

Online Appendix

Table of Contents

A1 Extended Data and Methods	A-1
A1.1 Balance Check	A-2
A1.2 Check for Preference Falsification	A-3
A1.3 Check for Prior Beliefs	A-4
A1.4 Ethical Considerations	A-6
A2 Main Analyses	A-7
A2.1 Main Results and Robustness Check	A-7
A2.2 Self-censorship	A-8
A2.3 Information Seeking	A-8
A2.4 Perceived Morality of the Critic	A-9
A2.5 Belief in Criminal Charges	A-11
A3 Additional Pre-Registered Analyses	A-15
A3.1 Does Confession Matter?	A-15
A3.2 Heterogeneous Effects by Respondent Morality	A-17
A3.3 Heterogeneous Effects by Respondent Demographics	A-20
A3.4 Heterogeneous Effects by Other Respondent Characteristics	A-22
A3.5 Manipulation Check	A-24
A4 Questionnaire	A-26
A4.1 Criticism and Treatment Conditions	A-26
A4.2 Variable Definitions	A-27
A5 Additional Analyses on the 2013 Crackdown	A-31
A5.1 Sentiment of Posts	A-31
A5.2 Discussions of Wang Gongquan and XueManzi	A-32

A1 Extended Data and Methods

The pre-registration for the survey experiment is available on the Open Science Framework: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/Y2GT7>.

A1.1 Balance Check

Table A1 reports the covariate balance among control and treatment groups based on a number of individual characteristics, including gender, age, education, minority status, religion, marriage status, work status and experience, party affiliation, income, language skills, social class, and media usage. As shown in Table A1, randomization is successful, and most covariates are balanced among all groups. The control group and political crime group are somewhat unbalanced in terms of leadership experience and English skills. But our main results remain robust after controlling for the covariates.

TABLE A1. BALANCE TABLE

Outcomes	(1) Female	(2) Age	(3) Education	(4) Minority	(5) Religious	(6) Married	(7) Work
Control	0.024 (0.043)	0.142 (0.965)	-0.115 (0.202)	0.009 (0.015)	0.009 (0.036)	-0.047 (0.037)	-0.009 (0.030)
Tax Evasion	-0.011 (0.044)	0.120 (0.979)	0.037 (0.211)	-0.010 (0.013)	0.029 (0.037)	-0.023 (0.037)	0.014 (0.030)
Prostitution	0.055 (0.045)	0.656 (1.025)	-0.070 (0.211)	-0.004 (0.014)	0.013 (0.038)	-0.013 (0.037)	-0.021 (0.032)
Constant	0.486*** (0.032)	37.267*** (0.716)	13.769*** (0.151)	0.028*** (0.011)	0.223*** (0.027)	0.785*** (0.026)	0.858*** (0.022)
Observations	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,065
R-squared	0.002	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001
F test	0.451	0.922	0.873	0.578	0.886	0.618	0.707

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

TABLE A1. BALANCE TABLE, CONTINUED

Outcomes	(8) Public Job	(9) Leadership	(10) CCP	(11) Income	(12) English	(13) Social Media	(14) Class
Control	0.009 (0.037)	-0.092** (0.043)	0.044 (0.030)	0.085 (0.141)	-0.216** (0.104)	-0.054 (0.069)	-0.046 (0.170)
Tax Evasion	-0.005 (0.037)	-0.035 (0.044)	0.014 (0.029)	-0.101 (0.152)	-0.148 (0.107)	-0.015 (0.070)	-0.262 (0.174)
Prostitution	-0.003 (0.038)	-0.022 (0.045)	0.053* (0.032)	0.133 (0.153)	-0.119 (0.109)	-0.039 (0.074)	0.178 (0.174)
Constant	0.239*** (0.027)	0.538*** (0.032)	0.117*** (0.021)	6.445*** (0.105)	2.794*** (0.077)	3.377*** (0.049)	5.737*** (0.122)
Observations	1,065	1,065	1,065	1,057	1,065	1,065	1,065
R-squared	0.000	0.005	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.001	0.006
F test	0.978	0.159	0.270	0.443	0.215	0.868	0.0966

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

A1.2 Check for Preference Falsification

To address potential preference falsification problems, we randomly sampled half of the respondents and reminded them of the anonymity and privacy protection they are afforded during the experiment. Figure A2 shows that the anonymity treatment does not change respondents' attitudes toward the KOL and state repression, and willingness to express dissent and conduct self-censorship. The findings suggest that respondents are unlikely to have been hiding their true preferences during the survey.

TABLE A2. EFFECTS OF ANONYMITY ON OUTCOMES

Outcomes	(1) Support KOL	(2) Support Repression	(3) Express Dissent	(4) Self-Censorship
Anonymity	0.064 (0.078)	0.059 (0.193)	0.025 (0.032)	-0.036 (0.101)
Female	-0.097 (0.082)	0.322 (0.199)	0.015 (0.035)	0.401*** (0.110)
Age	0.011** (0.004)	0.005 (0.011)	-0.003* (0.002)	0.006 (0.006)
Education	-0.033* (0.018)	-0.036 (0.042)	-0.002 (0.008)	0.101*** (0.025)
Minority	0.178 (0.255)	0.174 (0.631)	0.005 (0.129)	0.614** (0.269)
Religious	-0.049 (0.094)	0.658*** (0.217)	0.063 (0.042)	0.124 (0.126)
Married	0.075 (0.115)	-0.169 (0.302)	0.023 (0.052)	-0.663*** (0.158)
Employed	-0.206 (0.128)	0.080 (0.334)	-0.033 (0.053)	-0.331* (0.179)
Public Job	0.115 (0.095)	-0.182 (0.248)	0.118*** (0.041)	-0.434*** (0.124)
Private Job	-0.013 (0.094)	0.142 (0.243)	0.062 (0.038)	0.232* (0.124)
CCP Member	0.161 (0.115)	0.362 (0.283)	0.072 (0.053)	-0.074 (0.149)
Income	0.043 (0.030)	-0.189*** (0.065)	-0.017 (0.012)	0.046 (0.039)
English Skill	0.024 (0.040)	0.148 (0.105)	0.025 (0.018)	-0.065 (0.054)
SNS Usage	-0.091* (0.053)	0.402*** (0.128)	-0.045** (0.021)	0.089 (0.072)
Class	0.007 (0.025)	0.095 (0.059)	0.038*** (0.010)	-0.112*** (0.032)
Province FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.819*** (0.359)	6.347*** (0.851)	0.295* (0.154)	1.692*** (0.489)
Observations	1,055	759	759	1,055
R-squared	0.061	0.096	0.131	0.160

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

A1.3 Check for Prior Beliefs

In designing the experiment, we wanted to ensure that the particular arms of the treatment did not prompt respondents to think of a particular dissident toward whom they already have set beliefs. We addressed this concern in several ways. First, in the design phase, we pre-tested the treatments qualitatively and revised them to minimize the chances that participants would think of particular dissidents. We did this by describing areas of criticism targeting the Chinese government that are not associated with any single dissident (see additional discussion in Appendix Section A1.4). Second, in our survey, we included a question asking respondents about their willingness to read more information about the arrested opinion leader (see Appendix Section A2.3). If one arm of the treatment were prompting respondents to think of a particular dissident, those in this arm would be more familiar with the dissident and be less likely to want to read more information about them compared to respondents in other arms. As we show in Appendix Table A6, there are no discernible differences between the four arms in terms of respondents' willingness to read more information. This gives us more confidence that the arms of the treatment are not prompting respondents to think of particular dissidents. Finally, we selected the subsample of respondents who chose to read more information about the dissident (we use this post-treatment variable because there are no differences between treatment arms regarding this variable as shown in Appendix Section A2.3). The following figure shows that our results remain robust in this subsample. This evidence gives us further confidence that our results are not driven by uneven prompting effects.

TABLE A3. EFFECTS OF CRIME CHARGES ON OUTCOMES (STANDARDIZED, READ-MORE-INFO SAMPLE)

VARIABLES	(1) Support KOL (STDZ)	(2) Support Repression (STDZ)	(3) Dissent (STDZ)
Control	0.716*** (0.103)		
Tax Evasion	-0.280** (0.116)	0.615*** (0.139)	-0.411*** (0.143)
Prostitution	-0.383*** (0.113)	0.642*** (0.144)	-0.478*** (0.148)
Indv. Ctrl	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.532 (0.374)	-1.532*** (0.530)	0.940* (0.534)
Observations	469	330	330
R-squared	0.359	0.285	0.304

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

A1.4 Ethical Considerations

We obtained approval for all aspects of this study from the IRBs of the authors' home institutions and adhere to the EGAP Principles on Research Transparency and Protection of Research Team Members. We also follow the APSA Principles and Guidance for Research with Human Subjects in conducting the online survey experiment. First, we obtained informed consent from our respondents. The consent form was presented to respondents immediately upon entering the survey. We provide information about the content of the survey, the general purpose of the research, the estimated time of the survey, the potential risks and benefits to respondents, the respondent's rights in participating in the survey, the anonymous nature of the survey, and the contact information for the IRBs in case of complaints. Respondents could choose to agree or disagree with the consent form. Choosing "agree" indicates explicit consent to participate. Choosing "Disagree" automatically exited people from the survey.

The survey ended with a debrief to inform respondents that the information about government criticism in the survey were made by several different public figures instead of one as stated in the experiment. When respondents read the information about the dissident prior to treatment randomization (the "Criticism" panel in Figure 1), they are told that the criticisms were all made by one public figure. In the debriefing at the end of the experiment, respondents are told that the criticisms they were shown earlier were made by several different public figures. We associated a number of different criticisms with one figure because we do not want respondents to associate the criticism with a particular public figure that they might know and have prior conceptions of. Making the criticism more general is essential in reducing the impact of respondents' preconceptions associated with specific public figures, which would have made it difficult for us to measure the effects of disguised vs. blatant repression. Providing general criticisms rather than a specific case also helped minimize the sensitivity of the research for respondents. Aside from this, there is no deception in any other aspect of the research, including the identity, activities, and motivations of the researchers.

We took a number of measures to further minimize potential risks to respondents and research team staff. First, we collected non-identifiable information only and the information are securely

stored in servers outside China. We informed respondents the protection of privacy in the beginning of the survey and allowed them to exit the survey at any time. Second, we also avoid asking questions that are sensitive in the context of China. For example, we did not ask about support for political institutions, attitudes toward the CCP, and opinions toward political leaders. Third, we carefully choose the wording of the questions to minimize their sensitivity. We then asked our Chinese collaborators to check the questions and languages used in the survey and removed sensitive ones. The non-sensitive nature of the survey is reflected by the low voluntary dropout rate. Among the 2263 survey takers, there are only 137 respondents (6%) who did not finish the survey but were not forced out by screening mechanisms (i.e., respondents who spent 2 to 30 minutes in the survey but did not finish all questions).^{A1} And many of them might leave the survey for reasons other than its sensitivity. Given its non-sensitive nature, this online survey should cause no harm or trauma to participants.

The survey was conducted through a reputable, US-based survey company, which further help protect respondents' privacy and increase data security. Each respondent received a small amount of payment (10 - 15 Chinese Yuan, or 1.5 - 2.2 USD equivalent) as compensation for their time.

A2 Main Analyses

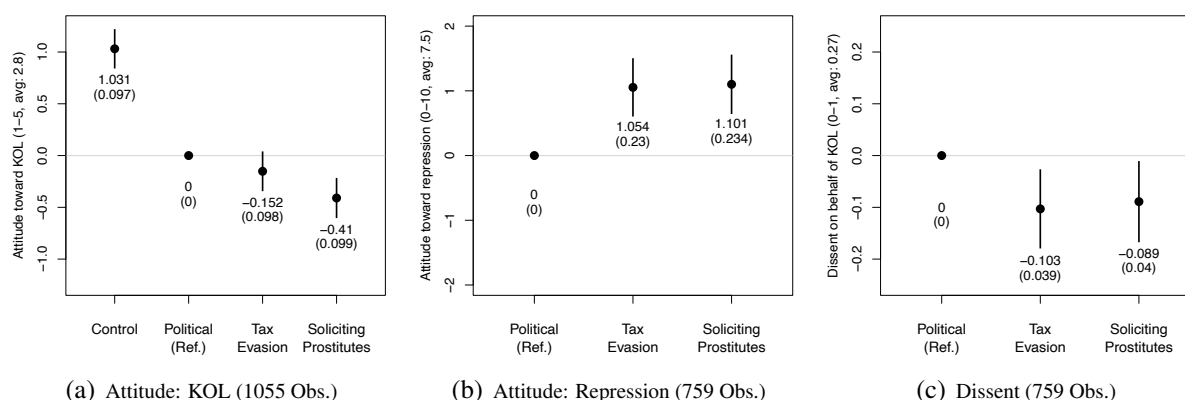
A2.1 Main Results and Robustness Check

Figure A1 shows the main results of disguised repression on people's attitudes toward the arrested individual, government repression, and willingness to dissent on behalf of the dissident, using the original scales of the outcome variables.

Table A4 reports the effects of crime charges on three main outcomes. The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition. Columns (1), (4), and (7) show the results without controls. Columns (2), (5), and (8) show that the results remain robust with covariates such as gender, age, education, minority status, religion, marriage status, employment status, public sector job, private sector job, party affiliation, income, language skills, social class, and social media

^{A1}Except for the 1065 effective respondents, the other 1061 survey takers were screened out for quota control or attention check reasons.

FIGURE A1. ATTITUDES TOWARD KOL, REPRESSION, AND DISSENT FOR KOL



Note: The reported estimates are relative to political repression; bars represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors. Point estimates and standard errors are reported below each dot. The sample size in panels (b) and (c) is smaller than that of panel (a) because questions about repression and dissent for the KOL can only be asked in the three treatment arms. The model controls for a number of individual characteristics such as gender, age, education level, employment status, and income.

usage. Columns (3), (6), and (9) add provincial fixed effects and the results remain statistically significant. In the main paper, we use estimates from Columns (3), (6), and (9) for Figure 2.

A2.2 Self-censorship

Table A5 reports the full results of the Table 2 in the main paper, including the estimates of each individual control variable. To summarize the results again, compared with no repression, charging the critic with soliciting prostitutes increases self-censorship among self-reported critics of the regime (Column[2]), especially those who have less stringent moral standards [Column[4]].

A2.3 Information Seeking

Table A6 Columns (1)–(3) show that neither political nor non-political charges increase citizens' willingness to read more information about the arrested opinion leader. However, Columns (4)–(6) show that for respondents who choose to read more information, respondents are more likely to look for information about the opinion leader's personal life rather than political activism when they are charged with non-political crimes compared to opinion leaders charged with political crimes. State repression can lead to backlash when the act of repression generates more interest in the dissident and their cause. This result suggests that charging dissidents with non-political crimes

TABLE A4. EFFECTS OF CRIME CHARGES ON OUTCOMES (STANDARDIZED)

VARIABLES	Support KOL (STDZ, SD=1.24)			Support Repression (STDZ, SD=2.61)			Express Dissent (STDZ, SD=0.44)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Control	0.821*** (0.077)	0.827*** (0.078)	0.832*** (0.078)						
Tax Evasion	-0.135* (0.079)	-0.126 (0.078)	-0.123 (0.079)	0.398*** (0.087)	0.402*** (0.086)	0.405*** (0.088)	-0.247*** (0.088)	-0.221** (0.087)	-0.232*** (0.087)
Prostitution	-0.326*** (0.082)	-0.329*** (0.081)	-0.331*** (0.080)	0.419*** (0.091)	0.415*** (0.088)	0.423*** (0.090)	-0.171* (0.092)	-0.188** (0.089)	-0.200** (0.091)
Female		-0.078 (0.056)	-0.098* (0.058)		0.066 (0.070)	0.096 (0.075)		0.013 (0.077)	0.046 (0.078)
Age		0.009*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)		0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)		-0.006 (0.004)	-0.007 (0.004)
Education		-0.020 (0.013)	-0.029** (0.014)		-0.022 (0.014)	-0.014 (0.016)		-0.002 (0.017)	-0.004 (0.019)
Minority		0.152 (0.138)	0.058 (0.139)		-0.003 (0.220)	0.089 (0.234)		0.089 (0.264)	0.012 (0.289)
Religious		-0.091 (0.064)	-0.048 (0.065)		0.315*** (0.082)	0.250*** (0.084)		0.172* (0.089)	0.144 (0.094)
Married		0.096 (0.079)	0.082 (0.079)		-0.053 (0.113)	-0.045 (0.112)		0.043 (0.116)	0.045 (0.117)
Employed		-0.164* (0.091)	-0.195** (0.091)		-0.007 (0.120)	0.027 (0.126)		-0.064 (0.118)	-0.067 (0.120)
Public Job		0.060 (0.069)	0.073 (0.070)		-0.031 (0.089)	-0.071 (0.092)		0.266*** (0.093)	0.264*** (0.092)
Private Job		0.060 (0.065)	0.065 (0.066)		0.061 (0.091)	0.059 (0.092)		0.147* (0.083)	0.138 (0.086)
CCP Member		0.104 (0.083)	0.091 (0.084)		0.070 (0.105)	0.095 (0.105)		0.179 (0.117)	0.184 (0.119)
Income		-0.007 (0.021)	0.017 (0.022)		-0.052** (0.022)	-0.074*** (0.024)		-0.048* (0.025)	-0.038 (0.027)
English Skill		0.030 (0.028)	0.027 (0.029)		0.074* (0.038)	0.072* (0.040)		0.046 (0.038)	0.048 (0.040)
SNS Usage		-0.040 (0.039)	-0.059 (0.040)		0.138*** (0.049)	0.157*** (0.049)		-0.084* (0.047)	-0.102** (0.046)
Class		0.014 (0.018)	0.012 (0.019)		0.035 (0.023)	0.037* (0.023)		0.088*** (0.023)	0.084*** (0.023)
Province FEs	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Constant	-0.120** (0.057)	-0.119 (0.254)	-0.021 (0.261)	-0.277*** (0.066)	-0.634** (0.289)	-0.724** (0.314)	0.143** (0.068)	0.181 (0.326)	0.247 (0.351)
Observations	1,065	1,057	1,055	767	761	759	767	761	759
R-squared	0.204	0.234	0.260	0.036	0.094	0.131	0.011	0.093	0.140

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

can reduce this backlash by diverting attention to the non-political aspects of dissidents lives and behavior.

A2.4 Perceived Morality of the Critic

Table A7 reports the effects of crime charges on respondents' perceived morality of the critic. The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition. Column (1) shows the results without controls. Columns (2) and (3) shows that the results remain robust when adding the aforementioned controls and province fixed effects. In the main paper, we use estimates from

TABLE A5. SELF-CENSORSHIP

Outcome: Self-censorship	(1) Full Sample	(2) Critics	(3) Non-Critics	(4) Less Morally Stringent Critics	(5) More Morally Stringent Critics
Political	0.022 (0.142)	0.129 (0.185)	0.074 (0.200)	0.173 (0.245)	-0.002 (0.278)
Tax Evasion	0.007 (0.142)	0.118 (0.183)	0.036 (0.203)	0.213 (0.232)	-0.263 (0.277)
Prostitution	0.059 (0.144)	0.374* (0.191)	-0.121 (0.203)	0.547** (0.246)	0.030 (0.313)
Female	0.401*** (0.111)	-0.098 (0.141)	0.771*** (0.175)	-0.043 (0.176)	-0.212 (0.287)
Age	0.006 (0.006)	0.009 (0.008)	0.009 (0.010)	-0.004 (0.011)	0.024 (0.015)
Education	0.101*** (0.025)	0.073** (0.034)	0.088** (0.044)	0.076* (0.043)	0.063 (0.073)
Minority	0.610** (0.270)	0.456 (0.484)	0.828** (0.338)	0.394 (0.479)	-0.532 (0.924)
Religious	0.127 (0.126)	-0.500*** (0.172)	0.489** (0.199)	-0.704*** (0.226)	-0.400 (0.300)
Married	-0.663*** (0.159)	-0.782*** (0.242)	-0.398* (0.230)	-0.709** (0.309)	-0.358 (0.367)
Employed	-0.328* (0.179)	-0.041 (0.308)	-0.429* (0.229)	-0.320 (0.422)	0.252 (0.503)
Public Job	-0.434*** (0.124)	-0.383** (0.162)	-0.220 (0.215)	-0.088 (0.224)	-0.846*** (0.287)
Private Job	0.231* (0.124)	0.362** (0.175)	0.078 (0.184)	0.332 (0.232)	0.232 (0.309)
CCP Member	-0.074 (0.149)	0.449** (0.179)	-0.802*** (0.291)	0.566** (0.232)	-0.012 (0.358)
Income	0.046 (0.039)	0.028 (0.054)	-0.025 (0.057)	0.116 (0.076)	-0.088 (0.091)
English Skill	-0.065 (0.054)	-0.075 (0.075)	0.181** (0.090)	-0.300*** (0.101)	0.127 (0.124)
SNS Usage	0.087 (0.072)	0.359*** (0.125)	0.039 (0.090)	0.338** (0.157)	0.621** (0.249)
Class	-0.112*** (0.032)	-0.181*** (0.045)	-0.035 (0.049)	-0.060 (0.056)	-0.306*** (0.069)
Province FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.652*** (0.495)	1.203 (0.821)	1.222* (0.715)	1.256 (1.142)	0.649 (1.278)
Observations	1,055	503	547	307	194
R-squared	0.160	0.238	0.271	0.307	0.381

The reported estimates are relative to the control condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

TABLE A6. SEEKING INFORMATION ON KOL

Outcomes	Read More Info. (RM) (Full Sample)			Read More Info.: Political (RM=Yes)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Control	0.056 (0.043)	0.072* (0.041)	0.063 (0.042)	-0.022 (0.062)	-0.028 (0.062)	-0.030 (0.064)
Tax Evasion	0.025 (0.043)	0.022 (0.042)	0.006 (0.043)	-0.239*** (0.065)	-0.238*** (0.065)	-0.239*** (0.068)
Prostitution	0.038 (0.045)	0.054 (0.043)	0.038 (0.043)	-0.258*** (0.066)	-0.265*** (0.066)	-0.265*** (0.069)
Female		-0.069** (0.031)	-0.063** (0.032)		0.075 (0.049)	0.082 (0.052)
Age		-0.003 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)		0.002 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)
Education		0.027*** (0.007)	0.028*** (0.008)		0.005 (0.012)	0.003 (0.014)
Minority		0.136 (0.093)	0.132 (0.109)		0.032 (0.115)	0.015 (0.133)
Religious		0.075** (0.035)	0.091** (0.037)		-0.064 (0.055)	-0.066 (0.058)
Married		0.008 (0.046)	-0.009 (0.047)		0.158** (0.069)	0.175** (0.075)
Employed		0.069 (0.047)	0.071 (0.047)		-0.119 (0.085)	-0.136 (0.092)
Public Job		-0.008 (0.040)	0.024 (0.040)		-0.030 (0.057)	0.000 (0.059)
Private Job		0.030 (0.036)	0.041 (0.036)		-0.061 (0.055)	-0.057 (0.059)
CCP Member		0.105** (0.049)	0.110** (0.050)		-0.045 (0.066)	-0.047 (0.071)
Income		-0.035*** (0.011)	-0.022* (0.012)		0.034** (0.016)	0.038** (0.017)
English Skill		0.055*** (0.016)	0.060*** (0.016)		0.006 (0.023)	0.009 (0.024)
SNS Usage		0.052*** (0.019)	0.042** (0.019)		0.015 (0.034)	0.010 (0.035)
Class		-0.014 (0.009)	-0.021** (0.009)		-0.022 (0.014)	-0.022 (0.014)
Province FEs	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Constant	0.417*** (0.031)	0.043 (0.134)	0.003 (0.147)	0.660*** (0.047)	0.367* (0.215)	0.441* (0.241)
Observations	1,065	1,057	1,055	477	471	469
R-squared	0.002	0.118	0.162	0.056	0.102	0.146

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

Column (3) for Figure 3.

A2.5 Belief in Criminal Charges

Some people may see the political motivation behind disguised repression and doubt the veracity of the non-political crime charged against the dissident. If people do not believe the non-political crime charge, we would not observe a decrease in the support for the dissident. We examine to what extent respondents believe that the dissident committed the charged crime. Table A8 shows that

TABLE A7. PERCEIVED MORALITY OF THE CRITIC (STANDARDIZED)

Outcomes	(1) Morality	(2) Morality	(3) Morality
Control	0.940*** (0.127)	0.881*** (0.127)	0.936*** (0.132)
Tax Evasion	-0.332** (0.128)	-0.368*** (0.126)	-0.332*** (0.126)
Prostitution	-0.422*** (0.140)	-0.536*** (0.132)	-0.526*** (0.131)
Female		0.081 (0.096)	0.087 (0.104)
Age		0.005 (0.006)	0.006 (0.006)
Education		-0.018 (0.019)	-0.021 (0.022)
Minority		-0.103 (0.179)	-0.154 (0.198)
Religious		-0.190 (0.119)	-0.103 (0.125)
Married		0.031 (0.129)	0.042 (0.133)
Employed		0.041 (0.154)	-0.033 (0.159)
Public Job		0.119 (0.127)	0.074 (0.137)
Private Job		-0.020 (0.111)	0.024 (0.125)
CCP Member		0.440*** (0.150)	0.464*** (0.156)
Income		-0.036 (0.036)	-0.026 (0.041)
English Skill		0.034 (0.049)	0.038 (0.052)
SNS Usage		-0.049 (0.059)	-0.081 (0.066)
Class		0.062* (0.032)	0.068** (0.034)
Province FEs	No	No	Yes
Constant	-0.058 (0.096)	-0.119 (0.350)	-0.096 (0.389)
Observations	340	338	336
R-squared	0.300	0.361	0.417

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

respondents in the non-political crime conditions are more likely to believe that the dissident committed the charged crime than respondents in the political crime condition. The findings suggest that non-political crime charges are credible to the average respondent. The differences between the political crime and non-political crimes may further imply that respondents do not agree with the political crime charge against the dissident.

Why might respondents find the charges credible? Wave 7 of the World Value Survey, conducted in China in 2018, asked questions about China's judicial system. In particular, it asks "I am

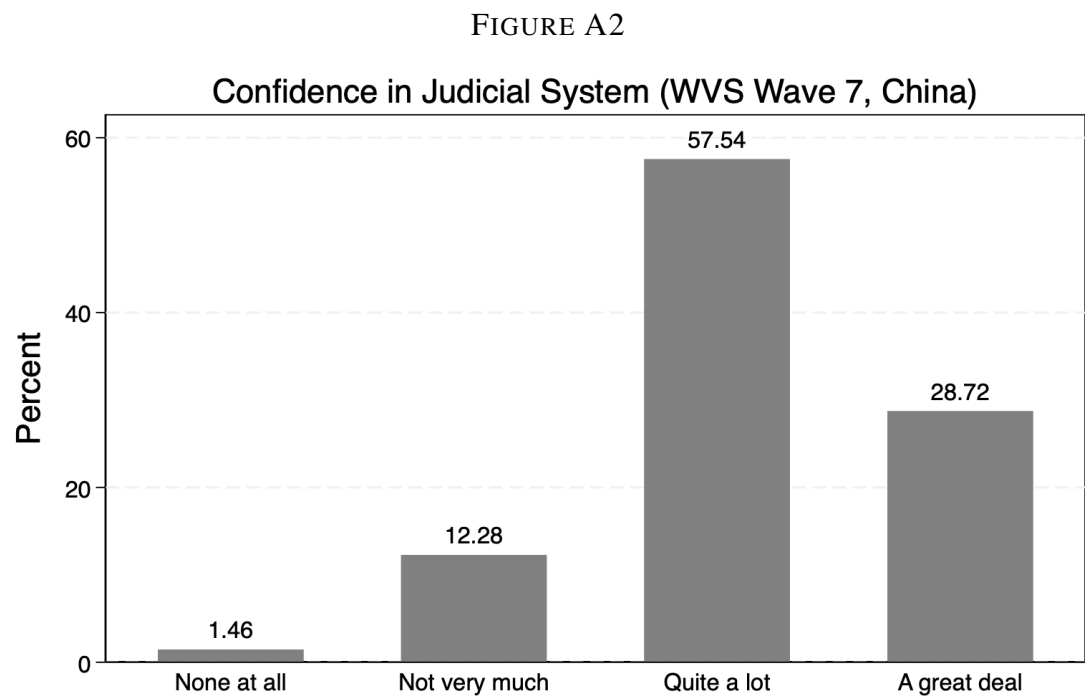
TABLE A8. BELIEF IN THE CHARGED CRIME

Outcomes	Committed Crime		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Tax Evasion	0.840*** (0.229)	0.826*** (0.226)	0.844*** (0.227)
Prostitution	1.068*** (0.232)	1.059*** (0.229)	1.080*** (0.228)
Female		0.151 (0.193)	0.255 (0.199)
Age		-0.013 (0.011)	-0.013 (0.011)
Education		0.005 (0.041)	0.012 (0.044)
Minority		-0.009 (0.577)	0.266 (0.607)
Religious		-0.081 (0.229)	-0.217 (0.241)
Married		-0.135 (0.282)	-0.068 (0.283)
Employed		0.215 (0.305)	0.223 (0.316)
Public Job		-0.685*** (0.250)	-0.805*** (0.255)
Private Job		0.283 (0.228)	0.273 (0.229)
CCP Member		-0.283 (0.288)	-0.204 (0.290)
Income		0.223*** (0.068)	0.170*** (0.071)
English Skill		-0.163 (0.105)	-0.194* (0.111)
SNS Usage		0.260** (0.122)	0.308** (0.123)
Class		-0.038 (0.063)	-0.004 (0.064)
Province FEs	No	No	Yes
Constant	6.619*** (0.171)	5.322*** (0.724)	5.183*** (0.808)
Observations	767	761	759
R-squared	0.031	0.082	0.139

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all? The courts.” The World Values Survey data shows that 86% of the Chinese public considers the country’s judicial system trustworthy (“Quite a lot of confidence” and “A great deal of confidence”), which also aligns with [Zhang and Ginsburg \(2019\)](#)’s observations regarding the credibility of China’s judicial system among the Chinese public. This context may help explain why the vast majority of respondents find the charge credible.



A3 Additional Pre-Registered Analyses

A3.1 Does Confession Matter?

Forced confession to alleged charges is usually a component of disguised repression. Dictators sometimes require political dissidents to confess in public. For example, the cases of Xue Manzi in China and Pratasevich in Belarus involved public confession. When we examine the interaction effects of criminal charges and confession on the main outcomes, Table A9 shows that public confessions do not moderate the treatment effects in a statistically significant manner.

TABLE A9. INTERACTION EFFECTS OF CRIME CHARGES AND CONFESSION

Outcomes	(1) Support KOL	(2) Support Repression	(3) Express Dissent	(4) Self-censorship
Control	1.105*** (0.139)			-0.120 (0.200)
Control x Confession	-0.147 (0.193)			0.172 (0.282)
Tax Evasion	-0.169 (0.141)	1.260*** (0.324)	-0.087 (0.054)	-0.055 (0.199)
Tax Evasion x Confession	0.027 (0.195)	-0.399 (0.457)	-0.032 (0.078)	0.082 (0.288)
Prostitution	-0.350** (0.147)	0.879** (0.352)	-0.075 (0.057)	-0.007 (0.200)
Prostitution x Confession	-0.125 (0.204)	0.461 (0.468)	-0.027 (0.082)	0.093 (0.289)
Confession	0.094 (0.141)	-0.006 (0.337)	-0.014 (0.059)	0.036 (0.199)
Female	-0.121* (0.072)	0.241 (0.196)	0.021 (0.035)	0.395*** (0.111)
Age	0.011*** (0.004)	0.004 (0.011)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.006 (0.006)
Education	-0.035** (0.017)	-0.043 (0.041)	-0.002 (0.008)	0.103*** (0.025)
Minority	0.048 (0.174)	0.274 (0.616)	0.017 (0.129)	0.616** (0.274)
Religious	-0.061 (0.081)	0.655*** (0.217)	0.065 (0.042)	0.128 (0.127)
Married	0.102 (0.099)	-0.113 (0.295)	0.019 (0.052)	-0.658*** (0.159)
Employed	-0.244** (0.114)	0.093 (0.328)	-0.033 (0.054)	-0.311* (0.182)
Public Job	0.092 (0.087)	-0.209 (0.239)	0.121*** (0.041)	-0.445*** (0.125)
Private Job	0.085 (0.082)	0.130 (0.240)	0.062 (0.039)	0.226* (0.125)
CCP Member	0.118 (0.104)	0.224 (0.275)	0.084 (0.053)	-0.093 (0.151)
Income	0.022 (0.027)	-0.197*** (0.062)	-0.017 (0.012)	0.045 (0.039)
English Skill	0.032 (0.035)	0.194* (0.105)	0.022 (0.018)	-0.063 (0.054)
SNS Usage	-0.075 (0.050)	0.425*** (0.129)	-0.047** (0.021)	0.096 (0.073)
Class	0.015 (0.023)	0.102* (0.059)	0.037*** (0.010)	-0.110*** (0.033)
Province FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.819*** (0.359)	6.347*** (0.851)	0.295* (0.154)	1.692*** (0.489)
Observations	1,055	759	759	1,055
R-squared	0.061	0.096	0.131	0.160

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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

A3.2 Heterogeneous Effects by Respondent Morality

To measure moral standards, we use the ethical values and norms battery from the World Value Survey (WVS). The WVS is one of the most frequently used survey instruments to capture the values and beliefs of people around the world. The ethical values and norms questions have been widely used to measure moral values in different societies (e.g., [Barker 1992](#); [Doerrenberg and Peichl 2013](#); [Vauclair and Fischer 2011](#)). We use 15 items from the 6th wave of the WVS and one item (‘casual sex’) from the 7th wave (see Table [A10](#)). The items were rated on a 11-point Likert scale with higher numbers reflecting a more lenient or less stringent moral attitudes (from ‘never justified’ = 0 to ‘always justified’ = 10). Previous research finds that these question should be organized into different dimensions of morality [Barker \(1992\)](#) and [Halpern \(2001\)](#). We follow this research and organize items into three dimensions: self-interest, personal-sexual, and violence.

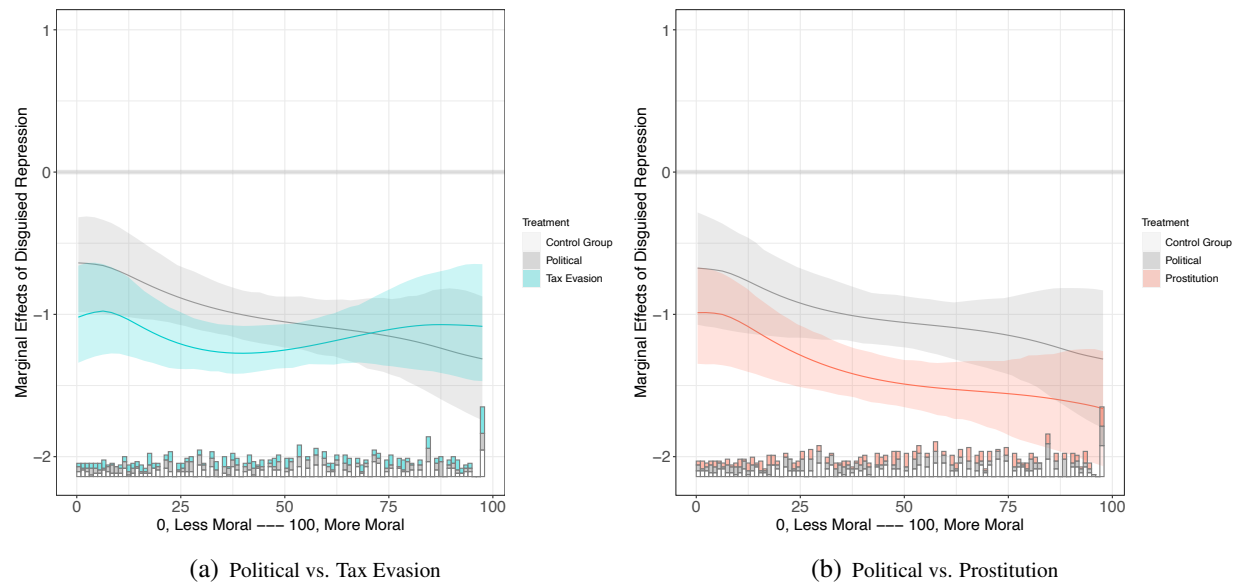
TABLE A10. WVS MORALITY ITEMS

No.	Item	Chinese	Category
1	Fraudulent collection of government benefits	向政府要求自己无权享受的福利	Self-Interest
2	Fare evasion (e.g., do not pay for bus ride)	逃票(乘坐公共汽车不买票)	Self-Interest
3	Stealing	偷盗	Self-Interest
4	Tax evasion	有机会就逃税	Self-Interest
5	Taking bribes	接受贿赂	Self-Interest
6	Homosexuality	同性恋	Personal-Sexual
7	Prostitution	卖淫	Personal-Sexual
8	Abortion	堕胎	Personal-Sexual
9	Divorce	离婚	Personal-Sexual
10	Premarital sex	婚前性行为	Personal-Sexual
11	Casual sex	随意的性行为	Personal-Sexual
12	Suicide	自杀	Violence
13	Euthanasia	安乐死	Violence
14	Wife beating	打老婆	Violence
15	Corporal punishment (of children)	父母打孩子	Violence
16	Violence against others	针对他人的暴力行为	Violence

Do the effects of disguised repression differ for those who have more and less stringent moral standards? To explore whether this is the case, we use a composited measure that adds up all morality items, across the self-interest, personal-sexual, and violence dimensions (Table [A10](#)). Figure [A3](#) shows the results with Panel (a) comparing tax evasion (cyan) with political crime (grey) and Panel (b) comparing prostitution (coral) with political crime (grey).

Figure [A3](#) shows that non-political crimes such as tax evasion and soliciting prostitutes have

FIGURE A3. RESPONDENT MORAL VALUES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLS



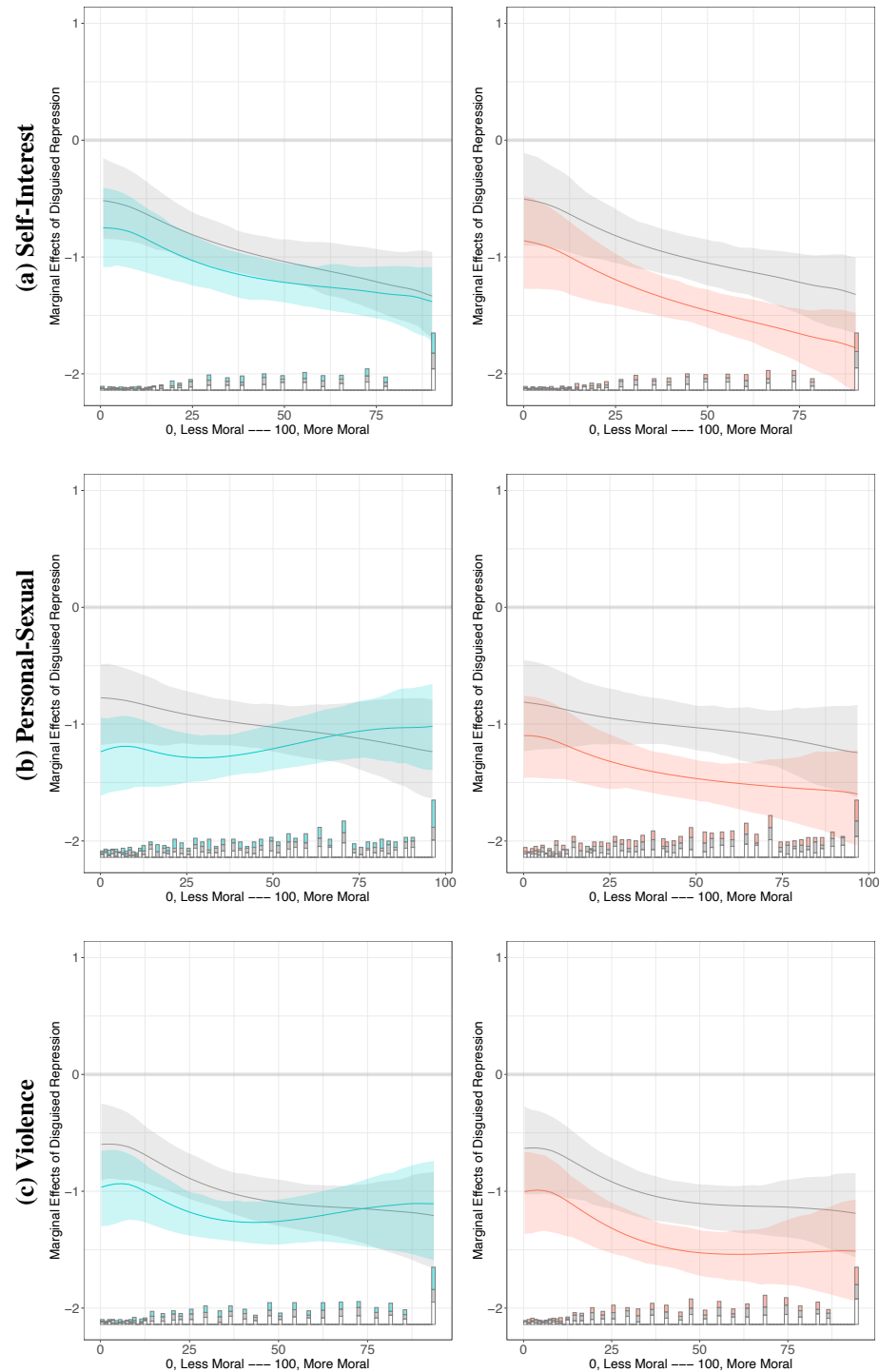
Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

stronger effects on diminishing support for the arrested opinion leader among respondents who hold more stringent moral values. This moderating effect is especially large with regard to the prostitution charge, and the political crime has a smaller overall effect than non-political crimes (i.e., the grey lines in Figure A3 are generally above the cyan and coral lines).

Next, we generate three measures of moral values by analyzing items in each moral dimension (self-interest, personal-sexual, violence) separately. Figure A4 plots the heterogeneous effects of disguised repression on attitudes toward KOLs using the three different dimensions of moral values. The tax evasion treatment affects people with more stringent moral values on the self-interest dimension but not people with more stringent values on personal-sexual and violent behavior (the cyan lines in Figure A4). On the other hand, the prostitution treatment affect people with more stringent moral values on all three dimensions (the coral lines in Figure A4).

It is worth noting that compared with the control condition, charging dissidents with a political crime also significantly reduces perceived morality of the KOL (Figure 3) and has a stronger negative effect among respondents with more stringent moral standards (Figure A3 and Figure A4). These results may be driven by the fact that criminalization of any behavior (e.g., protest, free speech) associates that behavior with negative values and overtones of immorality. This means for

FIGURE A4. THREE TYPES OF MORAL VALUES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLS



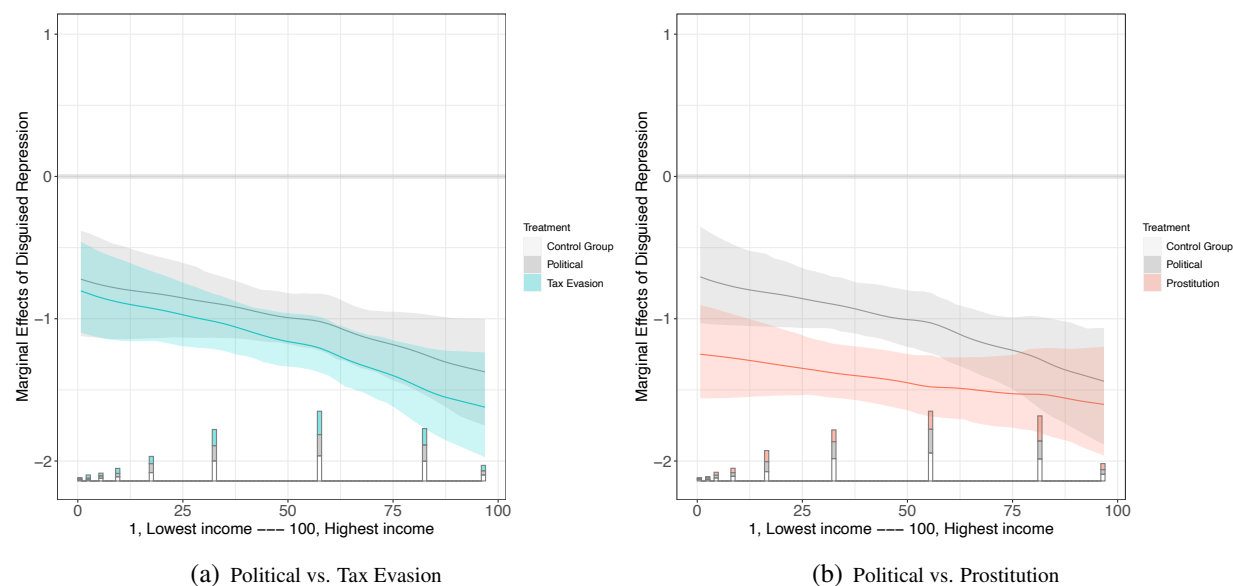
Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors. Grey line indicates political crime; cyan line indicates tax evasion; coral line indicates soliciting prostitutes.

individuals with more stringent moral standards, any actions that is criminalized may be seen as immoral. Moreover, it is also possible that people with more stringent moral standards are more likely to abide by rules and regulations set by an authoritarian regime because morality is what *societies* determine to be “right” and “acceptable,” and in authoritarian regimes, the autocrats can shape what is “right” and “acceptable” by setting the rules. In other words, these results suggest that individuals with higher moral standards in these authoritarian societies may be more likely to agree with political repression when political acts are criminalized than those with lower moral standards. Future research is needed to determine whether criminalizing dissent may be in and of itself effective in justifying repression in dictatorships.

A3.3 Heterogeneous Effects by Respondent Demographics

As we pre-registered, we explore the heterogeneous effects of disguised repression by respondent demographics. Figure A5 shows that political and non-political crimes have stronger effects on diminishing support for the arrested opinion leader among higher-income respondents.

FIGURE A5. RESPONDENT INCOME AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLs

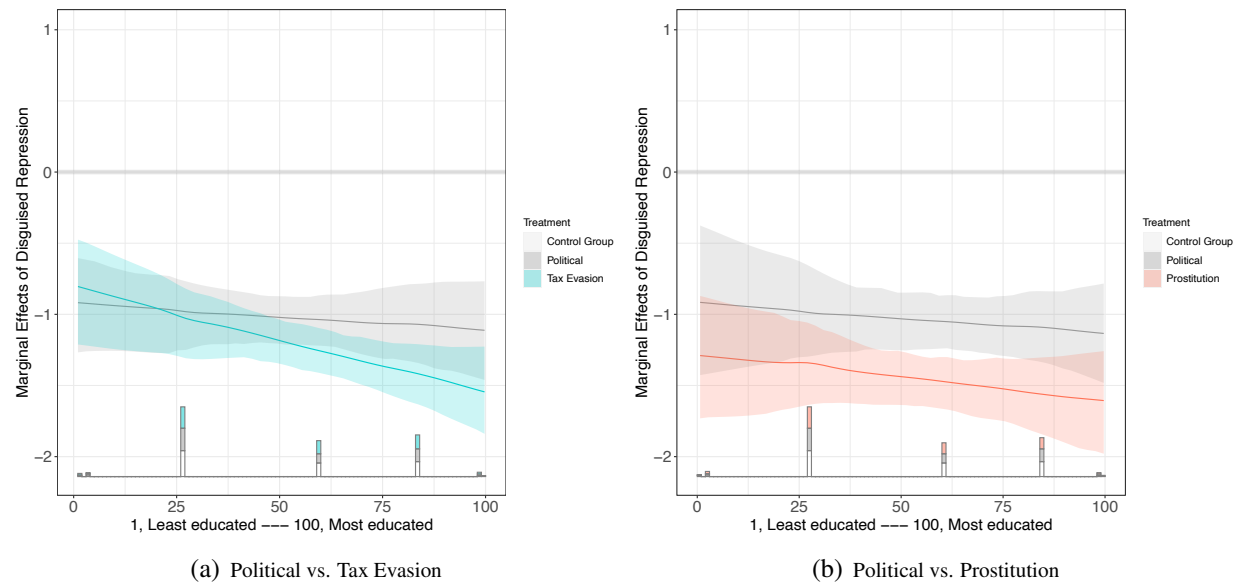


Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

Figure A6 shows that tax evasion has stronger effects on diminishing support for the arrested opinion leader among better-educated respondents. Education does not moderate the effects of

political crime and prostitution.

FIGURE A6. RESPONDENT EDUCATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLS

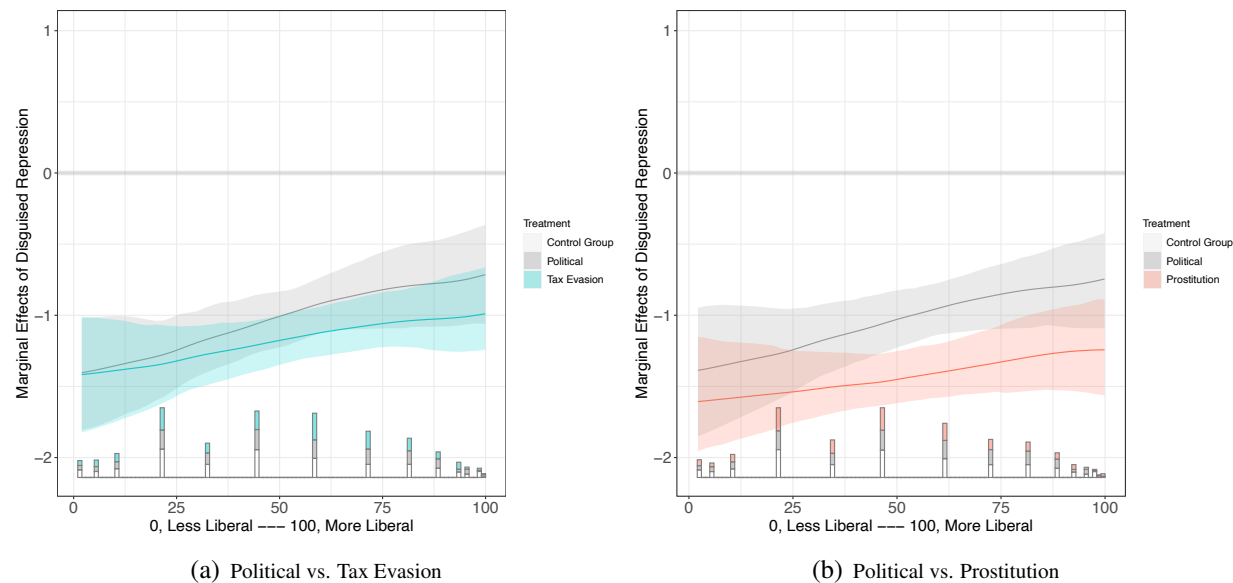


Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

A3.4 Heterogeneous Effects by Other Respondent Characteristics

When we explore the heterogeneous effects of disguised repression by other pre-registered respondent characteristics, Figure A7 shows that non-political crimes such as tax evasion and prostitution have weak effects on diminishing support for the arrested opinion leader among respondents who hold more liberal values. Moreover, liberal values appears to have a larger moderating effect on the political crime than on non-political crimes.

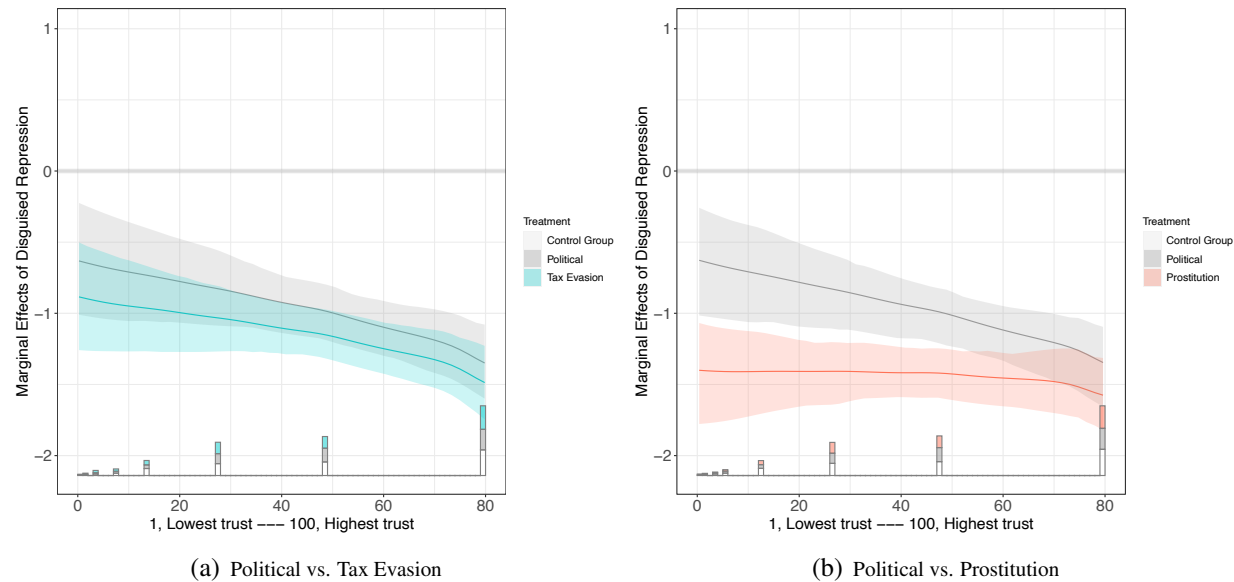
FIGURE A7. LIBERAL VALUES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLS



Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

Figure A8 shows that the political crime and tax evasion have stonger effects on diminishing support for the arrested opinion leader among respondents who trust the government more. On the other hand, trust in government does not moderate the effects of prostitution.

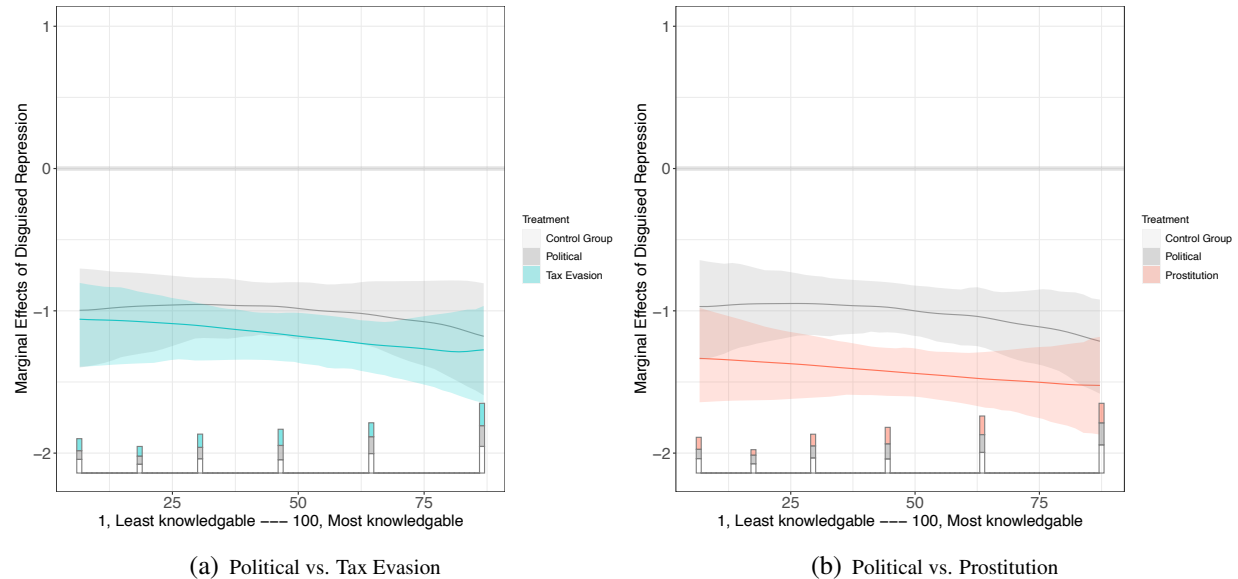
FIGURE A8. TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLS



Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

Figure A9 shows that respondents' political knowledge does not moderate the effects of political and non-political crimes.

FIGURE A9. POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD KOLS



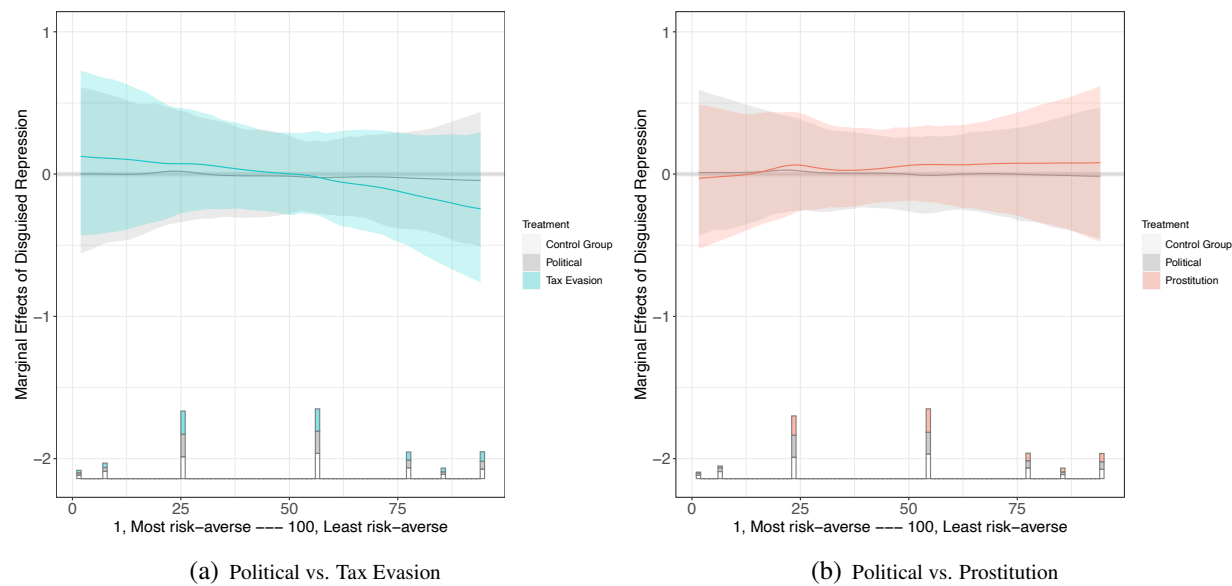
Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

Figure A10 shows that respondents' risk Tolerance does not moderate the effects of political and non-political crimes on self-censorship.

A3.5 Manipulation Check

We include manipulation checks at the end of the survey so that the manipulation check question does not intervene with treatment effects. The multiple choice question asks respondents to identify which crime the KOL was charged with. Table A11 cross-tabulates the treatment variable and respondents' answer to the manipulation check question. The accuracy of responses are high for all three crimes: 85% for political crime, 85% for tax evasion, and 86% for prostitution. However, respondents in the control group, who received no information about punishment, tend to mistakenly think the KOL was charged with the political crime. This implies that Chinese citizens have a strong tendency to link online criticism to political repression. The fact that respondents confuse the control condition with the political crime condition instead of non-political crime conditions

FIGURE A10. RISK TOLERANCE AND SELF-CENSORSHIP



Note: The reported estimates are relative to the control group (at 0); areas represent 95% confidence intervals based on Huber-White robust standard errors.

further suggests that the crime of spreading harmful information is a reasonable proxy of political repression.

Note that the manipulation check question is asked at the end of the survey—a relatively long period after respondents saw the treatment information. This might explain why the accuracy of this check is not higher. Nevertheless, when we check the robustness of the main results by excluding respondents who answered this question incorrectly, Table A12 shows that all the results remain robust.

TABLE A11. MANIPULATION CHECK

Treatment \ Manipulation Check	Treatment				Total
	Control	Political	Tax Evasion	Prostitution	
Control	152	105	12	29	298
Political	13	211	8	15	247
Tax Evasion	10	22	234	8	274
Prostitution	11	19	5	211	246
Total	186	357	259	263	1,065

TABLE A12. MAIN RESULTS: MANIPULATION CHECK PASSED

VARIABLES	(1)	Support KOL (2)	(3)	(4)	Support Repression (5)	(6)	(7)	Express Dissent (8)	(9)
Control	1.583*** (0.104)	1.575*** (0.106)	1.564*** (0.108)						
Tax Evasion	-0.171* (0.103)	-0.179* (0.103)	-0.189* (0.103)	1.217*** (0.248)	1.260*** (0.245)	1.297*** (0.251)	-0.151*** (0.040)	-0.134*** (0.040)	-0.142*** (0.040)
Prostitution	-0.469*** (0.102)	-0.464*** (0.102)	-0.484*** (0.102)	1.246*** (0.258)	1.239*** (0.253)	1.280*** (0.255)	-0.085** (0.043)	-0.094** (0.043)	-0.106** (0.043)
Female		-0.042 (0.073)	-0.049 (0.076)		0.153 (0.197)	0.215 (0.210)		0.038 (0.036)	0.047 (0.036)
Age		0.007 (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)		0.006 (0.012)	0.011 (0.012)		-0.003 (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)
Education		-0.032* (0.018)	-0.037* (0.019)		-0.045 (0.043)	-0.026 (0.046)		0.001 (0.008)	0.000 (0.009)
Minority		-0.031 (0.179)	-0.145 (0.180)		-0.043 (0.635)	0.237 (0.673)		-0.055 (0.107)	-0.108 (0.113)
Religious		-0.269*** (0.088)	-0.208** (0.090)		0.895*** (0.232)	0.653*** (0.237)		0.015 (0.042)	-0.004 (0.044)
Married		0.017 (0.104)	-0.012 (0.106)		-0.170 (0.314)	-0.152 (0.317)		0.014 (0.054)	0.009 (0.054)
Employed		-0.035 (0.119)	-0.099 (0.117)		-0.283 (0.316)	-0.310 (0.339)		-0.038 (0.056)	-0.045 (0.055)
Public Job		0.090 (0.092)	0.122 (0.094)		0.070 (0.254)	-0.047 (0.264)		0.108** (0.045)	0.111** (0.044)
Private Job		0.124 (0.089)	0.148 (0.091)		0.120 (0.260)	0.143 (0.262)		0.065* (0.038)	0.063 (0.040)
CCP Member		-0.020 (0.104)	-0.036 (0.104)		0.197 (0.289)	0.255 (0.296)		0.064 (0.056)	0.060 (0.056)
Income		0.005 (0.029)	0.041 (0.031)		-0.122* (0.064)	-0.210*** (0.071)		-0.016 (0.012)	-0.013 (0.012)
English Skill		0.023 (0.038)	0.017 (0.039)		0.062 (0.116)	0.019 (0.122)		-0.000 (0.019)	-0.003 (0.020)
SNS Usage		-0.072 (0.055)	-0.091 (0.057)		0.457*** (0.139)	0.513*** (0.145)		-0.027 (0.022)	-0.041* (0.023)
Class		-0.014 (0.025)	-0.019 (0.026)		0.103 (0.066)	0.111* (0.066)		0.030*** (0.011)	0.028** (0.011)
Province FEs	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Constant	2.569*** (0.075)	2.998*** (0.353)	3.007*** (0.360)	6.706*** (0.194)	5.563*** (0.826)	5.574*** (0.900)	0.318*** (0.032)	0.384** (0.152)	0.473*** (0.163)
Observations	808	802	800	656	651	649	656	651	649
R-squared	0.331	0.351	0.386	0.049	0.100	0.149	0.021	0.066	0.135

The reported estimates are relative to the blatant repression condition; Huber-White robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

A4 Questionnaire

A4.1 Criticism and Treatment Conditions

In the experimental setting, all respondents read an excerpt about an unnamed dissident’s online criticisms of Chinese government policies. The following content shows the wording of the criticism excerpt and three treatment conditions. Note that in the pure control condition, respondents receive no information about punishment.

Criticism: A well-known opinion leader often criticizes current affairs and discusses vi-

ral public events online on behalf of the public. For example, he once: called for greater disclosure of officials' property; fought for the equal right to education for the children of migrant workers in cities; called on the government to strengthen law enforcement against "child trafficking". His remarks are widely disseminated on the Internet and have a large social influence.

Treatment 1–Political Crime: Recently, this opinion leader was taken away by the police. After a period of investigation and evidence collection, this person was charged with publishing and disseminating harmful information, and was formally arrested. The police disclosed some more detailed incriminating evidence, including the testimony of several witnesses. The verdict stated that this person posted the controversial remarks online and spread a large amount of harmful information, which had an extremely bad influence on the public. The court sentenced the person to three years in prison.

Treatment 2–Tax Evasion: Recently, this opinion leader was taken away by the police. After a period of investigation and evidence collection, this person was charged with tax evasion and was formally arrested. The police disclosed some more detailed incriminating evidence, including the testimony of several witnesses. The verdict stated that in order to obtain more benefits, the person employed a lot of tricks to evade paying taxes, and took advantage of some loopholes in tax systems. The court sentenced the person to three years in prison.

Treatment 3–Soliciting Prostitutes: Recently, this opinion leader was taken away by the police. After a period of investigation and evidence collection, the person was charged with soliciting prostitutes and group licentiousness, and was formally arrested. The police disclosed some more detailed incriminating evidence, including the testimony of several witnesses. The verdict stated that the person had special desires and sexual habits, frequently visited pornographic places, and was obsessed with soliciting prostitutes and promiscuous activities for a long time. The court sentenced the person to three years in prison.

A4.2 Variable Definitions

TABLE A13. VARIABLE DEFINITIONS

Variable	Question	Options
<i>Individual Characteristics:</i>		
Female	What is your gender?	1 = female; 0 = male. Age
Which year were you born?		
Province	Which province is your permanent residency?	
Education	What is your highest level of education attainment?	1 = primary school; 2 = secondary school; 3 = vocational middle school; 4 = high school; 5 = junior college; 6 = college; 7 = master's; 8 = Ph.D. 0 = Han; 1 = otherwise.
Minority	What is your ethnicity?	0 = married; 1 = otherwise.
Single	What is your marital status?	1 = do not speak English at all; 2 = can say a few sentences; 3 = can speak and read a little; 4 = can manage conversations, but not fluently; 5 = can speak fluently.
English proficiency [1, 5]	What is your level of English proficiency?	10 categories, from low to high.
Income category [1, 10]	What is your total disposable income, including salaries, stipends, and allowances?	
Religious	Do you have a religion?	1 = yes; 0 = no.
CCP member	What is your political affiliation?	1 = Chinese Communist Party; 0 = otherwise.
Self-reported social class [0, 10]	What do you think is your social class on a 0-10 scale?	0 = the bottom of the society; 1 = the top of the society.
Having worked	Have you ever had a full-time job?	1 = yes; 0 = no.
Public sector worker	What is the nature of your employer?	1 = SOEs or the government; 0 = otherwise.
Being reported to	In your job, are there any people who report to you?	1 = yes; 0 = no.
<i>Predispositions:</i>		
Liberal values: component 1	The government has no right to interfere in the decision to have a child, or how many children to have.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
Liberal values: component 2	People should be restricted from gathering and participating in demonstrations in public places.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
Liberal values: component 3	Foreign journalists who frequently publish negative reports about China should be allowed to enter China.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
Liberal values: component 4	People should be allowed to post positive or negative comments on government policies on the Internet.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
Liberal values: component 5	In the long run, multiparty systems are unsuitable for China in its current state.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
National sovereignty: component 1	Both elementary and middle school students or college students should participate in military training arranged by the state.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
National sovereignty: component 2	Founding leaders and national heroes can be used as objects of criticism or ridicule in literary and artistic works.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
National sovereignty: component 3	Statutory holidays should be set up to commemorate Chairman Mao's birthday.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
National sovereignty: component 4	The government should attach importance to the development of military strength, as it does to the development of the economy.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
National sovereignty: component 5	In the case of mature military conditions, military power can be considered to unify Taiwan.	5-point Likert scale. 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.

Political Knowledge:

Political knowledge 1	How many members are there in the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China?	1 = 7; 0 = 5, 9, 15, Not sure.
Political knowledge 2	Which of the following people does not belong to the Standing Committee of the 19th Politburo of CPC?	1 = Wang Qishan; 0 = Han Zheng, Zhao Leji, Li Zhanshu, Don't Know.
Political knowledge 3	Which of the following countries is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council?	1 = Germany; 0 = United States, China, Russia, UK, Not sure.
Political knowledge 4	During the past 5 years, what is roughly the average real GDP growth rate of China?	1 = 6%; 0 = 3%, 13%, 20%, Not sure.
Political knowledge 5	Which of the following is the current Prime Minister of France?	1 = Emmanuel Macron; 0 = Jacques Chirac, François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, Not sure.

Morality Items:

Could you please tell me to what extent do you accept the following behaviors?

Item 1	Fraudulent collection of government benefits	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 2	Fare evasion (e.g., do not pay for bus ride)	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 3	Stealing	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 4	Tax evasion	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 5	Taking bribes	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 6	Homosexuality	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 7	Prostitution	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 8	Abortion	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 9	Divorce	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 10	Premarital sex	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 11	Casual sex	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 12	Suicide	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 13	Euthanasia	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 14	Wife beating	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 15	Corporal punishment (of children)	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable
Item 16	Violence against others	11-point Likert scale, 0 = Totally unacceptable, 10 = Totally acceptable

Other indicators:

Trust in the central government	Do you trust the central government?	11-point Likert scale. 0 = not trust at all; 10 = trust completely.
Trust in the local government	Do you trust the local government?	11-point Likert scale. 0 = not trust at all; 10 = trust completely.
State media usage	Do you usually get news information from official media, such as CCTV news, People's Daily, Reference News, etc. (including its website and social media account)?	1 = Never, 2 = Several times per month, 3 = Several times per week, 4 = Everyday
Social media usage	Do you usually get news information from social media, such as browsing WeChat, Weibo, etc.?	1 = Never, 2 = Several times per month, 3 = Several times per week, 4 = Everyday
Online comments	Do you usually forward or comment on hot political events on social media?	1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Usually, 4 = Very frequently.
Online criticism	Do you criticize unreasonable policies, rules and regulations on social media or online forums?	1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Usually, 4 = Very frequently.
Trust in state media	If there is disagreement over a viral event, how much do you believe in the content reported by official media?	11-point Likert scale. 0 = not trust at all; 10 = trust completely.

Attitudinal Outcomes:

Attitude toward dissident	Based on the information currently available, what is your general attitude towards this person?	1. Very disgusted ... 5. Very supportive
Attitude toward repression	Do you think it is reasonable to arrest this person?	0. Totally unreasonable ... 10. Totally Reasonable
Dissent on behalf of dissident	If there are netizens calling for solidarity with the detained KOL, would you express solidarity for the KOL on social media?	1. Yes, 0. No
Keep following	If you have followed this person's Weibo or Wechat, are you going to keep following his or her?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Unfollowing friends	If your friends or WeChat public accounts you follow continue to repost this person's remarks, would you consider unfollowing them?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Others keep following	If other people have followed this person's Weibo or WeChat account in the past, do you think they would continue to follow it now?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Likes	Do you give likes to some Wechat or Weibo articles that discuss current affairs and hot events?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Forwarding	Do you forward some articles that discuss current affairs and hot events?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Discussing	Do you participate in discussions of current affairs and hot events online?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Following	Do you follow some Weibo or WeChat public accounts that often discuss current affairs and hot events?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Discuss in private	Do you discuss current affairs and hot events privately with your friends?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Protest online	If you or your family have been treated unfairly in your life and have nowhere to appeal, would you post the matter online to seek public opinion support?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Others protest online	If other people are treated unfairly in their lives and have nowhere to appeal, do you think they will post things online to seek public opinion support?	1 = Certainly not, 2 = probably not, 3 = probably yes, 4. certainly yes.
Crime committed	Do you think this individual has committed the alleged crime?	0. Certainly no ... 10. Certainly yes.
Perceived morality	What do you think of this person's moral level?	0. Very low... 10. Very high.

Behavioral Outcomes:

Read more	If you wish, you can choose to "read more" about the individual after completing all the questions. If you select "Do not want to read" now, this information will not be displayed when you complete the questionnaire.	1 = Read more, 2 = Do not want to read.
Information to read	Earlier you selected "Read more" about the individual. Which of the following information would you like to read?	1 = Online remarks and behavior, 2 = Morality and life style.
Self-censorship 1	Some people say, "China's population is rapidly aging, and the social pension burden is greatly increased, which is the result of the government's long-term implementation of family planning." Do you agree with this statement?	1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Strongly agree, 5 = I do not want to answer this question.
Self-censorship 2	Some people say, "Because of the state's policies on housing, education, medical care, etc., the burden on the Chinese people is heavier." Do you agree with this statement?	1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Strongly agree, 5 = I do not want to answer this question.
Self-censorship 3	Some people say, "In the past few years, intellectuals have been afraid to express their opinions in public." Do you agree with this statement?	1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Strongly agree, 5 = I do not want to answer this question.
Self-censorship 4	Some people say, "In the past few years, our country's policies towards Hong Kong and Taiwan have been problematic." Do you agree with this statement?	1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Strongly agree, 5 = I do not want to answer this question.
Self-censorship 5	Some people say, "the abolition of the term limit for central leaders may mean that leading cadres will be held for life". Do you agree with this statement?	1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Strongly agree, 5 = I do not want to answer this question.

A5 Additional Analyses on the 2013 Crackdown

A5.1 Sentiment of Posts

In addition to detecting the stance of Weibo posts directed at online critics, we also conduct more traditional sentiment analysis to measure the overall sentiment of posts. We use SnowNLP (<https://github.com/isnowfy/snownlp>), a Chinese sentiment classifier frequently used in peer-reviewed publications, to generate a value between 0 (most negative) and 1 (most positive) for each post. Sentiment classification in SnowNLP is based on a simple naive bayes classifiers trained on Chinese-language product reviews. As Figure A11 shows, before arrest, overall sentiment of posts related

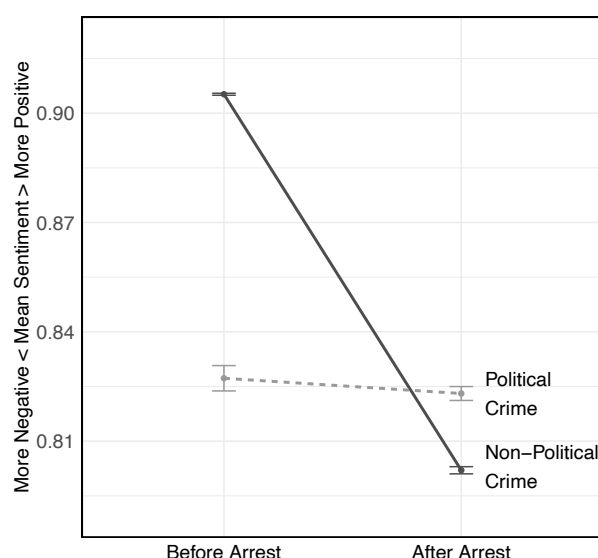


FIGURE A11. OVERALL SENTIMENT OF WEIBO POSTS

to critics subsequently arrested for non-political crimes is more positive than sentiment of posts about those subsequently arrested for political crimes. However, after arrests, the overall sentiment of posts for individuals arrested for non-political crimes plummets (dark gray), decreasing so much that after arrests, sentiment toward those arrested for political crimes (light gray) is more positive than those arrested for non-political crimes, which confirms the result of the main papers, focused on sentiment within posts toward the individual in question. Note that unlike Stance detection used in the main text, there is no, pre-set threshold at which content is deemed “negative” or “positive” with this classification method. Instead, the key is to focus on the before and after

arrest and between those arrested for political and non-political crimes.

A5.2 Discussions of Wang Gongquan and XueManzi

In this case study, we hone in on two people who were arrested—Wang Gongquan, who was charged with a political crime, and Xue Manzi, who was charged with a non-political crime—to examine more deeply how they are discussed on Weibo before and after their arrests. We do not collapse posts about different individuals together because each critic was associated with different causes and was charged with different crimes. As a result, discussions about each person are very different both before and after the arrests.

We analyze all Weibo posts about each person in three months before and after their arrest. We use a log-odds ratio to identify words that most effectively separate pre-arrest Weibo posts and post-arrest Weibo posts, following [Monroe, Colaresi and Quinn \(2008\)](#) and [Grimmer \(2013\)](#). The log-odds ratio is a method to compare the relative frequency of a word used before and after an intervention—here the opinion leader’s arrest. To construct the log-odds ratio for words about Xue Manzi, we identified the 1,000 most frequent words in posts prior to arrests and in posts after the arrest and then matched the two sets of words to find the common words used both pre- and post-arrest. After matching, we calculate the relative frequency of each word among the pre- and post-arrest posts. Let $prop_{w,pre-arrest}$ represent word w as a proportion of all words in Weibo posts about Xuemanzi before his arrest. For each word, the odds of this word appearing in pre-arrest Weibo posts is:

$$Odds(w, pre-arrest) = \frac{prop_{w,pre-arrest}}{1 - prop_{w,pre-arrest}} \quad (A1)$$

and we calculate the analogous odds for the word appearing in the post-arrest posts as $Odds(w, post-arrest)$.

We then calculate the log-odds ratio as:

$$logOdds(w) = logOdds(w, post-arrest) - logOdds(w, pre-arrest) \quad (A2)$$

If a word appeared more often in post-arrest Weibo posts, the log-Odds ratio for the word is positive, and if a word appeared more often in pre-arrest Weibo posts, its log-Odds ratio is negative.

We then construct a measure of combined log frequency for each word as:

$$logFreq(w) = logFreq(w, pre-arrest) + logFreq(w, post-arrest) \quad (A3)$$

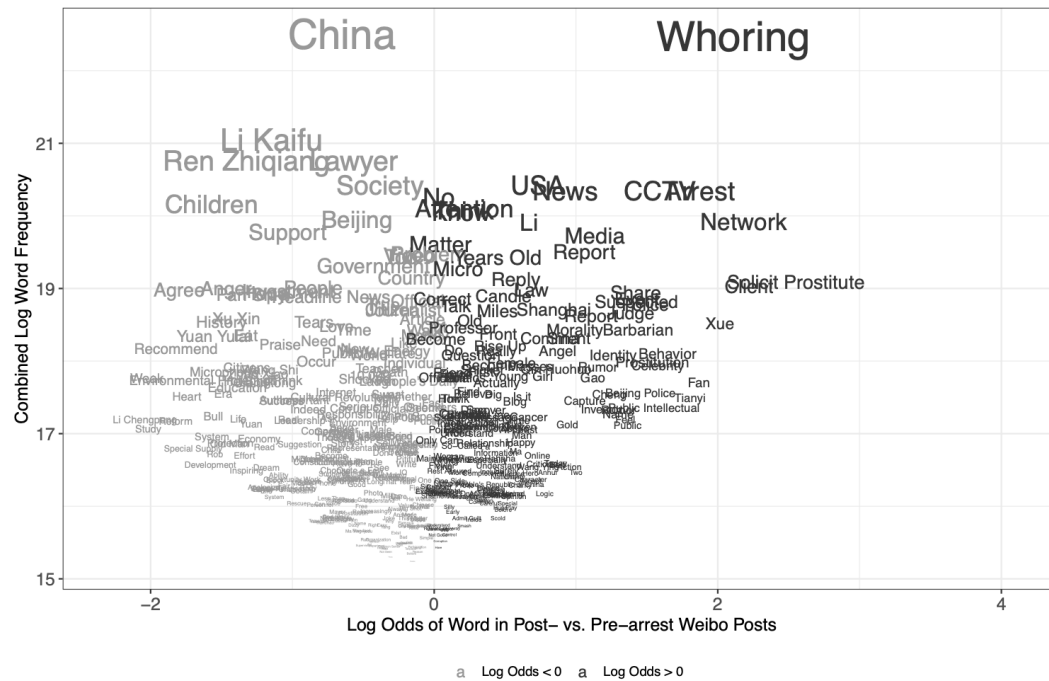
to make it easier to compare posts by the two critics since the volume of posts before and after their arrest was very different (see Figure 4).

Figures A12(a) and (b) show word frequency and the log-odds ratio for Xue and Wang, respectively, with words appearing more often after arrests in dark grey and word appearing more often pre-arrest in light grey. Words on the diagonal are more frequently mentioned and more effective at separating pre-post Weibo posts than off-diagonal words. Xue Manzi is a successful investor known for his investments in Internet and technology companies in China. He became an Internet celebrity in the early 2010s for his investing tips and commentary on social issues, including child trafficking and the plight of the underprivileged people in China. Figure A12(a) shows that discussions involving Xue Manzi before his arrest focus on his political and online activism, with words such as “China,” “Li Kaifu,” and “Ren Zhiqiang” (other critics), “children,” “lawyer,” and “support.” However, after his arrest discussions focus on his crime and immoral behavior, with words such as “whoring” (soliciting prostitutes), “CCTV,” “network,” “arrest,” “police,” “suspected,” “client,” “(corrupt) morality,” and “barbarian.” This result suggests that disguised repression reduced public support and worsened perceptions of the morality of the dissident.

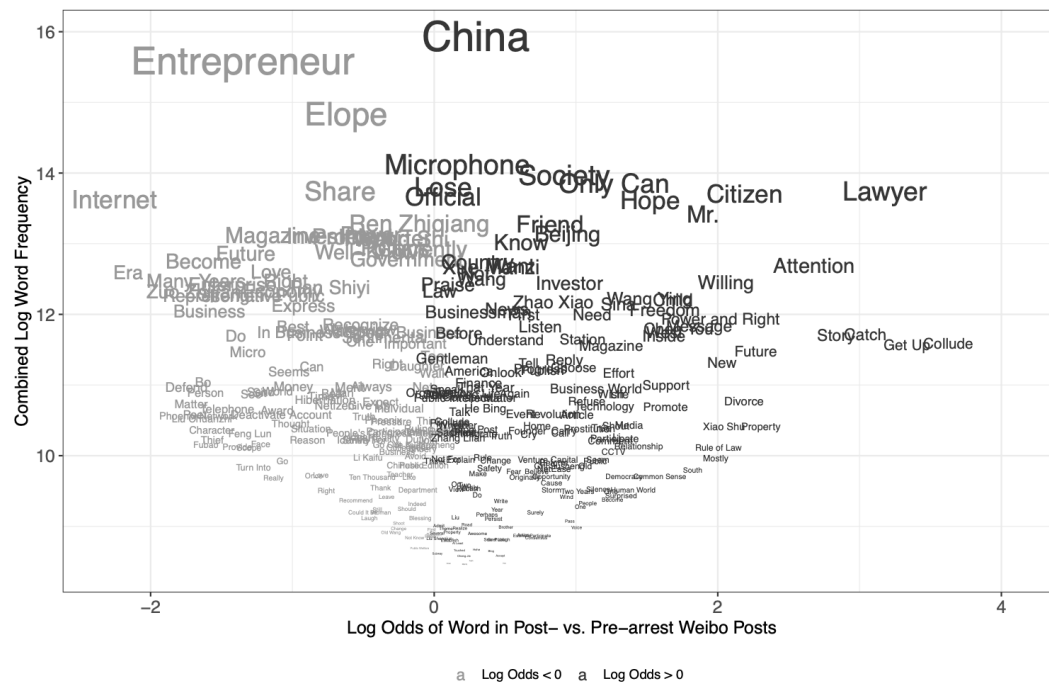
Wang Gongquan is also an investor known for his wealth and success in real estate and venture capital investment. Since 2005, Mr. Wang began strongly advocating for more liberal policies and became involved in a wide range of social issues. For example, he condemned “black jails” where security officers secretly detained aggrieved petitioners. He advocated for the rights of the children of migrant workers. In 2011, Mr. Wang garnered attention on social media after he publicly announced that he was leaving his wife and eloping with Wang Qin, a businesswoman from Southern China. In contrast to the case of Xue Manzi, Figure A12(b) shows that Weibo discussions about Wang Gongquan before his arrest focus on his activism, with words such as “entrepreneur,” “Internet,” “era,” and “represent,” and discussions after his arrest were related to activism and hopes for his release.

The comparison between posts mentioning Xue and Wang shows that while public attitudes toward both critics were focused on their political and social activism before their arrests, online discussions about Xue became highly negative and focused on his immoral behavior after he was charged with “soliciting prostitutes, group licentiousness” while online discussions about Wang

FIGURE A12. WORD FREQUENCY REGARDING CRITICS PRE- AND POST-ARREST



(a) Xue Manzi (arrested for soliciting prostitutes)



(b) Wang Gongquan (arrested for gathering crowds to disrupt public order)

Note: The figures show the log odds of words for each critic (x-axis) versus frequency (y-axis). Words appearing more frequently in post-arrest Weibo posts have a positive log odds ratio (dark grey); those more common pre-arrest have a negative ratio (light grey). The word size represents its relative log frequency.

remained focused on his activism after he was charged “gathering crowds to disrupt public order.”

Appendix References

- Barker, David G. 1992. “Changing social values in Europe.” *Business Ethics: A European Review* 1(2):91–103.
- Doerrenberg, Philipp and Andreas Peichl. 2013. “Progressive taxation and tax morale.” *Public Choice* 155(3):293–316.
- Halpern, David. 2001. “Moral Values, Social Trust and Inequality: Can Values Explain Crime?” *British Journal of criminology* 41(2):236–251.
- Vauclair, Christin-Melanie and Ronald Fischer. 2011. “Do Cultural Values Predict Individuals’ Moral Attitudes? A Cross-cultural Multilevel Approach.” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41(5):645–657.