

**Stanford** | King Center on  
Global Development

# Does Legality Produce Political Legitimacy? An Experimental Approach

Yiqin Fu

Yiqing Xu

Taisu Zhang

November, 2021

Working Paper No. 2008

# Does Legality Produce Political Legitimacy?

## An Experimental Approach

Yiqin Fu (Stanford) Yiqing Xu (Stanford) Taisu Zhang (Yale)<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article studies whether “pure” legality, stripped of the normative components that are conceptually necessary for “the rule of law,” can convey meaningful amounts of perceived legitimacy to governmental institutions and activity. Through a survey experiment conducted among urban Chinese residents, it examines whether such conveyance is possible under current Chinese sociopolitical conditions, in which the Party-state continues to invest heavily in “pure legality,” but without imposing meaningful legal checks on the Party leadership’s political power, and without corresponding investment in substantive civil rights or socioeconomic freedoms. Among survey respondents, government investment in legality conveys meaningful amounts of political legitimacy, even when it is applied to actions, such as online speech censorship, that are socially controversial or unattractive, and even when such investment does not clearly enhance the predictability of state behavior. However, the legitimacy-enhancing effects of legality are likely weaker than those of state investment in procedural justice.

---

<sup>1</sup> Authors are listed alphabetically. Yiqin Fu is a Ph.D Candidate at Stanford University, Department of Political Science. Email: [yiqinfu@stanford.edu](mailto:yiqinfu@stanford.edu). Yiqing Xu is an Assistant Professor at Stanford University, Department of Political Science. Email: [yiqingxu@stanford.edu](mailto:yiqingxu@stanford.edu). Taisu Zhang is a Professor of Law at the Yale Law School. Email: [taisuzhang@yale.edu](mailto:taisuzhang@yale.edu). Please email Taisu Zhang for correspondence.

## 1. Introduction

This article studies whether “pure” legality, stripped of the substantive and normative components that would bring it closer to conventional understandings of “the rule of law,” can convey substantial amounts of popularity and perceived legitimacy to governmental institutions and political activity. Through a survey experiment, it examines whether such conveyance is possible under the sociopolitical conditions that currently exist in the People’s Republic China. Contrary to a significant academic literature that has expressed skepticism towards this possibility, we find strong evidence of its existence in at least the Chinese context. In particular, we find that state investment in legality can produce perceived legitimacy even when it is applied to laws and institutions that are probably normatively unattractive to a significant portion of the general population, and even when such investment does not significantly enhance the external predictability of state action. However, the ability of such investments to produce legitimacy is likely smaller than that of state investment in procedural justice.

Academic discussion of the connection between legality and legitimacy is almost as old as the modern social sciences, dating back at least to Max Weber’s writings on “rational-legal authority” as a major source of perceived political legitimacy in modern societies (Weber 1978, 215-220). Over the past several decades, this connection has often been folded into discussions on the connection between the normatively thicker concept of the “rule of law” and perceived legitimacy (e.g., Rosenfeld 2000; Peerenboom 2002; Krygier 2019), or between procedural justice and social compliance (e.g., Tyler 2017; Meares, Tyler & Gardener 2015). Contrary to these latter connections, both of which have received positive theoretical endorsement and substantial empirical verification, legality has received a much cooler academic treatment since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Partially because of a later 20th Century backlash against Weber, political and social theorists have often been reluctant to acknowledge any positive relationship between pure legality, understood as the consistent and accurate enforcement of legal rules, regardless of their substantive content, and perceived legitimacy (e.g., Grafstein 1981; Turner 1982). Instead, they tend to argue that law’s ability to generate legitimacy depends on its ability to support a “process of competitive election” (White 1986, at 463), effectively constrain governmental power (Thompson 1975; Landry 2008; Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008), facilitate socially desirable substantive outcomes such as economic growth or the protection of individual freedoms and rights (White 1986; Zhu 2011), or procedurally function in ways that are considered normatively just, such as giving respectful answers to requests for individualized explanation (Tyler 2017).

From these perspectives, the legitimacy of state action derives much less from its raw legality than from its normative content, either in outcomes or procedure. Empirical research conducted on American law enforcement, too, has found that “actual lawfulness ... is not the central antecedent of public reactions to experienced or observed instances” of governmental law

enforcement (Tyler 2017, 1977; Meares, Tyler & Gardener 2015). Instead, procedural justice—“explanation, respect, etc.”—seems to be the key to perceived legitimacy (Tyler 2017, 1999).

Judging from patterns of political behavior across the world, however, the idea that boosting legality can generate perceived legitimacy is likely still popular in some regimes, particularly in autocratic ones. As a substantial literature on “authoritarian legality” has shown, many non-democratic regimes have recently made heavy investments in judicial infrastructure and legal professionalism, often with the express objective of curbing official corruption and abuse of power (e.g., Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008; Chen & Fu 2020). Although this literature tends to explain these investments by reference to the substantive sociopolitical or economic outcomes—stronger control over local governmental agents, less corruption, greater economic efficiency due to stronger property rights, and so on—that they potentially supply, there is good reason to think that at least some regimes are betting on legality itself as a source of perceived political legitimacy (Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008, at 4-10; Liebman, 2014; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011).

China is perhaps the best and most important example of this: for the past seven to eight years, it has embarked on a sweeping political campaign to “govern the country according to law” (Zhang & Ginsburg 2019). This has involved a number of centralized measures to strengthen the financial independence and legal professionalism of the courts, bring local and mid-level officials into stronger conformity with formal legal rules, and increase the legal awareness and knowledge of the general population. While scholars have found uneven local implementation of these top-down directives, available evidence nonetheless suggests that the campaign is being carried out with considerable seriousness (Wang 2020). A plausible interpretation of these developments is that they are part of the Chinese government’s broader push to find alternative sources of public support and perceived legitimacy as economic growth, the most important source of “performance-based legitimacy” it has relied on for the past four decades, slows significantly (Zhang & Ginsburg 2019; Fu 2020).

At the same time, however, it has made little, if any, effort to expand or reinforce the substantive socioeconomic freedoms enjoyed by the population, and has actually cracked down heavily on some core civil rights, such as the freedom of expression, or the ability of workers to engage in organized labor resistance. Procedural justice reforms, too, seem to have stalled. The government seems to be betting, therefore, that enhancing legality alone can nonetheless supply a considerable amount of perceived political legitimacy, even as socioeconomic welfare begins to plateau, and even as the regime becomes more politically oppressive (Zhang & Ginsburg 2019; Fu & Dowdle 2020).

But is this bet likely to pay off? Empirical research on Chinese law and politics does not consistently differentiate between the legitimacy-enhancing effects of substantive legal freedoms and rights and the legitimacy impact of “pure legality.” For example, scholars have consistently found that government past campaigns to boost public legal awareness or “legal consciousness”

strengthens the regime's perceived legitimacy (e.g., Whiting 2017; Gallagher 2006). This leaves open, however, the question of how exactly this perceived legitimacy is generated: is it because higher legal awareness has also raised public awareness of the substantive socioeconomic and political rights guaranteed to them by law, or is it because the campaigns have strengthened the public's confidence in the legality of state action—regardless of the law's substantive content? If the former, then the true source of political legitimacy seems to be the substantive rights, but if the latter, then “pure legality” would seem to play a much larger role than scholars usually acknowledge.

This article argues that, at least in the Chinese context, government investment in pure legality can produce a politically meaningful amount of perceived legitimacy, but likely not as much as investment in procedural justice. This latter finding is broadly consistent with the pre-existing empirical literature on law and legitimacy, but the former finding identifies a blind spot that neither previous empirical research nor theoretical analysis has adequately accounted for. At the very least, it suggests that the connection between legality and legitimacy varies significantly from society to society, and that it is positive in at least some major populations.

We rely primarily on online survey experiments conducted on a pool of urban Chinese respondents. In our main survey, 1,040 respondents were asked to read four randomly assigned fictional fact patterns on governmental control measures in an unspecified country—online speech censorship, content review of movies and television programs, supervision of street side vendors, and control over private firework use during major holidays—and then to indicate their level of approval and trust in those measures. The survey therefore operates in sociopolitical contexts in which legal action restricts, rather than strengthens, individual rights and freedoms. In the case of speech censorship and content review, the actions are at least controversial, perhaps outright unpopular, among the Chinese public.

The fact patterns incorporate four possible treatments of governmental behavior: first, the state may or may not issue formal legal rules to regulate the use of power by its lower-level agents. Second, if it does, it may or may not publish those rules to the public. Third, again assuming the issuance of legal rules, the state may or may not invest in professional training of lower-level agents to ensure accurate rule enforcement. Finally, those agents may or may not respond to requests from affected private parties for them to explain their actions. In any given fact pattern, the existence of the latter three treatments depends on the existence of the first treatment—for example, the state will invest in law enforcement training only when there exist laws to enforce—but are otherwise independent from each other. In no fact pattern are government actions subject to individual judicial review or its functional equivalent.

The first and third treatments capture the core components of “pure legality”: the issuance and consistent implementation of laws. The second treatment speaks to the legal system's social transparency, and to whether the general public can, assuming sufficiently accurate and consistent law enforcement, predict governmental action. The fourth treatment approximates

what pre-existing empirical scholarship has identified as the core components of “procedural justice”: responsiveness, explanation, and the individualized conveyance of dignity and respect. Regardless of which combination of treatments a fact pattern incorporates, the basic statistical outcomes of governmental control—the percentage of social media posts subject to censorship, the percentage of movies and television programs banned, and so on—are held constant.

Relative to a baseline control group in which and no laws were issued and published, no legal training was conducted, and no explanations were given in response to private inquiries, survey respondents exhibited no positive reaction to treatments in the first and second dimensions: neither the issuance of laws nor their publication had a significant impact on the perceived legitimacy of governmental action. Treatments in the third and fourth dimensions, however, did make a meaningful difference: respondents across nearly all major demographic categories had a statistically significant positive reaction to state investment in professional training, even when such training was not paired with the publication of laws or investments in procedural justice. The boost—around 0.15 standard deviations—was large enough to be politically meaningful. Moreover, respondents had an even larger positive reaction, around 0.3 standard deviations, to investment in procedural justice, regardless of whether such investment was paired with any of the other treatments.

In these results, “pure legality” is an independent source of perceived political legitimacy. First, its legitimacy-enhancing effects exist in sociopolitical contexts where substantive civil rights and freedoms are being restricted. Second, these effects are also unrelated to its ability to render state action more predictable: such predictability functionally depends on the publication of laws, but legal training boosted perceived legitimacy even when laws were unpublished. Finally, although our results reaffirm the pre-existing academic belief that procedural justice is a major source of legitimacy, we also find that the legitimacy-enhancing effects of legality are functionally independent from those of procedural justice, given the lack of interaction effects between the two treatments. Combined, these results suggest that the Chinese government can indeed reap some legitimacy benefits from investment in legality even when it is unwilling to invest in either procedural justice or substantive rights protection for the individual citizen, and even if it somehow does not wish to publish the underlying legal rules.

A supplementary survey we conducted on 248 respondents further confirms that the functional independence of legality and procedural justice: the survey, which had a similar design to the main survey but focused only on two treatments—the issuance of laws and the provision of procedural justice/responsiveness, found that the legitimacy-enhancing effect of the latter was independent of the existence of the former.

Political scientists differentiate between “specific support” for a particular governmental action and “diffused support” for the political system behind the action (Easton 1975). We find that, within our respondents, the two are positively correlated: when asked about their general trust in the unspecified political regime, those respondents who were consistently exposed to the legality

and procedural justice treatments also had significantly higher diffused support in the overall regime than those who were not.

Our empirical findings are, of course, limited to the contemporary Chinese political context, but there are good reasons to believe that the positive connection between pure legality and perceived legitimacy has deep roots in modern Chinese political and intellectual history: for example, it strongly echoes the way that law and political modernity were discussed among Chinese political and intellectual elites in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Whether our findings can be generalized beyond China's borders is a much more difficult question, and there are reasons to both believe and doubt that the politics of legality in China are qualitatively different from those in other countries. More empirical research is needed to sort through these analytical possibilities.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Part II defines and discusses our core concepts, including legality—contrasted with “rule of law,” “rule by law,” and procedural justice—and perceived legitimacy—contrasted with normative legitimacy. Part III provides additional background, both on the preexisting academic literature and on the current Chinese legal reforms that partially motivate this article. Part IV lays out the design of our survey experiments, and Part V explains their results. A short conclusion follows, briefly addressing the issue of generalizability.

## **2. Conceptual Definitions**

There are two central concepts in this article: legality and legitimacy. Of the two, “legality” has been used in a largely consistent fashion in previous scholarship, whereas there has been fierce debate over the proper meaning of “legitimacy.” Both are, in any case, regularly employed across highly diverse academic terrain, and therefore need to be defined more carefully before they can be applied to empirical analysis.

Legality, as it is generally applied in jurisprudence, is “the quality of being law” (Shapiro 2011, 7), or “the quality of being legal” (Merriam-Webster). What “being law” or “being legal” exactly means depends on the specific theory of law and legal interpretation being applied, but assuming that, in some sociopolitical context, the substantive meaning of a law is clear and uncontroversial to all parties, then investing in legality in that context simply means taking steps to ensure the accurate and consistent enforcement of the law against all relevant parties—including and especially government officials themselves. “Pure” legality therefore takes no position on what the law's substantive content should be, merely that this content should be faithfully enforced and executed.

Legality thus defined is qualitatively different from three other law-related concepts that are commonly employed in the social sciences: rule of law, rule by law, and procedural justice.

“Rule of law” has a number of academic variations (Tamanaha 2004; Waldron 2016): “thick” rule of law generally requires a political system to not only constrain all regular exercises of power—including those by the highest ranking officials—through legal rules, but also to legally commit to some substantive version of liberal democracy. “Thin” rule of law generally drops the latter requirement, but retains the insistence that law be employed to check the exercise of power by the political regime. Legality, in contrast with both definitions, does not require that all regular exercises of power be constrained by legal rules: if, for example, a country’s laws do not explicitly constrain the power of its political leader, then consistent application and enforcement of those laws would give the country legality, but not rule of law. The latter contains substantive requirements about the *content* and *scope* of law that the former does not.

“Rule by law” is a term commonly employed in studies of authoritarian regimes, and generally refers to the state’s use of legal rules to govern the general population (Tamanaha 2004, at 3). The central difference between legality and rule by law is that, whereas the former requires legal rules to be accurately and consistently applied to all relevant sociopolitical actors, including any government official nominally covered by those rules, the latter takes a fundamentally instrumental approach to law enforcement, requiring accuracy and consistency only insofar as it furthers the objective of sociopolitical control (Ng 2019). In other words, accurate and consistent law enforcement is non-negotiable component of legality, almost an end-in-itself, whereas it is a functionally negotiable component of rule by law. Legality is therefore a stronger, more restrictive concept than rule by law, but a weaker, less restrictive one than rule of law.

In recent decades, “procedural justice” has become a central concept in scholarship on law and legitimacy. It generally refers to “how fairly the police and the courts exercise their authority,” (Tyler 2017, at 1972) and is therefore unavoidably value-laden. There is, of course, a fundamental difference between social perceptions of fairness and fairness as a matter of philosophical normativity. The idea of “procedural justice” can apply to either dimension, although empirical scholarship has operated more frequently in the realm of social perception. Substantively, preexisting scholarship has tended to associate social perceptions of procedural justice with the procedural conveyance of dignity and respect: the willingness of officials to explain their decisions to affected parties, to respond to their requests for clarification, and to generally engage on a human level (*ibid.*). We use the term here in a qualitatively similar fashion. In theory, governmental action need not have any connection to law to be perceived as procedurally just. Whether the two are indeed completely unrelated as a matter of social perception is an empirical question, but the conceptual distinction is clear.

Compared with the relatively intuitive coexistence between legality and its conceptual cousins, legitimacy is a more complicated and sometimes contested term in the social sciences. It has at least two qualitatively different meanings: normative and perceived. The former is an objective philosophical measure, which lays out the normative conditions of legitimate rule without reference to actual social facts. Whether a government is descriptively legitimate or not depends



on whether it conforms to these normative tenets (Simmons 1999). The latter, in contrast, is a positive concept, and refers to “the belief on the part of citizens that the dictates of the state are right and proper” (Whiting 2017, at 1912; Hechter 2009, at 280). Nearly all empirical work on law and legitimacy is concerned with the latter concept, whereas a large amount of political and legal theory focuses more on the former. The two are conceptually independent, although there is a large likelihood that the normative beliefs of any individual scholar may very well subconsciously influence how he or she understands perceived legitimacy.

The idea of perceived legitimacy raises a number of difficult methodological questions: whose beliefs count, and what exactly do we mean when we say that state action is considered “right and proper?” It is easy to say that every citizen’s beliefs should count equally as a normative matter, but if the point of measuring legitimacy is to measure a regime’s durability and strength, then clearly the beliefs of some matter may more than those of others. As for the meaning of being considered “right and proper” or “legitimate,” there are many different variations: most directly, it seems to mean that citizens consider the action justifiable given the context, however they subjectively define the normative criteria. Alternatively, it could mean that citizens trust the state in this context, or that they like or approve of its actions. The empirical correlation between these terms is generally quite strong, and many studies use trust as a proxy for legitimacy (Whiting 2017; Weatherford 1992).

While acknowledging the complexity of these problems, this study, like any other empirical study, must take a stand somewhere along the spectrum. Demographically, we focus, as noted above, on urban residents, both because they are easier to reach, and because they now constitute a clear majority of the Chinese population. We seek to measure legitimacy in both conceptually direct and indirect ways: we directly ask survey respondents whether a specific state action is “justifiable,” but also ask them, at the end of the survey, whether the underlying political regime is, in general, “trustworthy.” This is because the justifiability or legitimacy of a specific action is often a much more intuitive question than the legitimacy of an entire regime. On the latter issue, many survey respondents would likely find it more natural and comfortable to answer whether they *trust* a regime, rather than “perceive it as legitimate,” which is an admittedly convoluted phrase that mainly exists in academic discourse. By using trust as a proxy measure for perceived legitimacy, we are, of course, agreeing with the numerous preexisting studies that assume a similar conceptual and empirical correlation.

### **3. Background and Literature**

This section supplies additional information on both the preexisting academic literature on law and legitimacy and the wave of legal developments in China since 2014 that partially motivate this study. The latter, in particular, pose serious and arguably unique challenges to conventional beliefs about the way that authoritarian regimes employ law—and therefore render the issue of

whether pure legality can produce perceived legitimacy much more politically timely and significant than it otherwise would be. From this background material, the section draws out four conceptually distinct mechanisms through which law might enhance perceived legitimacy: protecting substantive rights and freedoms, boosting the predictability of state action through legality, providing procedural justice, and the inherent attractiveness of legality for its own sake.

### 3.1. Relevant Academic Literature

There are two different categories of academic literature on law and legitimacy, one oriented towards political theory and broader historical narrative, the other focused on quantitative empirical research. The latter is, of course, more directly related to this article, but the former nonetheless provides useful theoretical and conceptual background. As with many major debates in the social sciences, it can trace itself back to the ideas of Max Weber, who famously argued that “rational-legal” authority, rooted in the legalistic organization and coordination of state action, supplied an enormous amount of political legitimacy for modern states. Under this view, modernization is, to a large extent, the process of *accepting law as political reason*, or even of substituting law for reason. Many of Weber’s contemporaries also engaged with the idea that legality had become a prominent source of political legitimacy—some, like Carl Schmitt, rather critically (1928)—but most would have agreed that the idea had indeed become central to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century political discourse.

Scholars came to view this idea from a more skeptical perspective in the post-World War II era. Some of this stemmed from a growing liberal insistence that legal institutions must satisfy certain normative conditions—protection of basic civil rights and freedoms, for example, or checking the exercise of arbitrary power—to generate political legitimacy, while other parts of pushback came from concerns over empirical measurability. As Robert Grafstein famously argued, the Weberian account of legality as a source of legitimacy “identifies legitimacy with stable and effective political power, reducing it to a routine submission of authority.” (1981) Grafstein further argues that Weber’s account improperly ignores the normative dimensions of legitimacy. This latter critique, especially popular in the 1970s and 1980s among philosophers and political theorists (Spencer 1970; Turner 1982), has largely been ignored by empiricists, but the former critique raises a difficult methodological question: how can one empirically identify the difference between submission, coerced support, and true perceived legitimacy?

This question is particularly problematic for studies of autocratic regimes. During the Cold War, when a large share of academic attention was focused on fascism and other forms of totalitarianism, a core question for scholars was how much of the apparent popularity of non-democratic regimes was genuine, and how much was coerced, either consciously or subconsciously (Ashenden & Hess 2016; Paklusi 1986; Rigby 1982; Arendt 1951). Some went so far as to argue that citizens of totalitarian regimes lacked the basic political agency and freedom needed to issue true assessments of legitimacy—and therefore that, although totalitarian regimes could certainly be popular, they could never be truly legitimate in a perceived sense.

Given that the conceptual boundaries between totalitarianism and authoritarianism have long been poorly policed in Western political theory, similar ideas were also periodically applied to authoritarian regimes.

A few other major intellectual trends continued to reinforce these ideas into the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century: first, the dominance of the “modernization school” of development theory in the 1960s, followed by its reincarnation in the 1990s, allowed large swathes of the scholarly community to merge the functional analysis of the rule of law and legality: such theories tend to assume that the positive features of modern liberal democracies—law and legality, professional and rational bureaucracies, industrialization and rapid economic growth, freedom, property rights, political checks and balances, and democracy—functionally connected, and therefore emerged in tandem (Tamanaha 1995; Gilman 2003; Krever 2011). From this perspective, it simply made no sense to speak of legality without rights and liberties, because the two were functionally connected, and could only emerge together. These beliefs received a major shot of popularity following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which ignited more than a full decade of “end of history”-type triumphalism among Western intellectuals (Rodrik 2006).

When the now increasingly influential literature on “authoritarian legality” emerged in the early 2000s (Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008; Schedler 2009), it therefore faced an intellectual environment that was skeptical of even the basic empirical claim that there could be any real legality in authoritarian regimes. Although this literature has been largely successful at reestablishing that authoritarian regimes do invest in legality, it has taken a more roundabout approach to the question of whether legality can produce legitimacy: when explaining the incentive for authoritarian regimes to pursue legality, it has focused more on the economic and organizational benefits of legality—its enhancement of efficient resource reallocation, its reinforcement of central political control over local agents and so on (Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008, at 4-10).

Insofar as this literature has discussed possible connections between legality and legitimacy, it has usually done so with reference to the functional benefits of legality: for example, because the citizenry desires economic growth, it welcomes state investment in legality under the belief that greater legality will increase the predictability of governmental action, thereby clarifying and regularizing legal rights, which in turn enhances economic growth (*ibid.*). Alternatively, legality may help project a social image of effective judicial checks against executive authority, thereby leaving the public with the impression that the regime has actually invested in something closer to “the rule of law,” thereby creating legal checks against its own power, rather than mere legality (Landry 2008; Moustafa & Ginsburg 2008, at 6). The idea that pure legality, for its own sake, can be a source of legitimacy has largely been absent.

The quantitative empirical literature on law and legality, while conceptually and methodologically distinct from the more theoretically oriented strands of writing summarized above, nonetheless seems to share their skepticism towards the idea that pure legality can be a

source of legitimacy. Take, for example, the seminal research on law and legitimacy that Tom Tyler and others have conducted in the context of American criminal law enforcement: it has generally found that the legality of governmental action itself has a negligible effect on whether citizens consider them justified, but also that procedural justice matters greatly (e.g., Tyler 2017, 2006, 1977; Meares, Tyler & Gardener 2015). In particular, whether law enforcement officers are willing to respond to social inquiries with patient explanation and individual interaction has been shown to have a major influence on whether citizens perceive their actions as legitimate. Follow-up studies in the European and Australian contexts appear to support these conclusions as well (Van Craen & Skogan 2014; Murphy 2005).

Taking advantage of opportunities for field research, the rise of new survey methods, and the occasional natural experiment, scholars have also tried to probe more deeply into the connection between law and legitimacy in authoritarian regimes. At least one cross-national study that covers democratic and authoritarian regimes alike simply merges public perceptions of the legality of state behavior into its definition of legitimacy, thereby assuming that the two are inherently linked (Gilley 2006). More commonly, scholars have treated law and legality as potential input variables that could produce the output variable of perceived legitimacy, and have devised various ways to observe their interactions.

Given China's outsized importance among authoritarian regimes, it comes as no surprise that a significant portion of this literature has empirically focused on Chinese politics and institutions. Scholars generally agree that the Party-state has long employed legal reform as a tool to enhance its own legitimacy (Diamant et al., 2005; Landry, 2008; Potter, 2009; Lee, 2007; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011; Whiting 2017; Hurst 2018). However, these arguments tend to present law and legal institutions in an instrumental light: as a means to some other substantive end, rather than an end in itself.

For example, studies on the use of law in labor disputes and rights activism find positive social perceptions of law and legal institutions only to the extent that workers consider legal action an effective way to protect their economic rights (Gallagher 2006; Stockmann & Gallagher 2011). Other studies show that higher social awareness of the state's legal responsibilities in financing compulsory education boost public support for the central government (Lü 2014). Similarly, a recent study on "authoritarian 'rule of law' and regime legitimacy" finds that government measures to boost the public's legal awareness or "legal consciousness" strengthened the state's perceived legitimacy, but makes this finding in the context of government sponsored legal aid: when local residents are made aware of legal aid initiatives that can assist them in seeking redress for workplace injuries or protecting their real property rights, they show higher levels of trust in the state (Whiting 2017).

In all these cases, there is a strong case to be made that the positive connection between legal consciousness and legitimacy was driven by the law's substantive protection of labor rights, education rights, or property rights. It would be extremely difficult, if not outright impossible, to

disentangle any possible effect of “pure legality” on perceived legitimacy from this broader substantive context.

It must be acknowledged that, for most of the post-1945 era, the question of whether pure legality could generate perceived legitimacy did not carry an enormous amount of real-world significance: most regimes, including authoritarian ones, that invested heavily in legality during this era paired it with equally substantial investment in private socioeconomic rights, if not always in political rights. China is an excellent example of this: for most of the post-Mao Zedong reform era, the Party-state aggressively pursued both legal professionalization *and* the expansion of socioeconomic rights and freedoms, including property rights, the freedom of contract, labor rights, and even some political freedoms (Fu 2016; Minzner 2011, at 940-43; Peerenboom 2002; Lubman 2000). The fact that legal reform was generally conducted against—and in functional service to—a background of expanding socioeconomic rights and freedoms would seem to explain and justify the instrumental approach to law discussed above.

Since 2014, however, the synergy between Chinese legal reform and substantive rights enhancement has collapsed. The Party-state continues to invest heavily in legality—and has even ramped up its political investment, but at the same time, the general state of civil freedoms and rights seems to have deteriorated rapidly. Under these conditions, which are discussed in the following subsection, the question of whether pure legality can generate perceived legitimacy even when it is being employed for substantively oppressive political ends has quickly become critically important for our understanding of Chinese law and politics.

### **3.2. Chinese Legal Reforms Since 2014**

China’s post-Mao legal infrastructure has undergone two major systemic shocks since the early 2000s, first after 2008, and then again after 2014. Prior to 2008, many foreign and Chinese scholars alike believed that China was on some sort of “long march towards the rule of law,” in which the state consistently invested in legal professionalism and, to some extent, judicial independence, while also expanding the economic rights and freedoms held by the populace (Peerenboom 2002). The latter trend manifested through a series of major legislative moves that stretched from the 1980s, following the adoption of a new constitution in 1982 that provided for stronger separation of Party and state, to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which saw the passage of several landmark laws, including the 2007 Property Law and the 2008 Labor Contract Law, that enshrined core private economic rights (Zhang 2008; Gallagher & Dong 2011).

The judiciary and legal profession underwent massive expansion as part of these efforts (Liu 2006; Liu 2008; Stern 2014). The state continued to view sociopolitical freedoms such as speech, assembly, and religion with much suspicion and hesitation, but even there, the general trend after 1978 was, with the exception of 1989 and its immediate aftermath, moderately—sometimes strongly—towards political “opening” (Liebman 2008). For most of this roughly 30 year period,

the expansion of substantive rights and freedoms and the institutional strengthening of legality went largely hand-in-hand, although not necessarily synchronously.<sup>2</sup>

All this began to change around 2008. The Party-state's posture towards legality became rather negative over the next four years, to the extent that some scholars have called this period a "turn against law" (Minzner 2011). As part of a general political push towards "social harmony," the courts were ordered to prioritize informal mediation and reconciliation over formal adjudication, while administrative entities at the local level began to play a greater, non-legal role over socioeconomic dispute resolution. Politically, the central Party leadership clearly seemed to harbor considerable distrust of the judiciary, believing that its pursuit of institutional stature and functional independence over the previous decades had become too aggressive for comfort. It therefore moved to reassert control, most noticeably by parachuting in a senior bureaucrat with no prior judicial experience into the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court. The Party's supremacy over the courts, and indeed over the legal system in its entirety, reemerged as a major rhetorical theme in political speeches and slogans (Zhang 2012).

At around the same time, the expansion of substantive rights and freedoms began to plateau, partially because socioeconomic freedoms had already reached a relatively high level, but also because the government apparently wished to assert stronger control over certain facets of private life. Governmental regulation of numerous kinds of economic activity, ranging from real estate transactions to financial activity, noticeably tightened in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, and the state control over private companies came to draw considerable amounts of academic attention (Liebman 2014). Meanwhile, political freedoms began to erode, most noticeably through tighter internet censorship and escalating crackdowns over civil rights activism. China's progress towards the rule of law ideal seemed to regress across the board during this period, both in terms of its commitment towards legality, and in terms of the substantive rights and freedoms granted through law (Zhang 2016; Minzner 2018).

The Party-state's institutional posture again underwent a major shift after 2012, when Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao as Party Secretary and President (Zhang & Ginsburg 2019). The new regime immediately moved to reverse the anti-legalistic tendencies of its predecessor, making "governing the country according to law" one of its most prominent political slogans. After 2014, the slogan was quickly backed up with a sweeping array of institutional reforms that aimed to boost the judiciary's professionalism, independence, and ability to act as a check against other governmental entities.

First, a new and higher pay scale was created specifically for judges and prosecutors, while the educational and professional credentials required for judicial employment, particularly for

---

<sup>2</sup> While the general direction of pre-2008 Chinese legal reform was largely towards legal professionalization, enhancement of rights, and perhaps even the rule of law, only partial progress was made towards any of those ideals, as scholars have documented in great detail. See, e.g., Wang 2015; Ng and He 2017; Clarke 2021.

adjudication positions, were substantially raised (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, higher level courts were granted stronger and more expansive powers to oversee lower court adjudication, with the express aim of improving the consistent legality of judgments. Second, a concerted effort has been made to shield lower and mid-level courts against political interference from other governmental entities of the same administrative level, most notably by removing their budgetary and personnel decisions from parallel local or city governments to the provincial level or above (Wang 2020). Finally, the courts have been given stronger review powers over the administrative actions of governmental agencies, especially over the exercise of eminent domain powers by local or city governments, which even led to a rise in private parties' win rates in administrative litigation (Zhang & Ginsburg 2019).

The rollout of these measures dovetailed with a sharp escalation in the Party-state's anti-corruption efforts, which took on a more institutionalized tone—as opposed to its traditional reliance on concentrated political campaigning—after 2014. This was no accident: both were described in high level speeches as central components of “governing the country according to law,” which now clearly included the tightening of legal control over government officials at all levels below the central Party leadership. The institutionalization and regularization of anti-corruption culminated in the creation, through constitutional amendment in 2018, of an entirely new branch of government called the Supervision Commission, charged with investigating and bringing charges against acts of corruption or abuse of political power, and regulated by an elaborate system of formal procedural rules (*ibid.*).

Almost inevitably, institutional changes of such sweeping scope will run into implementation problems at the lower levels of government, hampered by the very same principal-agent problems they seek to solve—and these pro-legality moves taken by the Xi regime are no different. Recent scholarship has found often patchy implementation at the sub-provincial level, especially of the budgetary and personnel reforms aimed at freeing lower-level courts from horizontal political influence: despite formal compliance with the reforms, many local governments continue to retain some measure of informal influence (Wang 2020). Nonetheless, the fact that there has been near-universal formal compliance likely means that the aggregate strength of such influence has nonetheless receded from pre-reform levels, however unevenly. In any case, the central government's seriousness in bolstering formal legality seems undeniable at this point, and has not noticeably wavered since 2014.

If the power transition between Hu and Xi reversed the partial “turn against law” that had taken place from 2008 to 2012, it only seemed to accelerate the erosion of substantive rights and freedoms (Minzner 2018). Government crackdowns against rights activism have, as many have pointed out, risen to arguably the highest levels since the aftermath of 1989. More pertinently for the general population, online speech is now monitored and censored with even greater intensity, aided by new requirements that most social media handles and phone purchases must be registered with government-issued ID. Relatedly, the government has substantially strengthened its oversight over most kinds of cultural product: movies, television series, novels,

academic work, and so on. Religious freedom, too, seems to be waning as the state has stepped up its efforts to contain organized religion. Meanwhile, economic rights and freedoms have stagnated at best, as governmental entities have taken an ever more active role in economic regulation and control and have become less tolerant of labor rights activism (Franceschini & Nessosi 2018). Finally, with the widespread application of the so-called “social credit” system and the application of human face recognition technology, privacy has shrunk while the state’s ability to monitor private activity has risen to perhaps unprecedented heights (Dai 2018). All in all, the balance between state control and private freedom has swung significantly towards the former over the past decade and shows no signs of stopping (Pils 2017; Zhang 2016).

What this means, for our present purposes, is that, for probably the first time in the post-Mao era, China’s relationship with legality has now decoupled from its relationship with substantive rights and freedoms in a prolonged and systemic fashion: For the past 7-8 years, the former has once again become significantly positive, whereas the latter has become increasingly negative. This makes considerable sense if one believes, as many do, that the Party leadership’s underlying goal is to strengthen its own dominance over all facets of state and society alike (Economy 2018; Lee 2017). Beyond the developments described above, it has also moved to centralize power—administrative, fiscal, and economic—within the governmental apparatus, partially reversing the commitment towards “de facto federalism” that had marked the previous two decades (Xu 2011). All this suggests a basic political posture of top-down, centralized control over both government agents and private parties, which, in a country of China’s size, significantly benefits from enhanced legality, but not from more robust private rights and freedoms.

It would, however, be much too simple to claim that the Party leadership’s only goal in enhancing legality is to instrumentally strengthen its control. It has also taken great pains to bolster the formal legality of its own power, whether by formally enshrining the Party’s political supremacy into the Chinese Constitution in 2018, by signaling Xi’s intention to stay in power beyond the customary 10 years through constitutional amendment instead of less formal political means, or by making sure the new Supervision Commission was legally backed by both constitutional amendment and litany of statutes and regulations (Zhang & Ginsburg 2019). This does not imply that substantive legal checks against its power will emerge any time soon—Chinese law does not formally constrain the authority of the central Party leadership in any meaningful fashion—but does suggest that it cares about the external perception of legality even, and perhaps especially, when it comes to its own authority.

All this produces the reasonable inference that the current Party leadership sees the social perception of legality as a potentially significant boost to its political legitimacy, and that its recent investment in “ruling the country according to law” is at least partially rooted in that assumption. A number of speeches given by senior leaders, including Xi himself, lend significant support to this idea (*ibid.*). Given the slowdown in Chinese economic growth over the past several years, it also seems likely that the Party-state has been searching for new sources



of perceived legitimacy to supplement the likely decline in traditional “performance-based legitimacy,” which focused almost entirely on economic performance (Wang 2018).

But if government investment in legality was in part driven by a desire to boost the Party-state’s political legitimacy, then the underlying assumption has to be that *pure* legality can produce perceived legitimacy: substantive rights and freedoms have almost certainly eroded since the mid-2000s, and with removal of presidential term limits in 2018, there are even fewer formal legal checks on high-level political power than before, both as a matter of political reality *and* as a matter of public perception. China may well be moving away from substantive rule of law at the same time it is moving towards legality—something that is quite rare in modern political history. Under these general circumstances, can there be a reasonable expectation that the Party-state’s investment in pure legality can generate politically meaningful amounts of perceived legitimacy?<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3. Possible Connections between Law and Legitimacy

The academic and political background provided above identifies four major potential mechanisms through which law can enhance a regime’s perceived legitimacy, to which we seek to add a fifth: First, if the legal system functions in ways that are seen as procedurally just, it can generate large amounts of perceived legitimacy. Second, the state may choose to enhance the substantive socioeconomic or political rights and freedoms enjoyed by its citizens and protect them through law. In such cases, further investment in legality would functionally strengthen these normatively desirable rights and freedoms. Third, the state could constrain its own power through legal checks and balances, which usually entails constitutional checks and balances, or at least a significant amount of judicial independence. Fourth, even if the state refuses to enhance substantive rights and freedoms or check its own power, the public may nonetheless welcome investment in law and legality because it renders governmental activity more predictable, thereby allowing economic actors to plan for it—or around it—more efficiently.

Finally, there is the Weberian idea that, in modern societies, people may value legality for its own sake, without any additional instrumental considerations: they simply believe that being legal is inherently valuable for its own sake, regardless of the law’s normative content, or its functional consequences for socioeconomic welfare. Much previous scholarship has, as noted above, expressed skepticism towards this latter possibility, but the remainder of this article provides empirical evidence to support it.

---

<sup>3</sup> The most recent wave of the World Values Survey (2017 – 2021) asked people in 49 countries their level of trust in the government and in the court system on a four-point scale. Interestingly, the Chinese exhibited some of the highest levels of trust in their central government and in their courts. It is easy to dismiss this result as politically coerced, but it may also suggest that the government’s pro-legality campaign is already popular and generating some of the desire effect on perceived political legitimacy.

These five mechanisms are summarized and organized in Table 1.

Table 1. Five Mechanisms of Legality

The state invests in...	The public responds positively because...
<p><i>Substantive rights and freedoms</i> (property rights, freedom of contracts, civil and political rights and freedoms, etc.)</p>	<p>... people desire those rights and freedoms, for either deontological or consequentialist reasons. (“Substantive rights and freedoms”)</p>
<p><i>Meaningful legal checks against the regime’s political power</i> (an independent judiciary, constitutional checks and balances)</p>	<p>... people are skeptical of unchecked political power. (“Checks and balances”)</p>
<p><i>Pure legality</i> (consistent, accurate law enforcement, governing according to law, etc.)</p>	<p>... people value legality for its own sake. (“Legality for its own sake”)</p>
	<p>... it instrumentally enhances the predictability of governmental activity, which enhances economic efficiency. (“Predictability”)</p>
<p><i>Procedural justice</i> (responsiveness, willingness to give individualized explanations, etc.)</p>	<p>... people enjoy being treated with dignity and respect. (“Procedural justice”)</p>

## 4. Research Design

To study the causal effect of pure legality on the Chinese public’s perceptions of institutional and political legitimacy, we constructed a multi-arm survey experiment. This section lays out the survey experiment’s research design and its underlying intuitions.

#### 4.1. Basic Intuitions

We aim to differentiate the legitimacy effects of *legality for its own sake* from those of the other four theoretical mechanisms discussed in the previous subsection: (1) the protection of *substantive rights and freedoms*, (2) the provision of *checks and balances* against political power, (3) the strengthening of the *predictability* of governmental action, and (4) the provision of *procedural justice*.

We strip out any possible interfering effect of the first mechanism, substantive rights and freedoms, by focusing on legal changes that attempt to restrict private rights and freedoms, rather than expand or strengthen them, in the fictional fact patterns we give to survey respondents. In particular, in two of our fact patterns—which focus respectively on internet speech censorship and media content review—the state engages in activity that restricts private freedom without any obvious benefit to other private rights. Previous studies have found that such activity is sociopolitically controversial in China (Wang & Mark 2015; Guo & Feng 2012). The other two fact patterns focus, in contrast, on state regulations that are less politically salient and controversial—the restriction of street-side vendors and private fireworks sales—allowing for some comparative analysis. We do not, however, provide a fact pattern in which private rights and freedoms are being expanded or strengthened. Very few scholars would doubt that such expansion and strengthening can significantly boost the government’s perceived legitimacy, and there is no need to empirically verify the obvious.

Moreover, none of these fact patterns yields a reasonable interpretation of the state limiting its own political power through law: quite the opposite, they are all clearly examples of the state instrumentally employing the law as a means of control. In the censorship and content review cases, it is exercising control specifically to strengthen its own rule and suppress dissent. In no fact pattern does an independent judiciary, or any independent adjudicative body, meaningfully constrain the state’s legal authority.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, whatever legitimacy-enhancing effects we find in these surveys could not plausibly have stemmed from a “checks and balances” mechanism.

Differentiating the legitimacy-enhancing effects of *legality for its own sake* from those of procedural justice or *legality for the sake of predictability* is a more delicate task, given that all three mechanisms can easily exist in contexts where substantive rights and freedoms are eroding *and* political checks and balances do not exist. Here, our core intuition is that these three mechanisms each emphasize a different part of the law enforcement process. The normal life cycle of a legal rule includes four qualitative phases: its creation through legislation or rulemaking, publication, enforcement, and post-enforcement actions such as explanation or review, if any. Beyond the functionally self-explanatory creation phase, without which there would be no law to speak of, the state has a range of options in each of the next three phases.

---

<sup>4</sup>In doing so, we also deemphasize the significance of courts, and instead focus on the legitimacy effects of law. As recent scholarship has found, the two are not necessarily connected in the Chinese context (Chen & Li 2020).

First, it may publish the rule to the public, a subset of the public, or only to rule enforcement agents. The latter option may seem counterintuitive if social compliance is the goal, but is exactly how some censorship regimes in authoritarian states have operated in practice.<sup>5</sup> Second, the state can take steps to ensure more accurate rule enforcement, such as by providing professional training to enforcement agents. Finally, it may or may not invest in procedures that enhance the social perception of procedural justice: it may, for example, offer explanations for individual decisions upon request, and may even provide review mechanisms for some decisions. In real-life legal regimes, many rule enforcement entities are unwilling to do either.<sup>6</sup> Note that the three phases are functionally independent from each other: a legal system can, for example, conduct professional enforcement training, or even explain enforcement decisions to affected parties, without publishing the rule.

The “legality for its own sake,” predictability, and procedural justice mechanisms each rely on a different combination of institutional options: first, pure legality for its own sake is primarily concerned with accurate and consistent law enforcement, and therefore benefits enormously from state investment in professional legal training, conditional upon the existence of formal rules in the first place. Insofar as general social compliance with legal rules makes accurate law enforcement easier, legality is also functionally connected to the publication of rules, but technically speaking, a legalistic regime can be one that does not publish its rules, as long as it enforces unpublished rules consistently and professionally against violators. If the public values legality for its own sake, it will respond positively to investments in professional training, with or without the publication of laws and rules. In particular, if the public responds positively to training even in the absence of publication, then that strongly suggests that it cares about legality for its own sake, and not merely as a proxy to predictability.

If, however, the public instrumentally values primarily legality for the predictability it provides, then it will respond positively to investment in professional training *if and only if* it is paired with the publication of laws and rules. Moreover, it may respond positively to publication even when it is not paired with professional training. After all, government law enforcement activity may still be somewhat predictable if rules are published but enforcement is occasionally inaccurate, but will be almost completely unpredictable if the rules are not even published.

Third, procedural justice as conventionally understood is, as explained above, both conceptually and functionally distinct from legality, and does not necessarily benefit significantly from either publication or professional training, although it is perfectly possible that a lack of publication

---

<sup>5</sup> This was, for example, the case in Chinese internet censorship for most of the previous few decades, see Tai 2014, and remains somewhat true even today. For discussion of censorship regimes in other countries that display similar institutional characteristics, see, e.g., Dewhurst 2002 (on Russia); Wagner 2012 (on Tunisia). Such practices are not limited to authoritarian regimes. See Deibert et al. 2010 (surveying Eastern and Western European practices).

<sup>6</sup> The lack of procedural justice and responsiveness in real-life American law enforcement is, of course, the social problem that motivates much of Tom Tyler’s research. See, e.g., Tyler 2006. Chinese internet censorship is also famously opaque and non-responsive to user complaints. See, e.g., Tai 2014. For general studies of how Chinese censorship is conducted, see, e.g., Gueorguiev and Malesky 2019; Han 2018; King, Pan and Roberts 2013.

might, under some contexts, instigate a feeling of disrespect. Regardless, previous scholarship clearly identifies the state’s post-enforcement activity—whether, in particular, it responds respectfully to private requests for explanation or review—as the most important determinant of procedural justice.

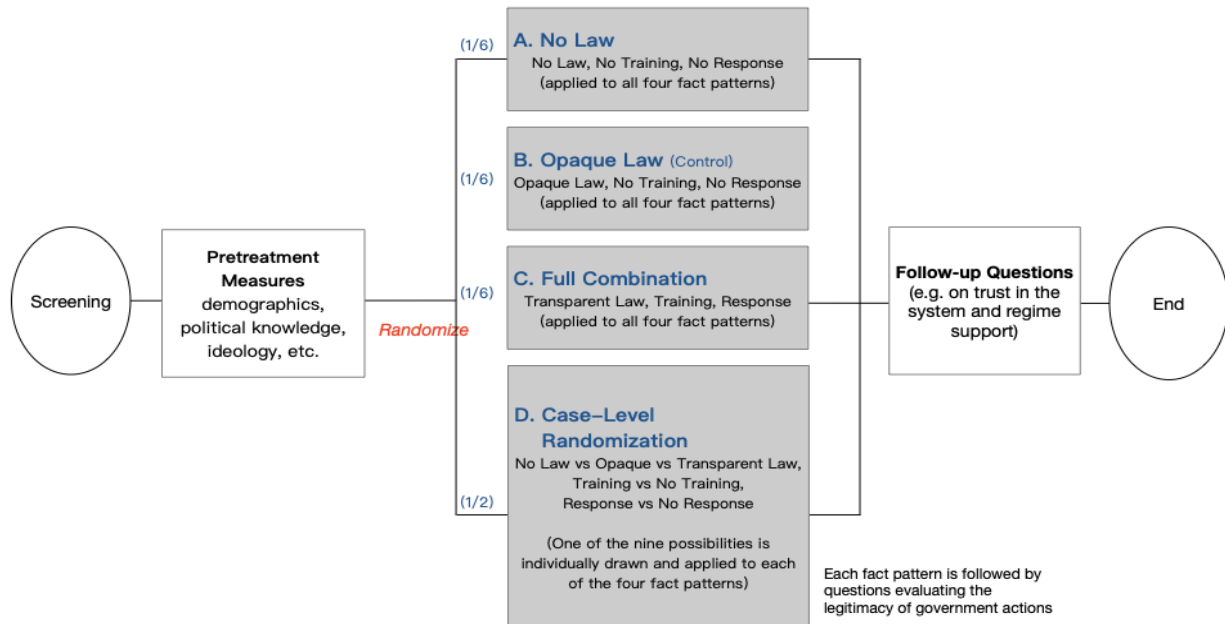
These conceptual and functional differences allow our survey experiments to probe more deeply into the specific mechanisms through which perceived legitimacy is produced: variations in whether the legal rule is published capture the public’s demand for predictability; variations in professional rule enforcement training in the absence of publication capture the public’s approval, if any, of legality for its own sake; and variations in post-enforcement responsiveness capture the public’s desire for procedural justice. The following section lays out the specific survey design that implements these basic intuitions.

## 4.2. Survey Design

### 4.2.1. Survey Flow and Treatments

Figure 1 illustrates our survey flow. After initial screening, respondents are first asked some basic demographic questions as well as their political predispositions (see Appendix Table A2 for question wording as well as the coding of variables). We use respondents’ agreement with various statements on law and politics to construct additive indices on nationalism, regime support, and support for legality.

Figure 1. Experiment Flow Chart



Subsequently, respondents are randomized into one of the four treatment arms (A, B, C, and D) where they read four fact patterns with different combinations of the legal characteristics

described in previous sections (see Table 3 for the specific variations). At the end of each fact pattern, respondents are asked to evaluate the legitimacy of government action. Once they finish reading all four fact patterns, they are asked to state their level of trust in the fictional regime at large.

The four fact patterns we presented concern, respectively, regulation of street-side vendors, regulation of fireworks sales, media censorship, and online speech censorship. Within each fact pattern, there are four possible institutional variations, as shown in Table 3: the issuance of formal laws and rules versus no issuance (“the issuance condition”); the publication of formally issued laws and rules versus no publication (“the publication condition”); professional training of enforcement personnel versus no training (“the training condition”); and governmental response to private requests for explanation versus no response (“the responsiveness condition”). Of these four conditions, the latter three are “switched on” only when the first is present: in other words, publication, training, and responsiveness are dependent on the issuance of formal laws and rules, but are independent from each other.

As discussed in Subsection 4.1, each of the latter three treatments correlates to a different mechanism through which investment in law potentially enhances perceived legitimacy. First, a positive response to publication suggests that respondents value greater transparency and predictability of state action. Second, a positive response to responsiveness suggests that they value procedural justice. Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, a positive response to professional enforcement training *in the absence of publication* indicates that respondents value legality for its own sake.

Table 2 summarizes these interpretations.

Table 2 Combinations of Treatments and Their Interpretations

<b>Treatment Combinations</b>	<b>If...</b>	<b>Then we conclude that:</b>
Issuance + Publication	There is no positive response to publication, all other conditions being held stable.	Either respondents did not place significant value on the transparency, and therefore predictability, of government action in this context; or they did not believe that publication significantly improved the predictability of government action.
	There is a positive response to publication, all other conditions being held stable.	Respondents placed significant value on the transparency and predictability of government action in this context.

Issuance + Training	There is no positive response to training, all other conditions being held stable.	Respondents did not place significant value on the accuracy of law enforcement, which suggests either that they did not care strongly about legality, whether for its own sake or as an instrumental proxy to predictability, or that they did not believe that training boosted legality (this seems unlikely).
	There is a positive response to training, <i>with</i> the existence of publication, and all other conditions being held stable.	Respondents placed significant value on the accuracy of law enforcement, which suggests that they cared strongly about legality, either for its own sake, or as an instrumental proxy to predictability.
	There is a positive response to training, <i>without</i> the existence of publication, and all other conditions being held stable.	Respondents placed significant value on the accuracy of law enforcement <i>even if laws are not published</i> . This suggests that they cared strongly about legality for its own sake, <i>not</i> as an instrumental proxy to predictability.
Issuance + Responsiveness	There is no positive response to responsiveness, all other conditions being held stable.	Either respondents did not place significant value on procedural justice (as conventionally understood).
	There is a positive response to responsiveness, all other conditions being held stable.	Respondents placed significant value on procedural justice (as conventionally understood).

#### 4.2.2. Treatment Arms and Randomization

In Arm A, as illustrated in Figure 1, about a sixth of the respondents (158 people) read four fact patterns all written in Control Variation 0, which contained no issuance of formal regulations—and therefore no publication, no professional training of enforcement personnel, and no government response to private requests for explanation. In Arm B (175 people), another sixth of the respondents read four fact patterns all written in Variation 1, with formally issued rules, but no publication, no professional training of enforcement personnel, and no government response to private requests for explanation. In Arm C (187 people), another sixth of the respondents read

four fact patterns all written in Variation 8, with the issuance and publication of formal regulations, professional training of enforcement personnel, and government response to private requests for explanation. Because the treatment conditions are the same for all four fact patterns in each of these three arms, we prevent spillover effects from treatment conditions appearing in one fact pattern to subsequent fact patterns. This allows us to study the causal effect of these conditions on respondents' diffused trust of the regime as a whole.

Table 3. Treatment Conditions for Fact Patterns: A Factorial Design

Arm	Variation	Law?	Publication?	Training?	Response?
<b>A</b> (1/6)	0				
<b>B</b> (1/6)	1	Y			
<b>C</b> (1/6)	8	Y	Y	Y	Y
	0				
	1	Y			
	2	Y	Y		
	3	Y		Y	
<b>D</b> (1/2)	4	Y	Y	Y	
	5	Y			Y
	6	Y	Y		Y
	7	Y		Y	Y
	8	Y	Y	Y	Y

Finally, the remaining half of the respondents, or 520 people, are randomized into Arm D. They read four fact patterns each independently drawn from the nine variations. In other words, if a respondent is assigned Variant 4 of the television media set, the respondent may be assigned to any variation in the other three fact patterns, including their respective Variant 4s. The order of the four fact patterns was also randomized—a respondent may read about censorship of a web series first and restrictions on fireworks sales second, or they may read about fireworks first and web series second.

### 4.2.3. Fact Pattern Vignettes

As noted above, the four fact patterns we use center around, respectively, street-side vendors, urban regulation of fireworks, television media censorship, and online speech censorship (see Appendix for the fact patterns). These are frequent topics of debate in contemporary Chinese society and are thus realistic and salient to our respondents. Furthermore, coercive action is taken directly by the government in the first two fact patterns and indirectly via commercial platforms in the latter two. The diversity in the range of topics and the agency of enforcement contributes to the generalizability of our findings.



We give an example of the web series fact pattern below—see Appendix Section 4 for all text combinations. It should be noted that all quantitative outcomes of the enforcement action are kept constant across all combinations.

[In 2016, Country W's media regulator issued a legal document titled "Further Regulations to Supervise Television Content", introducing 20 content moderation standards for online television series.] (The Issuance Condition) The authorities asked all online media platforms to fulfill their duties of reviewing online television series, promoting "positive" values, and removing negative content that harms public morals.

[The media regulator published the document in full on government portals.] (The Publication Condition)

S, a streaming platform, immediately held internal seminars on “purifying the online media environment and protecting public morals,” asking its employees to strictly follow the standards set by the document when reviewing existing television series on the platform.

[After publishing the regulations, Country W's media regulator also held training sessions, explaining to employees at the online platforms what each standard of the new regulation entailed. Content reviewers at Platform S all participated in the training and passed the national examination held that year on content moderation.] (The Training Condition)

In 2017, *The Critical Point*, a popular online television series imported from South Korea, was removed from Platform W.

Mr. Zhang had been greatly looking forward to seeing *The Critical Point*. When he saw that the series was removed from Platform C, he asked the platform for an explanation.

[Platform C wrote to him that *The Critical Point* violated the regulation's statute on the total amount of screen time allowed for "violent and vulgar" content.] (The Response Condition)

That year, Platform C removed 20 television series in total, accounting for 10% of all television series on the platform. Several market research surveys show that 80% of users were satisfied with Platform W.

The Issuance Condition contains two variations:

- [Without issuance] In 2016, Country W's media regulator conveyed to all Internet platforms the spirit of the meeting the national department held on "purifying the online media environment and protecting social morality."
- [With issuance] In 2016, Country W's media regulator issued a legal document titled "Further Regulations to Supervise Television Content", introducing 20 content moderation standards for online television series.

The Publication Condition contains three variations:

- [Without publication]
  - [If no issuance]: The spirit of the meeting was promulgated internally but never shared with the public.
  - [If issuance]: All Internet platforms received the document, but the regulator did not publicize its details.
- [With publication] The media regulator published the document in full on government portals.

The Training Condition contains two variations:

- [Without training] Media regulators in Country W did not organize training sessions for employees at the country's various streaming platforms. Employees at Platform S started reviewing content right away.
- [With training] After publishing the regulations, Country W's media regulator also held training sessions, explaining to employees at the online platforms what each standard of the new regulation entailed. Content reviewers at Platform S all participated in the training and passed the national examination held that year on content moderation.

The Responsiveness Condition contains two variations:

- [Without response] Platform C did not respond.
- [With response] Platform C did not respond.

Our experimental design offers three unique advantages. First, the factorial design allows us to isolate the legitimacy-enhancing effect of each of the four qualitative phases (issuance, publication, training, and response). Second, by randomizing respondents into pure treatment arms where they see four fact patterns of the same variant, we can test whether the presence or absence of law in any particular instance affects diffused trust in the regime overall. Third, pure treatment arms allow us to check for potential spillover effects. One might worry that respondents' reaction to the first fact pattern may affect their impression of later ones. By

comparing the average level of perceived legitimacy for case variants that appear in pure treatment arms and those that appear in the individually randomized arm (Arm D), we can test whether individual fact patterns have spillover effects. We find that they do not.

#### **4.2.4. Measurement**

Our key outcome variables are respondents' perceived legitimacy of the enforcement action (specific support) and their level of trust in the fictional regime (diffused support), both measured on 0-3 Likert scale (“extremely unreasonable”/“extremely untrustworthy,” “quite unreasonable”/“quite untrustworthy,” “quite reasonable”/“quite trustworthy,” “extremely reasonable”/“extremely trustworthy”). The wording and scale follow standard practices in survey experiments on public trust and political legitimacy.

After showing respondents each fact pattern, we also asked them to recall, on a fresh screen, the topic mentioned in the story. In some regression models, we include only those that answered the attention check questions correctly. We also include demographic controls such as gender, education, income, and pre-treatment political dispositions in some other models we estimate.

#### **4.3. Hypotheses**

This survey design allows us to test the following hypotheses:

H1 (“Legality for its own sake”): People view government action as more legitimate when relevant laws and rules are formally issued, compared to when no formal laws and rules are issued. We test this hypothesis by comparing the specific support responses in Arm B to those in Arm A.

H2 (“Strengthening predictability through legality”): Assuming the existence of relevant formal laws and rules, people view government action as more legitimate when the content of those laws and rules are publicly disclosed, compared to when they are only circulated internally among law enforcement officials. We test this hypothesis by isolating the specific support responses to the publication treatment within variations of Arm D.

H3 (“Legality for its own sake”): Assuming the existence of relevant formal laws and rules, people view government action as more legitimate when law enforcement officials receive professional training, compared to when no such training is provided—even and especially when the legal rules are not published. We test this hypothesis by isolating the specific support responses to the training treatment within variations of Arm D, focusing in particular on those that do not contain the publication treatment.

H4 (“Procedural justice”): People view government action as more legitimate when the government responds to private requests for explanation of those actions, compared to when no explanation is provided. We test this hypothesis by isolating the specific support responses to the responsiveness treatment within variations of Arm D.

H5 (“Diffused trust”): People consistently exposed to fact patterns with a richer set of legal characteristics (issuance, publication, training, *and* responsiveness) will place greater trust in the regime as a whole, compared to those consistently exposed to fact patterns with thinner elements of law. We test this hypothesis by comparing the diffuse support responses in Arm C with those in Arms A, B, and D.

#### 4.4. Supplementary Survey

Results from our main survey show, as discussed later in Section 5, that responsiveness has a large legitimizing effect on government action. However, because the responsiveness treatment in our main survey was assigned conditional on there being formal issuance of law, we could not isolate the effect of responsiveness from that of issuance. In a follow-up survey, we tried to separate these two concepts by showing a new set of respondents four fact patterns that vary along only these two dimensions. We used the same sampling method and the same design as our main survey. But rather than having nine variations of each fact pattern, we showed respondents fact patterns randomly belonging to one of four combinations,<sup>7</sup> as displayed in Table 4: no issuance of law *and* no responsiveness; issuance of law but no responsiveness; responsiveness but no issuance of law; and issuance of law *and* responsiveness.

Table 4. Treatment Conditions for Fact Patterns in the Supplementary Survey

Condition	Law?	Response?
1		
2	Y	
3		Y
4	Y	Y

## 5. Data and Results

In the following section, we present results of our survey experiments, which illustrate the legitimacy-enhancing effects of various elements of law both at the fact pattern level (specific support) and at the regime level (diffused support). We will also discuss the statistical and the political significance of our results and explore heterogeneous treatment effects.

### 5.1. Main Survey Data

In March and April of 2021, we recruited an online sample of 1,040 urban respondents from 26 provinces around China. The sample was not nationally representative, but we used quota sampling strategy to target age, gender, education, and province of residence marginals. Table 5

<sup>7</sup> In other words, all fact patterns in this Supplementary Survey were randomized in the same way as Arm D of the Main Survey.

reports the summary statistics of the sample. Overall, 51% of our sample were women; 20% had bachelor's degrees or above; 10% were party members. The median age was 37, and median monthly income was CNY5,001-8,000 (USD 777-1,243). The median level of trust in China's central government was an 8 out of 10, and trust in the respondents' local government a 7 out of 10, consistent with other online surveys involving Chinese participants.

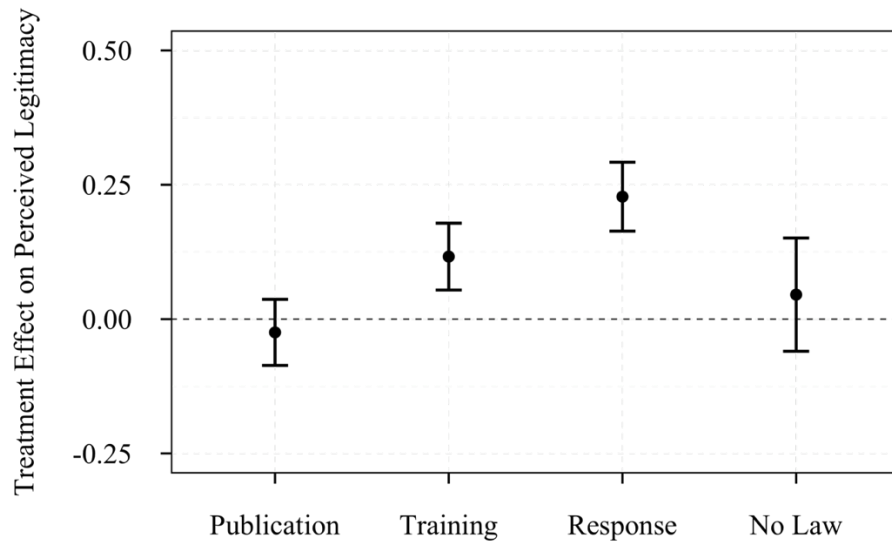
Table 5. Summary Statistics: Main Sample

	Summary Statistics				
	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max	Min
Age	1,040	37.44	12.12	61	19
Female	1,040	0.51	0.50	1	0
High School	1,040	0.14	0.34	1	0
Junior College	1,040	0.24	0.43	1	0
College or Above	1,040	0.20	0.40	1	0
Income Category	1,030	3.77	1.85	8	0
Self-Reported Social Class	1,040	1.26	0.70	3	0
Political Knowledge	1,040	2.62	1.90	5	0
Ethnic Minority	1,040	0.04	0.19	1	0
CCP Member	1,040	0.10	0.30	1	0
Ideology: Legality	1,040	0.00	1.00	2.87	-3.18
Ideology: Nationalism	1,040	0.00	1.00	2.27	-4.49
Ideology: Liberalism	1,040	0.00	1.00	4.18	-3.59
Ideology: Market Economy	1,040	0.00	1.00	3.88	-3.95
Regime Support	1,040	0.00	1.00	2.28	-4.74

We follow the same sampling procedure in our supplementary survey and report the summary statistics in Appendix Table A8.

In addition, Appendix Tables A1(a) and (b) report the covariate balance between different treatment arms and treatment conditions, respectively. We report the covariate balance of the supplementary survey in Appendix Table A9. The results in these tables show that the randomizations were successful in this study.

Figure 2. Treatment Effects on Specific Support



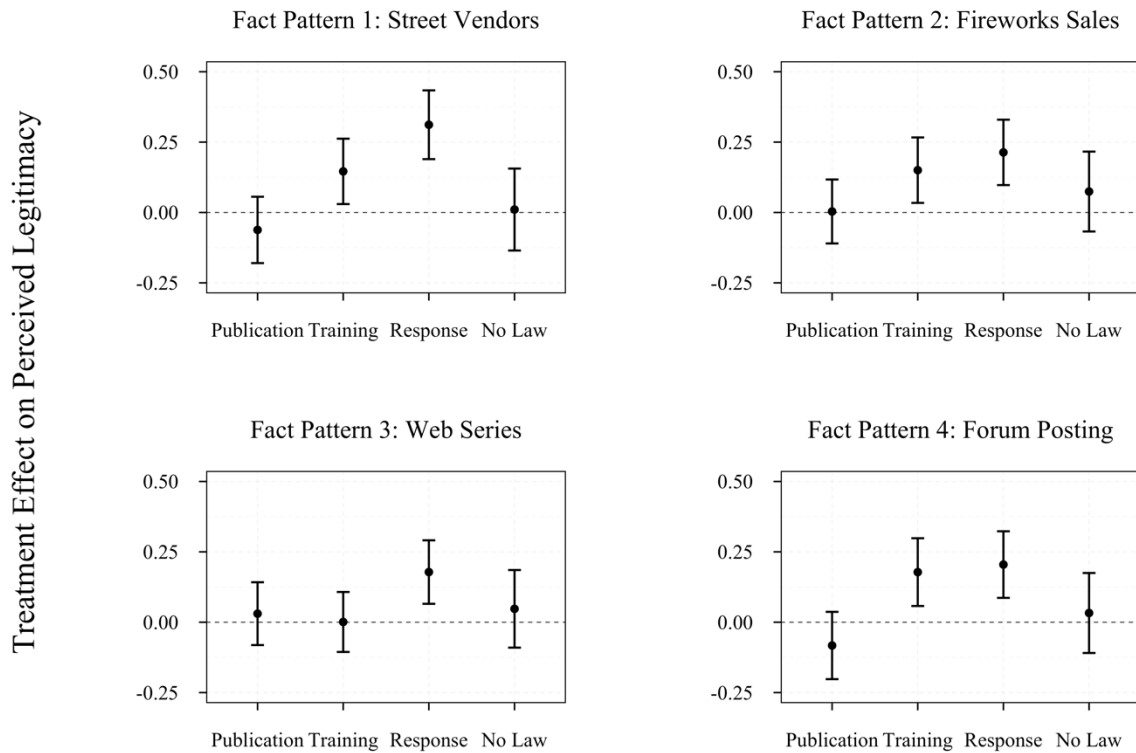
*Note:* The control condition is Case Variant 1 (Law, No Publication, No Training, No Response). Perceived legitimacy is measured on a scale of 0 - 3. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. See Appendix Table A3 for the full regression results.

## 5.2. Main Survey Results: Specific Support

Figure 2 shows that, of the four legal treatments deemed theoretically important—the issuance of law, the publication of law, training of enforcement officials, and responsiveness—both training and responsiveness increased the perceived legitimacy of enforcement action by a statistically significant amount, consistent with hypotheses H3 and H4. Measured on a 0-3 scale, government training of enforcement officials boosted legitimacy by 0.1 points (or 0.15 SD) on average, and response to affected citizens boosted legitimacy by 0.2 points (or 0.3 SD) on average. In contrast, neither the issuance of formal laws and rules nor their publication had any significant effect, contrary to hypotheses H1 and H2.

The findings of a null effect for issuance and publication and a statistically significant effect for training and response largely hold across all four fact patterns. Figure 3 shows that in all four fact patterns, neither the issuance nor the publication of law had any effect on perceived legitimacy, whereas training and responsiveness, with the exception of training in the web series fact pattern, both increased legitimacy—the latter by about twice as much as the former.

Figure 3. Treatment Effects on Specific Support: by Fact Pattern



**Note:** Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Control Group Mean: Street Vendors 1.69; Fireworks Sales 1.95; Web Series 1.96; Forum Posting 1.97. See Appendix Table A4 for the full regression results.

We ran additional OLS models with interaction terms but found that the four treatments had no interactive effects (see Table 6). In other words, having two or more of the treatments (for example, both training and response) did not, on average, generate any additional boost in perceived legitimacy. The treatments operated independently of each other. As shown in the table, our results are robust to including covariates and applying the attention filters. See Figure A1 in the Appendix for the average outcome under each treatment condition in all four arms.

Table 6. Treatment Effects on Specific Support: with Interactions

	Outcome Variable:					
	Legitimacy of Enforcement Action					
	Full Sample			Arm D: Case-Level Randomization		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Publication	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.08)
Training	0.16** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.16** (0.06)	0.15** (0.08)	0.14* (0.07)	0.17** (0.08)
Response	0.28*** (0.06)	0.26*** (0.06)	0.28*** (0.07)	0.27*** (0.08)	0.24*** (0.08)	0.29*** (0.09)
No Law	0.06 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	0.05 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.09)
Publication * Training	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.11)	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.11)
Publication * Response	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.09)	0.01 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.10)	0.00 (0.11)
Training * Response	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.15 (0.11)
Publication * Training * Response	0.10 (0.12)	0.09 (0.12)	0.12 (0.13)	0.13 (0.13)	0.13 (0.13)	0.17 (0.15)
Control variables		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Attention check filter			Yes			Yes
Observations	4,160	4,120	3,317	2,080	2,044	1,651
Clusters	1,040	1,030	1,020	520	511	508
Adjusted R-squared	0.03	0.09	0.09	0.03	0.09	0.08

**Note:** This table presents the average treatment effect of the four phases in government action: issuance of law, publication of law, training of enforcement officials, and response to affected citizens. The baseline is Variation 1 (law, no publication, no training, no response). Individual controls include *Age*, *Gender*, *Education*, *Income*, *Self-Reported Social Class*, *Political Knowledge*, *Ethnic Minority*, *CCP Membership*, and *Ideology*. Columns (1) and (2) use the full sample. Columns (3) and (4) subset to respondents in Arm D, who saw four fact patterns each individually randomized to be one of Variations 0-8. Robust standard errors clustered at the respondent level are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

Taken together, our results show that, in line with hypothesis H3, survey respondents rewarded investments in “pure legality”—as captured by the professional training treatment—with higher levels of perceived legitimacy even when, as in all four patterns, it was employed to *reduce* private rights and freedoms, and even when it did not constrain the regime’s aggregate exercise of political power. The magnitude of this legitimacy boost (0.15 SD) was only around half of what investments in procedural justice—captured by the responsiveness treatment—produced (0.3 SD), but it was nonetheless statistically significant and almost certainly politically meaningful.<sup>8</sup>

Second, insofar as survey respondents valued “pure legality,” they did so because they valued legality for its own sake, not because they valued the greater predictability of government action

<sup>8</sup> Note that, even if taken at face value, our results suggest that investments in pure legality can boost public support for government action by about 3-4 percentage points (0.12 on a 0-3 scale), which could easily make the difference between being narrowly unpopular and comfortably popular, or between worryingly unpopular and narrowly popular. Given that our survey results clumped within a relatively narrow range of between 1.5 and 2.5 on a 0-3 scale, the actual magnitude of any qualitatively similar boost in real life may very well be higher.



that legality supplied. Contrary to hypothesis H2, respondents had no statistically significant reaction to the publication of laws and rules, regardless of whether such publication was paired with professional training of enforcement officers or not. Given that there can be no meaningful increase in the predictability of government action unless relevant laws and rules are made publicly available, this result leads to one of two possible interpretations: first, respondents did not perceive predictable action as significantly more desirable than unpredictable action. Second, they did not believe that the publication of laws would render government action significantly more predictable—perhaps because they had insufficient confidence in their own ability to acquire the necessary legal knowledge.

In contrast, respondents rewarded the training treatment with greater perceived legitimacy, regardless of whether it was paired with the publication treatment. This strongly suggests that, to the extent they perceived professional training as legitimacy enhancing, they did so because they valued accurate rule enforcement for its own sake, not because it boosted predictability.

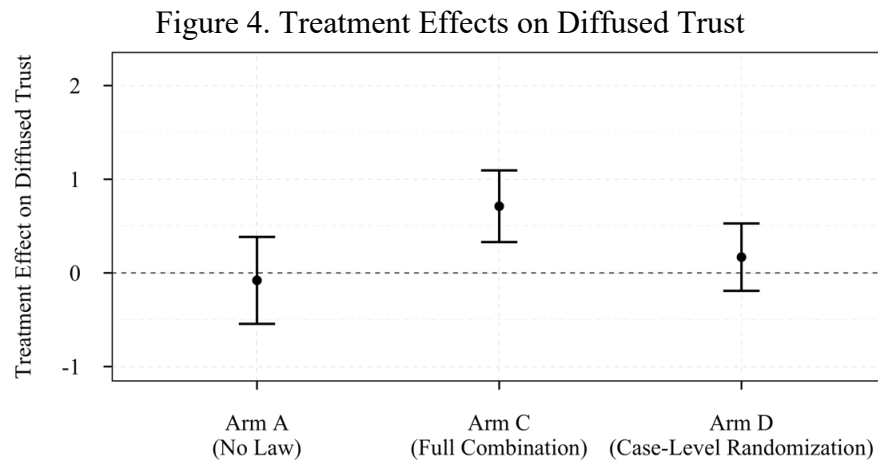
Third, contrary to hypothesis H1, the mere issuance of formal laws and rules did not, by itself, produce any increase in perceived legitimacy. This was likely because respondents did not believe that the issuance of formal rules could produce true legality unless it was paired with professional training. In other words, they likely did not trust enforcement personnel to accurately enforce formal rules in the absence of professional training. If such training was provided, however, perceived legitimacy increased.

Fourth, consistent with hypothesis H4, investments in procedural justice did indeed provide a large boost to perceived legitimacy, larger, in fact, than the boost provided by investments in pure legality. However, the two boosts were functionally independent from each other: both could exist in the other's absence, and combining them did not generate any additional perceived legitimacy. Moreover, as we will discuss in Subsection 5.5, we find in our supplementary survey that investments in procedural justice increased perceived legitimacy to the same extent regardless of whether they were accompanied by the formal issuance of law. In summary, people value both legality for its own sake and, separate from the existence of formal legal institutions, procedural justice measures that treat individuals with greater dignity.

### **5.3. Main Survey Results: Diffused Trust**

Besides enhancing the legitimacy of specific government actions, investments in the various aspects of law also boosted the legitimacy of the fictional regime as a whole, a system-wide effect that went beyond the particulars of any specific fact pattern. Figure 4 shows the treatment effect on respondents' level of trust in Country W. We see that compared to the "opaque law" Arm B (i.e. those shown Variant 1 for all fact patterns), those randomized into the "no law" Arm A (i.e. those shown Variant 0 for all fact patterns) as well as the individually randomized Arm D (i.e. those randomly shown Variants 0 through 8 for each of the fact patterns) had similar levels of trust in Country W (around 7.5 points out of 10). In contrast, consistent with hypothesis H5,

those randomized into the fully saturated arm (Arm C), who received Variant 8 for all four fact patterns, rated the fictional regime as 0.7 points more trustworthy on a 0-10 scale, a 0.4 SD increase relative to the “opaque law” baseline (Arm B).



*Note:* The baseline group is Arm B (Opaque Law), where respondents saw four cases of the pattern (written law, no transparency, no training, no response). Diffused trust is measured on a scale of 0-3. N=175 (Arm B), 158 (Arm A), 187 (Arm C), 520 (Arm D). See Appendix Table A5 for the full regression results.

The difference in diffused trust between our treatment arms indicates that a systemically more legalistic and procedurally just regime was, as a whole, perceived as more legitimate than those that did not invest in legality and procedural justice, or did so only inconsistently.

#### 5.4. Main Survey Results: Treatment Effects Heterogeneity

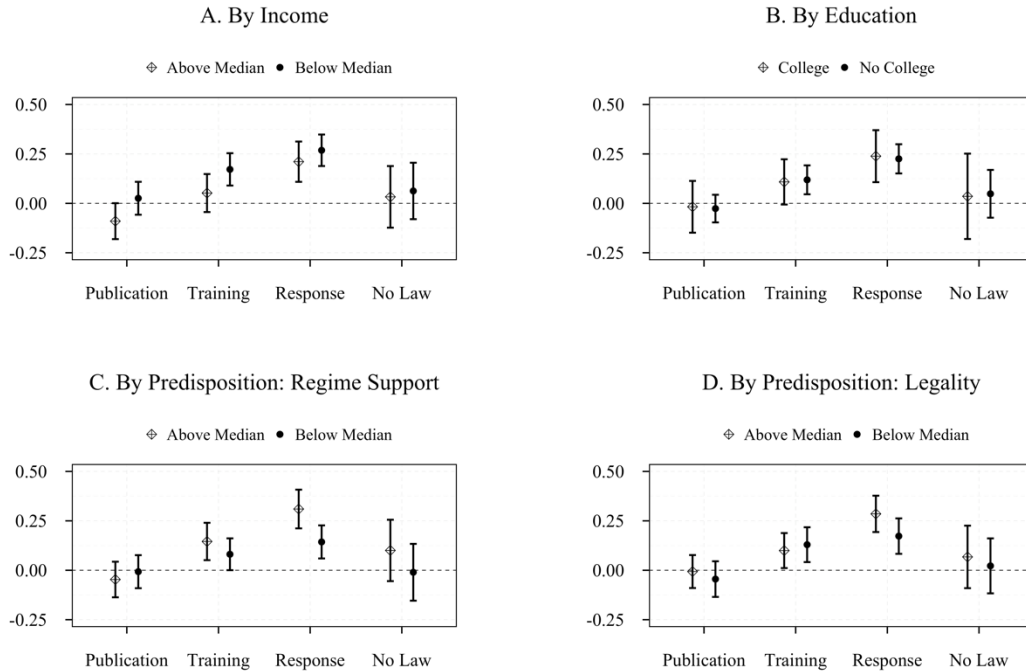
As described in our pre-registration, we explore heterogeneous treatment effects by respondent characteristics such as income, education, and their pretreatment levels of regime support and support for the rule of law. Figure 5(a) shows that professional training and government response consistently enhanced legitimacy among almost all subgroups of participants, and that the effect size did not meaningfully differ across the subgroups. The effects on diffused trust are similar across different subgroup, too, as shown in Figure 5(b).

The robustness of our results speaks to the generalizability of our findings. Even though the survey was conducted on a sample of urban Chinese Internet users, consistent effect sizes across almost all subgroups suggest that similar patterns likely exist among much larger groups of Chinese citizens.

Figure 5. Treatment Effects by Pre-Treatment Characteristics

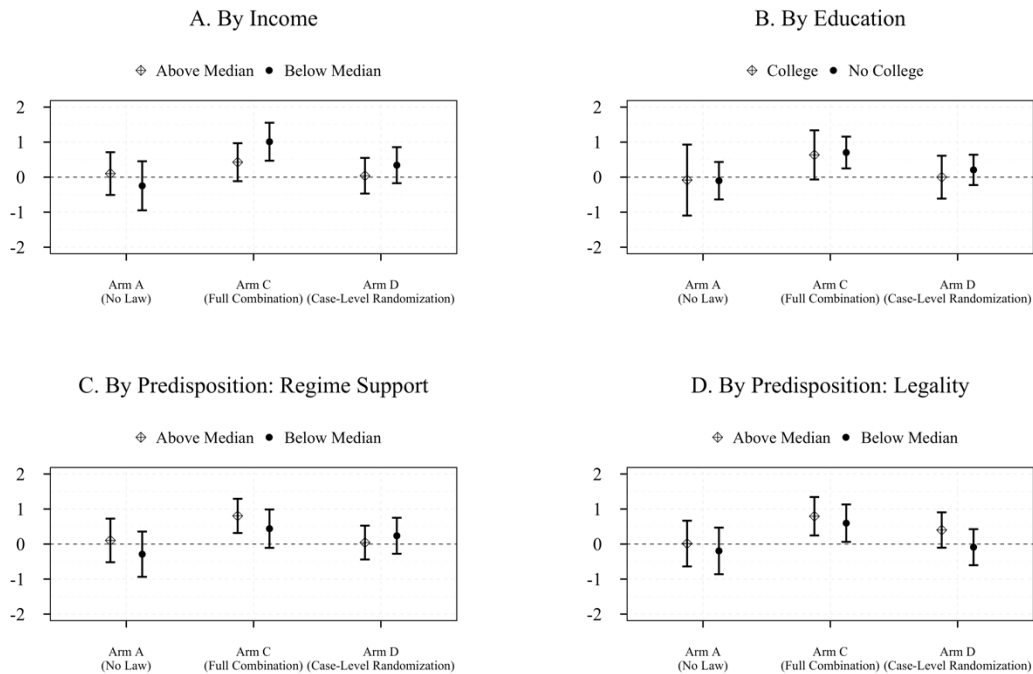
(a) On Specific Support

Treatment Effect on Perceived Legitimacy



(b) On Diffused Trust

Treatment Effect on Diffused Trust



*Note:* See Appendix Tables A6 and A7 for the full regression results.

## 5.5. Supplementary Survey Results

We have shown that, conditional on the issuance of law, responsiveness has a large effect on the perceived legitimacy of government action. However, it remains unclear whether this legitimacy-enhancing mechanism operates independently from the existence of law altogether. We therefore conducted a follow-up survey, which, as described in Subsection 4.3, showed a new set of 420 respondents the same four fact patterns, but this time with a 2x2 design that only contained the issuance of law and responsiveness treatments. As shown in Table 7, government response increased perceived legitimacy by 0.2 points, or 0.3 standard deviations, on a 0-3 scale. But neither the coefficient of the issuance treatment itself nor its interaction with responsiveness is significantly different from zero. This indicates that responsiveness, through the dignity and respect it offers to citizens, boosts legitimacy separately from the existence of formal law.

Table 7. Treatment Effects on Specific Support: Supplementary Sample

	Outcome Variable:							
	Legitimacy of Enforcement Action							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Law	0.00 (-0.05)	0.03 (-0.04)	0.01 (-0.05)	0.04 (-0.05)	0.01 (-0.07)	0.00 (-0.06)	-0.01 (-0.07)	-0.02 (-0.07)
Response	0.23*** (-0.04)	0.23*** (-0.04)	0.22*** (-0.05)	0.23*** (-0.05)	0.23*** (-0.06)	0.21*** (-0.06)	0.20*** (-0.07)	0.17** (-0.07)
Law * Response					-0.02 (0.09)	0.05 (0.08)	0.05 (0.10)	0.11 (0.10)
Control variables		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Attention check filter			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
Observations	1,176	1,160	959	946	1,176	1,160	959	946
Clusters	294	290	293	289	294	290	293	289
Adjusted R-squared	0.02	0.18	0.02	0.18	0.02	0.18	0.02	0.18

**Note:** This table presents the average treatment effect of law and government response to affected citizens. The baseline is the condition where the government neither issued laws nor responded to citizen inquiry. Individual controls include *Age*, *Gender*, *Education*, *Income*, *Self-Reported Social Class*, *Political Knowledge*, *Ethnic Minority*, *CCP Membership*, and *Ideology*. Robust standard errors clustered at the respondent level are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

This article has provided empirical evidence for the proposition that, under the sociopolitical conditions currently prevalent in urban China, pure legality can be an independent source of perceived political legitimacy, even when it fails to meaningfully constrain the regime's political power, and is employed to limit, rather than strengthen, substantive rights and freedoms. Perhaps most surprisingly, investment in legality can enhance perceived legitimacy even when it does little to boost the predictability of state action. Its legitimacy-enhancing effects are likely weaker than those of procedural justice but are nonetheless meaningful enough to justify some substantial state investment. Our findings suggest, therefore, that the Party-state's current posture towards legal reform is well-conceived. Assuming that the specific crackdown on

certain socioeconomic rights and freedoms and general escalation of state control over private life must continue for other reasons, the legitimacy-enhancing effects of pure legality likely allow the Party leadership to recoup at least some popularity and perceived legitimacy by implementing those steps in a legalistic fashion.

Our findings also indicate that it could, potentially, recoup even more perceived legitimacy by investing in procedural justice. Such investment is indeed happening in spots—for example, over the past two years, the government has begun to emphasize “transparent law enforcement” in everyday policing activity<sup>9</sup>—but there is scant evidence of any systemic program remotely comparable to “governing the country according to law.” There may, in fact, be good reasons for this: procedural justice is improved not by merely responding to requests for explanation, but by doing so in a dignified and respectful fashion. In fact, a disrespectful response may well be worse than no response at all. From the government’s perspective, ensuring respectfulness and dignity could be significantly more difficult and costly than simply ensuring legality, given that the latter is likely a more formulaic and mechanical task than the former. Investing in procedural justice is, therefore, not necessarily more cost-effective than investing in legality, even if its political ceiling is potentially higher.

Any study that employs the survey method to a single country begs the broader question of generalizability, both chronological and geographical. Chronologically, there are good reasons to think that the legitimacy-enhancing effects of legality in contemporary Chinese politics have deep historical origins that extend as far back as the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Cheng 2008; Zhang 2019). The idea that law and legality were core components of political modernity—and therefore necessary for national rejuvenation—was very popular among late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century political elites, but their understanding of those concepts was often unrelated to liberal ideals of civil liberties, democracy, or constitutional checks-and-balances. Instead, they seemed to believe in the inherent sociopolitical value of controlling the population through law, rather than through traditional social norms, and on the “modernizing” and “civilizing” effect that law could have on private individual behavior. While the People’s Republic of China only began to systemically commit to law and legality after 1978, the political valorization of legality in China began more than a century before. When and how that became socially influential enough to produce the kinds of legitimacy-enhancing effects we observe here deserves deep historical research that goes well beyond the capacity of this article.

---

<sup>9</sup> This involves, for the most part, video-recording of law enforcement activity and granting the public some access to the records. See, e.g., recent State Council Directives on these issues: *Guowu Yuan Bangong Ting guanyu Quanmian Tuixing Xingzheng Zhifa Gongshi Zhidu, Zhifa Quanguocheng Jilu Zhidu, Zhongda Zhifa Jueding Fazhi Shenhe Zhidu de Zhidao Yijian* [Directive of the State Council Administrative Office on Comprehensively Implementing Public Notification Mechanisms for Administrative Law Enforcement, Recording Mechanisms for Law Enforcement Actions, and Legal Review Mechanisms over Major Law Enforcement Decisions] (国务院办公厅关于全面推行行政执法公示制度、执法全过程记录制度、重大执法决定法制审核制度的指导意见), GUO BAN FA [PUBLICATIONS OF THE STATE COUNCIL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE] (国办发) 2018-118, available at [http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2019/content\\_5358677.htm](http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2019/content_5358677.htm).

Geographical generalizability is an even more complex and difficult question. There are good reasons to suspect that a similar connection between pure legality and perceived legitimacy does *not* exist in developed democracies like the United States. Scholars have found, as noted above, that “actual lawfulness” does not enhance perceived legitimacy in many American social contexts (Tyler 2017, 1977; Meares, Tyler & Gardener 2015). Furthermore, recent empirical scholarship suggests that social trust in judicial institutions depends significantly more on the public’s substantive moral agreement with court decisions in the United States than it does in China (Bartels & Johnston 2013, 184-85; Ding & Javed 2020). Nonetheless, one might wonder whether these are observations of Chinese exceptionalism or of American exceptionalism, and whether democratic societies that have traditionally taken a more positive view of state authority—a number of continental European regimes comes to mind (Damaska 1986)—might take a more positive view of pure legality. In any case, the question of whether developing countries with authoritarian regimes bear a closer sociopolitical resemblance to China than to the United States in this regard is an open one that, in light of our findings, hopefully receives more academic attention in the years to come.

## Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Henry Holt, 1951.
- Ashenden, Samantha & Andreas Hess. "Totalitarianism and justice: Hannah Arendt's and Judith N. Shklar's political reflections in historical and theoretical perspective." *Economy and Society* 45, No. 3 (2016): 505-529.
- Bartels, Brandon L., and Christopher D. Johnston. "On the Ideological Foundations of Supreme Court Legitimacy in the American Public." *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013): 184–99.
- Chen, Benjamin Minhao and Li, Zhiyu. "Judicial Legitimation in China." *Cornell International Law Journal* 53, No. 2 (2000): 169-206.
- Chen, Weitseng, and Hualing Fu. "Authoritarian Legality, the Rule of Law, and Democracy." In *Authoritarian Legality in Asia: Formation, Development and Transition*, edited by Weitseng Chen and Hualing Fu, 1–14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Cheng, Liaoyuan (程燎原). "Wan Qing "Xin Fajia" de "Xin Fazhi Zhuyi"" ["The "New Legalism" of the "New Legalists" in the Late Qing"] ("晚清"新法家"的"新法治主义"). *Zhongguo Faxue [Chinese Legal Studies]* (中国法学) 2008, No. 5: 30-48.
- China Journal* 72, No. 1 (2014): 53-74
- Clarke, Donald C. "Order and Law in China." GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2020-52 (2020), available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3682794>.
- Dai, Xin. "Toward a Reputation State: The Social Credit System Project of China." In *Social Credit Rating: Reputation und Vertrauen beurteilen*, edited by Oliver Everling, 139-64. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler, 2020.
- Damaska, Mirjan. *The Faces of Justice and State Authority: A Comparative Approach to the Legal Process*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Deibert, Ronald, John Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski, and Jonathan Zittrain. *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rules In Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
- Dewhirst, Martin. "Censorship in Russia, 1991 and 2001." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 18, No. 1 (2002): 21-34
- Diamant, Neil J., Stanley Lubman, and Kevin O'Brien eds. *Engaging the Law in China: State, Society, and Possibilities for Justice in China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Dimitar D. Gueorguiev and Edmund J. Malesky. "Consultation and Selective Censorship in China." *The Journal of Politics* 81, No. 4 (2019): 1539-1545.

Ding, Iza, and Jeffrey Javed. "The Autocrat's Moral-Legal Dilemma: Popular Morality and Legal Institutions in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 6 (May 2021): 989–1022.

Easton, David. "A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support." *British Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 4 (1975): 435-57.

Economy, Elizabeth. *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Franceschini, Ivan and Elisa Nessosi. "State Repression of Chinese Labor NGOs: A Chilling Effect?" *The China Journal* 80, No. 1 (2018): 111-129.

Fu, Hualing, and Michael Dowdle. "The Concept of Authoritarian Legality: The Chinese Case." In *Authoritarian Legality in Asia: Formation, Development and Transition*, edited by Weitseng Chen and Hualing Fu, 63–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Fu, Hualing. "Building Judicial Integrity in China." *Hastings Int'l Comp. L. Rev.* 39, No. 1 (2016): 167-82.

Fu, Hualing. "Understanding the Evolving Relationship between the Party and the Law: The Case of China's National Supervision Commission." University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper No. 2020/072 (2020). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3743636>.

Gallagher, Mary E. "Mobilizing the Law in China: 'Informed Disenchantment' and the Development of Legal Consciousness." *Law & Society Review* 40, no. 4 (2006): 783–816.

Gallagher, Mary E. and Dong, Baohua. "Legislating Harmony: Labor Law Reform in Contemporary China" In *From Iron Rice Bowl to Informalization: Markets, Workers, and the State in a Changing China*, edited by Sarosh Kuruvilla, Ching Kwan Lee and Mary E. Gallagher, 36-60. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Gilman, Nils. *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Ginsburg, Tom and Tamir Moustafa. "Introduction: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes." In *Rule by Law : The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*, edited by Tom Ginsburg and Tamir Moustafa, 1-22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008.

Grafstein, Robert. "The Failure of Weber's Conception of Legitimacy: Its Causes and Implications." *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 2 (1981): 456–72.

Han, Rongbin. *Contesting Cyberspace in China: Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.



Hechter, Michael. "Legitimacy in the Modern World." *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no. 3 (November 2009): 279–88.

Hurst, William. *Ruling Before the Law: The Politics of Legal Reform in China in Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (2013): 326–43.

Krever, Tor. "The Legal Turn in Late Development Theory: the "Rule of Law" and the World Bank's Development Model." *Harvard International Law Journal* 52, No. 1 (2011): 287-319 (2011).

Krygier, Martin. "The Rule of Law and State Legitimacy." In *Legitimacy: The State and Beyond*, edited by Wojciech Sadurski, Michael Sevel, and Kevin Walton, 106-36. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Landry, Pierre. "The Institutional Diffusion of Courts in China: Evidence from Survey Data." In *Rule by Law : The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*, edited by Tom Ginsburg and Tamir Moustafa, 207-34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008.

Lee, Ching Kwan. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Lee, Sangkuk. "An Institutional Analysis of Xi Jinping's Centralization of Power." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26, No. 2 (2017): 325-336.

Liebman, Benjamin L. "China's Courts: Restricted Reform." *The China Quarterly*, no. 191 (2007): 620–38.

Liebman, Benjamin L. "Legal Reform: China's Law-Stability Paradox." *Daedalus* 143, No. 2 (2014): 96–109.

Liu, Sida. "Beyond Global Convergence: Conflicts of Legitimacy in a Chinese Lower Court." *Law & Social Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2006): 75–106.

Liu, Sida. *Shiluo de Chengbang: dangdai Zhongguo falü zhiye bianqian*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2008.

Lü, Xiaobo. "Social Policy and Regime Legitimacy: The Effects of Education Reform in China." *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 2 (2014): 423–37.

Lubman, Stanley. *Bird in A Cage: Legal Reform in China After Mao*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Mearns, Tracey L., Tom R. Tyler, and Jacob Gardener. "Lawful or Fair? How Cops and Laypeople Perceive Good Policing." *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 105, no. 2 (2015): 297–343.

Minzner, Carl F. "China's Turn Against Law." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 59, no. 4 (2011): 935–84.

Minzner, Carl. *End of an Era: How China's Authoritarian Revival is Undermining Its Rise*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Ng, Kwai Hang and Xin He. *Embedded Courts: Judicial Decision-making in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Ng, Kwai Hang. "Is China a "rule-by-law" regime?" *Buff. L. Rev.* 67, No. 3 (2019): 793-821.

Pakulski, Jan. "Legitimacy and Mass Compliance: Reflections on Max Weber and Soviet-Type Societies." *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (1986): 35–56.

Pils, Eva. *Human Rights in China: A Social Practice in the Shadows of Authoritarianism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.

Potter, Pitman B. "Riding the Tiger: Legitimacy and Legal Culture in Post-Mao China." *The China Quarterly* 138 (1994): 325–58.

Rigby, T.H. "Introduction: Political Legitimacy, Weber and Communist Mono-organisational Systems." In *Political Legitimation in Communist States*, edited by T.H. Rigby and Ferenc Fehér, 1-26. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982.

Rodrik, Dani. "Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion? A Review of the World Bank's Economic Growth in the 1990s." *Journal of Economic Literature* 44, No. 4 (2006): 973-987.

Rosenfeld, Michel. "The Rule of Law and the Legitimacy of Constitutional Democracy." *S. Cal. L. Rev.* 74, no. 5 (2001): 1307-52.

Schedler, Andreas. "The new institutionalism in the study of authoritarian regimes." *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 6, No. 2 (2009): 323-340.

Schmitt, Carl. *Verfassungslehre*. München, Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1928.

Simmons, A. John. "Justification and Legitimacy." *Ethics* 109, no. 4 (1999): 739–71.

Spencer, Martin E. "Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority." *The British Journal of Sociology* 21, no. 2 (1970): 123–34.

Stern, Rachel E. "The political logic of China's new environmental courts." *The*

- Stockmann, Daniela, and Mary E. Gallagher. "Remote Control: How the Media Sustain Authoritarian Rule in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 4 (April 2011): 436–67.
- Tai, Qiuqing. "China's Media Censorship: A Dynamic and Diversified Regime." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 185–210.
- Tamanaha, Brian Z. "Review of *The Lessons of Law-and-Development Studies*, by Anthony Carty, Sammy Adelman, and Abdul Paliwala." *The American Journal of International Law* 89, no. 2 (1995): 470–86.
- Tamanaha, Brian. *On the Rule of Law: History, Politics, Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Thompson, E.P. *Whigs and Hunters*. New York: Pantheon, 1975.
- Turner, Bryan S. "Nietzsche, Weber and the Devaluation of Politics: The Problem of State Legitimacy." *The Sociological Review* 30, no. 3 (August 1982): 367–91.
- Tyler, Tom R. "Can the police enhance their popular legitimacy through their conduct: using empirical research to inform law." *U. Ill. L. Rev.* No. 5 (2017): 1971-2008.
- Wagner, Ben. "Push-button-autocracy in Tunisia: Analysing the role of Internet infrastructure, institutions and international markets in creating a Tunisian censorship regime." *Telecommun. Policy* 36, No. 6 (2012): 484-492.
- Waldron, Jeremy. "The Rule of Law." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/rule-of-law/>.
- Wang, Alex L. "Symbolic Legitimacy and Chinese Environmental Reform." *Environmental Law* 48, no. 4 (2018): 699-760
- Wang, Yueduan. "'Detaching' Courts from Local Politics? Assessing the Judicial Centralization Reforms in China." *The China Quarterly* 246 (2021): 545–64.
- Wang, Yuhua. *Tying the Autocrat's Hands: The Rise of the Rule of Law in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Weatherford, M. Stephen. "Measuring Political Legitimacy." *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (1992): 149–66.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978.
- White, Stephen. "Economic Performance and Communist Legitimacy." *World Politics* 38, no. 3 (1986): 462-82.

Whiting, Susan H. "Authoritarian 'Rule of Law' and Regime Legitimacy." *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 14 (December 2017): 1907–40.

Xu, Chenggang. "The Fundamental Institutions of China's Reforms and Development." *Journal of Economic Literature* 49, no. 4 (2011): 1076–1151.

Zhang, Mo. "From Public to Private: The Newly Enacted Chinese Property Law and the Protection of Property Rights in China." *Berkeley Bus. L.J.* 5, No. 2 (2008): 317-59.

Zhang, Qianfan. "Judicial Reform in China, An Overview." In *China's Socialist Rule of Law Reforms under Xi Jinping*, edited by John Garrick and Yan Chang Barrett, 1-13. London: Routledge 2016.

Zhang, Taisu and Tom Ginsburg. "China's Turn Towards Law." *Virginia Journal of International Law* 59, No. 2 (2019): 306-89.

Zhang, Taisu. "The pragmatic court: reinterpreting the Supreme People's Court of China." *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* 25, No. 1 (2012): 1-61.

Zhang, Taisu. "The Development of Comparative Law in China." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Law (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, edited by Mathias Reimann and Reinhard Zimmermann, 228-51. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Zhu, Yuchao. "'Performance Legitimacy' and China's Political Adaptation Strategy." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16 (2011): 123–140.

*Online Appendix for*

# Does Legality Produce Political Legitimacy? An Experimental Approach

## **Table of Contents**

1. Balance Tables
2. Variable Definitions
3. Additional Experimental Results
4. Fact Patterns
  - 4.1 Street Vendors
  - 4.2 Fireworks Sales
  - 4.3 Web Series
  - 4.4 Forum Posting

# 1. Balance Tables

Table A1(a) Balance Table: By Treatment Arm

<i>Outcome Variable</i>	<i>Age</i> [18, 60]	<i>Female</i> (0 or 1)	<i>High School</i> (0 or 1)	<i>Junior College</i> (0 or 1)	<i>College or Above</i> (0 or 1)	<i>Income Category</i> [0, 9]	<i>Self-Reported Social Class</i> [0, 3]	<i>Political Knowledge</i> [0, 4]	<i>Ethnic Minority</i> (0 or 1)	<i>CCP Member</i> (0 or 1)	<i>Ideology: Legality</i>	<i>Ideology: Nationalism</i>	<i>Ideology: Liberalism</i>	<i>Ideology: Market Economy</i>	<i>Regime Support</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
Arm A (No Law)	37.59	0.49	0.10	0.24	0.17	3.87	1.30	2.45	0.04	0.13	-0.01	-0.06	0.00	0.07	0.01
Arm B (Opaque Law) -- Baseline	36.65	0.54	0.15	0.24	0.23	3.71	1.22	2.63	0.04	0.08	-0.02	0.03	-0.05	-0.01	-0.02
Arm C (Full Combination)	38.64	0.53	0.17	0.25	0.17	3.86	1.25	2.70	0.06	0.09	-0.05	0.02	-0.04	-0.14	0.06
Arm D (Case-Level Randomization)	37.23	0.50	0.13	0.24	0.22	3.72	1.27	2.65	0.03	0.10	0.02	0.00	0.03	0.03	-0.02
<i>F</i> test p-value	0.40	0.67	0.27	1.00	0.22	0.67	0.74	0.65	0.26	0.57	0.85	0.86	0.73	0.14	0.79
Observations	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,030	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040	1,040

*Note:* Ideology and regime support measures are normalized.

Table A1(b) Balance Table: By Treatment Condition

<i>Outcome Variable</i>	<i>Age</i> <i>[18, 60]</i>	<i>Female</i> <i>(0 or 1)</i>	<i>High School</i> <i>(0 or 1)</i>	<i>Junior College</i> <i>(0 or 1)</i>	<i>College or Above</i> <i>(0 or 1)</i>	<i>Income Category</i> <i>[0, 9]</i>	<i>Self-Reported Social Class</i> <i>[0, 3]</i>	<i>Political Knowledge</i> <i>[0, 4]</i>	<i>Ethnic Minority</i> <i>(0 or 1)</i>	<i>CCP Member</i> <i>(0 or 1)</i>	<i>Ideology: Legality</i>	<i>Ideology: Nationalism</i>	<i>Ideology: Liberalism</i>	<i>Ideology: Market Economy</i>	<i>Regime Support</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
Variation 0: no law, no publication, no training, no response	37.56	0.5	0.12	0.23	0.18	3.82	1.28	2.51	0.04	0.12	-0.01	0	0.04	0.05	0.01
Variation 1: written law, no publication, no training, no response	36.72	0.53	0.14	0.24	0.24	3.73	1.22	2.65	0.04	0.08	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.00	-0.02
Variation 2: written law, publication, no training, no response	37.04	0.50	0.16	0.25	0.20	3.83	1.34	2.62	0.02	0.08	-0.04	-0.05	0.02	0.11	-0.04
Variation 3: written law, no publication, training, no response	36.74	0.53	0.13	0.24	0.24	3.67	1.22	2.68	0.03	0.10	0.07	-0.04	0.05	0.11	0.03
Variation 4: written law, publication, training, no response	36.67	0.49	0.10	0.26	0.21	3.71	1.28	2.60	0.03	0.10	-0.02	0.04	0.02	-0.08	0.01
Variation 5: written law, no publication, no training, response	38.58	0.47	0.12	0.24	0.2	3.97	1.33	2.66	0.02	0.13	0.02	0.09	-0.08	0	-0.01
Variation 6: written law, publication, no training, response	36.80	0.46	0.14	0.24	0.23	3.79	1.27	2.58	0.01	0.11	0.04	-0.06	0.08	0.04	-0.07
Variation 7: written law, no publication, training, response	37.64	0.53	0.11	0.27	0.21	3.74	1.33	2.66	0.02	0.09	-0.01	-0.06	-0.02	0.03	0.00
Variation 8: written law, publication, training, response	38.33	0.52	0.16	0.25	0.17	3.73	1.23	2.70	0.06	0.09	-0.01	0.02	-0.03	-0.10	0.03
<i>F</i> test p-value (clustered)	0.56	0.57	0.44	0.99	0.54	0.87	0.44	0.98	0.00	0.53	0.97	0.77	0.83	0.24	0.98
Observations	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,120	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160	4,160

*Note:* Ideology and regime support measures are normalized.

## 2. Variable Coding

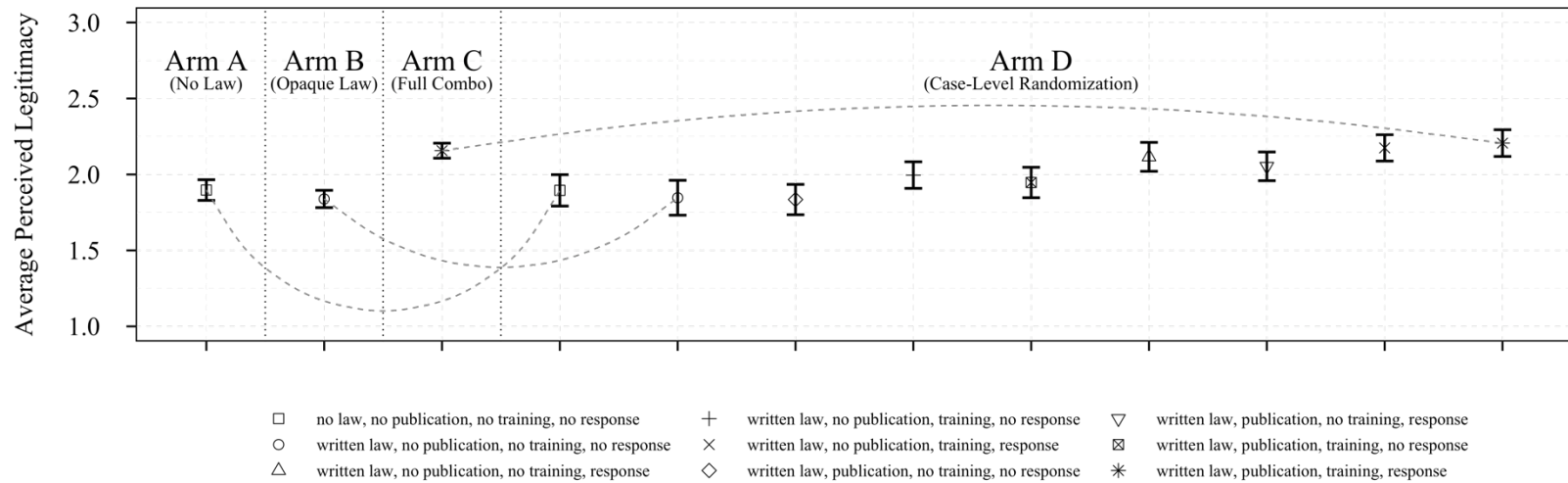
Table A2. Variable Definitions

Variable	Coding
Education	Highest level of education: <i>Primary education or less</i> = 0; <i>Middle School</i> = 1; <i>Vocational School</i> = 2; <i>High School</i> = 3; <i>Two-Year College</i> = 4; <i>Four-Year College</i> = 5; <i>Master's Degree</i> = 6; <i>Doctoral Degree</i> = 7
Income	Monthly income (CNY): <i>Below 1k</i> = 0; <i>1-2k</i> = 1; <i>2-3k</i> = 2; <i>3-5k</i> = 3; <i>5-8k</i> = 4; <i>8-12k</i> = 5; <i>12-20k</i> = 6; <i>20-50k</i> = 7; <i>50k or more</i> = 8
Self-Reported Social Class	Social class: <i>Bottom 25th percentile</i> = 0; <i>25th - 50th percentile</i> = 1; <i>50th - 75th percentile</i> = 2; <i>75th - 100th percentile</i> = 3
Political Knowledge	Multiple choice questions (correct answers in bold): 1) How many members are there on the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China? 5/7/9/15/Don't Know 2) Which of the following people does not sit on the Standing Committee of the 19th Politburo of the CPC? <b>Wang Qishan</b> /Han Zheng/Zhao Leji/Li Zhanshu/Don't Know 3) In the past five years, what is the average annual growth rate of China's real GDP? 2%/ <b>6%</b> /13%/20%/Don't Know 4) Which of the following countries is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council? U.S./China/Russia/ <b>Germany</b> /U.K./Don't Know 5) Which of the following is the current French Prime Minister? Chirac/Hollande/ <b>Macron</b> /Sakozy/Don't Know
Ideology: Legality	Likert Scale: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) 1) Doing the right thing sometimes means breaking the law. (reversed) 2) Lawyers should do their utmost to defend clients even if their client has committed a crime. 3) When laws fail to fully constrain criminal behavior, people have the right to impose their own punishments for these behaviors. (reversed) 4) One ought to be punished if they committed a crime, regardless of whether the evidence collection followed procedural rules. (reversed) 5) Courts should decide cases without regard to public opinion. (reversed)
Ideology: Nationalism	Likert Scale: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) 1) Force should be used to reunify Taiwan with China if conditions permit. 2) It is acceptable to besmirch the images of national leaders and founding leaders in literary and artistic works. (reversed) 3) China can unilaterally impose economic and trade sanctions against others countries, as long as the sanctions advance the national interest. 4) Chinese citizens should be allowed to hold foreign citizenship. (reversed) 5) The government ought to put as strong an emphasis on developing its military as it does on developing the economy.
Ideology: Liberalism	Likert Scale: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) 1) In the long term, multiparty systems are unsuitable for China. (reversed) 2) Elections ought not to be held in China today, because the people are not well educated enough. (reversed) 3) In times of emergency, the government ought to share as much information as possible with the public, even if the information may cause public panic. 4) The government ought not to prosecute those who criticize the government on the Internet as long as they are not smearing the government, even if their speech contains falsehoods. 5) The state ought not to interfere with the individual's decision to have a child, or how many children to have.
Ideology: Market Economy	Likert Scale: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) 1) State-owned enterprises should control all sectors crucial to national security and the people's livelihood. (reversed) 2) Private capital should be encouraged to set up private hospitals to provide convenient and high-quality services to those willing to pay high prices. 3) Private ownership and sale of land should be allowed. 4) People should be allowed to freely exchange domestic currency for foreign ones. 5) <del>The government should not regulate private monopolies that occur naturally.</del>
Regime Support	Likert Scale: (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) 1) Broadly speaking, I am proud of our political system. 2) In the long run, China's political system can solve the problems facing our country. 3) People should support our political system even if there are some problems. 4) Compared with our country's political system, I prefer to live under that of Western countries. (reversed)



### 3. Additional Experimental Results

Figure A1. Group Means by Treatment Conditions and Arms



**Note:** The dashed curves connect group means of the same treatment conditions (as defined in Table 3 of the main text) in different arms. From this figure, we see almost no signs of spillover effects from one treatment condition to another.

Table A3. Treatment Effects on Specific Support  
(w/o Interactions)

Outcome Variable:								
Legitimacy of Enforcement Action								
	Full Sample				Arm D: Case-Level Randomization			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Publication	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
Training	0.12*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.10*** (0.04)
Response	0.23*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.04)
No Law	0.05 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.05)	0.04 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)
Control variables		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Attention check filter			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
Observations	4160	4120	3348	3317	2080	2044	1678	1651
Clusters	1040	1030	1030	1020	520	511	517	508
Adjusted R-squared	0.03	0.09	0.04	0.09	0.03	0.09	0.04	0.08

**Note:** This table presents the average treatment effect of the four phases in government action: issuance of law, publication of law, training of enforcement officials, and response to affected citizens. The baseline is Variation 1 (law, no publicatin, no training, no response). Individual controls include *Age*, *Gender*, *Education*, *Income*, *Self-Reported Social Class*, *Political Knowledge*, *Ethnic Minority*, *CCP Membership*, and *Ideology*. Columns (1) to (4) use the full sample. Columns (5) to (8) subset to respondents in Arm D, who saw four fact patterns each individually randomized to be one of Variations 0-8. Robust standard errors clustered at the respondent level are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

Table A4. Treatment Effects on Specific Support (w/o Interactions): By Fact Pattern

<b>Outcome Variable:</b>																
Legitimacy of Enforcement Action																
	Fact Pattern 1: Street Vendors				Fact Pattern 2: Fireworks Sales				Fact Pattern 3: Web Series				Fact Pattern 4: Forum Posting			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
Publication	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.07)
Training	0.15** (0.06)	0.14** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)	0.18*** (0.06)	0.12* (0.06)	0.00 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.05)	0.18*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.06)	0.16** (0.07)	0.17** (0.07)
Response	0.31*** (0.06)	0.29*** (0.06)	0.30*** (0.06)	0.28*** (0.06)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.26*** (0.06)	0.30*** (0.06)	0.35*** (0.06)	0.18*** (0.06)	0.18*** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.06)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.20*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.06)	0.18*** (0.07)	0.19*** (0.07)
No Law	0.01 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.07)	0.01 (0.08)	0.01 (0.08)	0.07 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.11 (0.08)	0.09 (0.08)	0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.09)
Control variables		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Attention check filter			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
Observations	1,040	1,030	945	936	1,040	1,030	733	725	1,040	1,030	977	968	1,040	1,030	693	688
Clusters	1,040	1,030	945	936	1,040	1,030	733	725	1,040	1,030	977	968	1,040	1,030	693	688
Adjusted R-squared	0.05	0.10	0.05	0.09	0.03	0.09	0.06	0.09	0.01	0.11	0.01	0.11	0.03	0.09	0.03	0.09

*Note:* This table presents the average treatment effect of the four phases in government action: issuance of law, publication of law, training of enforcement officials, and response to affected citizens. The baseline is Variation 1 (law, no publication, no training, no response). Individual controls include *Age*, *Gender*, *Education*, *Income*, *Self-Reported Social Class*, *Political Knowledge*, *Ethnic Minority*, *CCP Membership*, and *Ideology*. Robust standard errors clustered at the respondent level are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

Table A5. Treatment Effects on Diffused Trust

	<b>Outcome Variable:</b>			
	Diffused Trust in the Fictional Regime			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Arm A: No Law	-0.08 (0.24)	-0.09 (0.21)	-0.08 (0.26)	-0.06 (0.24)
Arm C: Full Combination	0.71*** (0.19)	0.62*** (0.18)	0.67*** (0.22)	0.55*** (0.20)
Arm D: Case-Level Randomization	0.17 (0.18)	0.18 (0.17)	0.17 (0.21)	0.17 (0.19)
Control variables		Yes		Yes
Attention check filter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,040	1,030	873	866
Clusters	1,040	1,030	873	866
Adjusted R-squared	0.01	0.18	0.01	0.18

**Note:** This table presents the average treatment effect on diffused trust in the fictional regime. The baseline is Arm B (Opaque Law), where respondents saw four fact patterns all written in the style of Variation 1 (law, no publicatin, no trraining, no response). Individual controls include *Age*, *Gender*, *Education*, *Income*, *Self-Reported Social Class*, *Political Knowledge*, *Ethnic Minority*, *CCP Membership*, and *Ideology*. Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

Table A6. Heterogeneous Treatment Effects on Specific Trust

Outcome Variable:								
Legitimacy of Enforcement Action								
	Income		Education		Regime Support		Legality	
	Above Median	Below Median	College	No College	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Publication	-0.09*	0.03	-0.02	-0.03	-0.05	-0.01	-0.01	-0.04
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Training	0.05	0.17***	0.11*	0.12***	0.15***	0.08**	0.10**	0.13***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Response	0.21***	0.27***	0.24***	0.23***	0.31***	0.14***	0.29***	0.17***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
No Law	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.05	0.10	-0.01	0.07	0.02
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Observations	2,060	2,060	844	3,316	2,080	2,080	2,080	2,080
Clusters	515	515	211	829	520	520	520	520
Adjusted R-squar	0.01	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.02

**Note:** This table presents the average treatment effect of the four phases in government action: issuance of law, publication of law, training of enforcement officials, and response to affected citizens. "Regime support" and "legality" are attitudes measured pretreatment. The baseline is Variation 1 (law, no publicatin, no trraining, no response). Robust standard errors clustered at the respondent level are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

Table A7. Heterogeneous Treatment Effects on Diffused Trust

	Outcome Variable:							
	Diffused Trust in the Fictional Regime							
	Income		Education		Regime Support		Legality	
	Above Median	Below Median	College	No College	Above Median	Below Median	Above Median	Below Median
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	
Arm A: No Law	0.10 (0.31)	-0.25 (0.35)	-0.08 (0.51)	-0.10 (0.27)	0.10 (0.32)	-0.29 (0.33)	0.01 (0.33)	-0.20 (0.34)
Arm C: Full Combination	0.43 (0.27)	1.01*** (0.27)	0.63* (0.35)	0.70*** (0.23)	0.80*** (0.25)	0.44 (0.28)	0.79*** (0.28)	0.60** (0.27)
Arm D: Case-Level Randomization	0.04 (0.26)	0.34 (0.26)	-0.00 (0.31)	0.21 (0.22)	0.04 (0.24)	0.24 (0.26)	0.40 (0.26)	-0.09 (0.26)
Observations	515	515	211	829	520	520	520	520
Adjusted R-squared	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01

**Note:** This table presents the average treatment effect on diffused trust in the fictional regime. The baseline is Arm B (Opaque Law), where respondents saw four fact patterns all written in the style of Variation 1 (law, no publicatin, no trraining, no response). Individual controls include *Age*, *Gender*, *Education*, *Income*, *Self-Reported Social Class*, *Political Knowledge*, *Ethnic Minority*, *CCP Membership*, and *Ideology*. Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance markers: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1.

Table A8. Summary Statistics for the Supplementary Sample

Summary Statistics						
	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max	Min	
Age	294	34.61	9.96	58	18	
Female	294	0.46	0.50	1	0	
High School	294	0.23	0.42	1	0	
Junior College	294	0.22	0.42	1	0	
College or Above	294	0.36	0.48	1	0	
Income Category	290	4.27	1.95	8	0	
Self-Reported Social Class	294	1.23	0.71	3	0	
Political Knowledge	294	2.44	1.74	5	0	
Ethnic Minority	294	0.05	0.22	1	0	
CCP Member	294	0.15	0.35	1	0	
Ideology: Legality	294	0.00	1.00	2.40	-2.71	
Ideology: Nationalism	294	0.00	1.00	2.23	-3.42	
Ideology: Liberalism	294	0.00	1.00	3.21	-4.04	
Ideology: Market Economy	294	0.00	1.00	2.96	-2.62	
Regime Support	294	0.00	1.00	1.96	-3.92	

Table A9. Balance Table for the Supplementary Sample

Outcome Variable	Age	Female	High	Junior	College	Income	Self-	Political	Ethnic	CCP	Ideology:	Ideology:	Ideology:	Ideology:	Regime
	[18, 60]	(0 or 1)	School	College	or Above	Category	Reported	Knowledge	Minority	Member	Legality	Nationalism	Liberalism	Market	Support
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	[0, 3]	[0, 4]	(0 or 1)	(0 or 1)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
<b>No law, no response</b>	34.67	0.448	0.221	0.221	0.371	4.294	1.181	2.45	0.07	0.187	-0.034	0.016	0.015	-0.043	0.02
<b>Law, no response</b>	35.33	0.47	0.22	0.23	0.31	4.22	1.22	2.39	0.04	0.13	0.00	-0.03	-0.02	0.04	-0.15
<b>No law, response</b>	34.04	0.43	0.24	0.22	0.34	4.27	1.28	2.53	0.06	0.13	0.02	-0.05	-0.03	0.00	0.03
<b>Law, response</b>	34.38	0.50	0.26	0.22	0.41	4.29	1.25	2.39	0.04	0.14	0.02	0.06	0.04	0.01	0.10
<i>F</i> test p-value (clustered)	0.49	0.36	0.73	1.00	0.13	0.97	0.25	0.76	0.22	0.16	0.90	0.57	0.84	0.85	0.06
Observations	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176

Note: Ideology and regime support measures are normalized.

#### 4. Fact Patterns

##### 4.1. Street Vendors

W 国的路边摊造成了 W 国部分地区人行道拥堵。

Street vendors in Country W have caused congestion on sidewalks.

---

#### Law

---

Yes

No

2016 年，W 国政府制定了《关于合法摆放路边摊位的规定》，要求城市管理部门及时清理影响市容市貌的路边摊。

In 2016, the government of Country W drafted a set of regulations on street vendors, calling on its urban management department ("chengguan") to clean up vendors that cause congestion on sidewalks.

2016 年，W 国政府在内部会议上提出“清理路边摊贩，整顿市容市貌”的号召。

In 2016, the government of Country W put forth a call to "clean up street vendors and rectify the appearance of the city" during an internal meeting.

---

#### Transparency

---

Yes (with Law)

No (with Law)

No Law

《规定》不仅在政府内部流通，全文还向社会公众公开。

The regulations were both circulated internally and shared with the public.

《规定》仅在政府内部流通，未向社会公众公开。

However, the regulations were circulated only internally and never made public.

号召仅在政府内部宣传，未向社会公众公开。

The vow was circulated internally but never shared with the public.



W 国的城市管理部门多次组织“清理路边摊贩、整顿市容市貌”的研讨会，决定在特定时间、特定路段，集中对路边摊进行清理。

The urban management force ("chengguan") decided to launch a campaign to clear street vendors in specific locations and at specific times of the day. Chengguan held several internal discussions on the campaign and explored best practices.

---

## Training

---

Yes

No

此外，城市管理部门还多次组织了培训会，向执法人员逐一解释该规定的内容，对摆放时间、地点和方式等可能存在歧义、模糊的地方都逐一明确，并通过多个案例对执法标准予以详解。通过多次培训，执法人员均表示对执法标准有了清晰、统一的认识。

Furthermore, chengguan also organized several training sessions for its frontline officers, explaining to them each article of the regulations, clarifying possible ambiguities around the time and placement of stalls, and discussing case studies in detail. Through these trainings, frontline law enforcement officials gained a clear and consistent understanding of enforcement standards.

由于时间紧迫，城市管理部门并没有对一线执法人员就路边摊的摆放时间、地点、方式进行统一培训。

Given time constraints, chengguan did not organize training sessions for frontline officers on the time and placement of street-side stalls.

---

2017 年 6 月，王某在甲路上摆放了三年的煎饼果子路边摊被清理。

In June 2017, a roadside stall Mr. Wang has owned for three years was cleared.

---

## Responsiveness

---

Yes

No

---

王某进一步询问时，执法人员表示王某违反了《规定》第 3 条第 1 款“不得在城市拥堵路段摆放路边摊”的规定。

当王某进一步向有关部门询问路边摊被清理的具体原因时，有关部门未予回应

When Wang asked further questions, officials said that Wang had violated Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the regulations, which stipulated that street-side stalls may not be placed in congested areas in city.

When Wang asked further questions as to why his stall was cleared, he received no response from officials.

---

根据统计，2017 年 W 国城市管理部门共清理路边摊 1250 个，占路边摊总数的 10%。根据民生报社的调查，该年度居民认为路边摊给生活带来的幸福指数（包括食品的种类、价格、方便程度）为 70%。

Government statistics shows that officials in Country W cleared 150 street vendors, or 10% of the Country's total in 2017. According to a survey conducted by a local newspaper, residents of Country W rated street vendors 70 out of 100 on a satisfaction index, which captures the convenience and food variety street vendors bring.

## 4.2. Fireworks Sales

2016年，由于燃放烟花爆竹造成的财产损失和人身伤害事件数量逐年上升，W国的代表们在代表大会上要求严管烟花爆竹。

In 2016, as fireworks use resulted in increasing property damages and personal injuries, Country W's Representative Assembly declared a pressing need to strictly regulate fireworks in the city.

---

### Law

---

Yes

No

2017年，政府制定了《W国烟花爆竹安全管理规定》，划定了八个禁止燃放的区域，明确了对烟花爆竹生产、经销的限制。

In 2017, the government passed the "Country W Firework Safety Regulations Act," which banned fireworks in eight zones in the city and restricted firework production and sales.

2017年，政府明确了“逐步限制、趋于禁止”的总方针。

In 2017, the government decided on the general principle of "gradually restricting and tending to prohibit."

---

### Transparency

---

Yes (with Law)

No (with Law)

No Law

《规定》全文也在网上公开。

The full text of the Act was also made public online.

《管理规定》仅在政府内部公开。

This Act was only circulated only within the government.

方针仅在政府内部流通，未向社会公众公开。

The principle was circulated internally but never shared with the public.

---

此外，W国政府多次组织有关部门参加“烟花爆竹管理”的工作会议。

In addition, the government of Country W held multiple working discussions on "firework regulations" with relevant agencies.

有关部门认真学习《安全管理规定》，依据《规定》对

Relevant governmental agencies carefully studied the Act

有关部门认真学习会议精神，

Relevant governmental agencies carefully studied the principle of the meeting

每年春节烟花爆竹的销售进行集中整顿。

and enforced the regulations on fireworks sales every Lunar New Year.

---

## Training

---

Yes

No

---

有关部门还对基层执法人员进行了培训。针对生产、经营、运输和出口、燃放等重点环节，部门领导给出了具体的管理制度和标准，明确了各部门的职责。所有基层执法人员都参加了培训，并对管理的标准和执法的目标达成了统一的认知。

Relevant governmental agencies also trained their enforcement officers. Managers listed specific enforcement standards and rules to regulate the production, sales, transportation and exports, and usage of fireworks. All officers received training and formed a unified and consistent understanding of the regulatory standards and the goals of law enforcement.

受到时间限制，有关部门并没有对基层执法人员进行培训。基层执法人员没有就烟花爆竹的生产、经营、运输、出口、燃放等问题统一认识。

Given time constraints, relevant authorities did not organize training sessions for frontline officers, who, as a result, did not develop a consistent understanding of the production, sales, transportation, exports, and usage of fireworks.

---

2018年，李某开了四年的烟花爆竹商店在国庆节期间被关停。

In 2018, Mr. Li, a firework merchant, was forced to close his four-year-old store.

---

**Responsiveness**

---

Yes

No

---

当李某进一步询问他的店面为何违规时，工作人员表示他违反了《规定》中“禁止生产、经营无标签产品”的条例。

When Mr. Li inquired governmental agencies about his violation, officers explained that his store was closed due to the statute on the "prohibition of producing and selling unlabeled products" in the Act.

当李某进一步询问他的店面为何违规时，并未获得答复。

When Mr. Li inquired governmental agencies about his violation, he did not receive a response.

---

当年，W 国有关部门限制了 480 名烟花爆竹生产者和经销商的经营活动，占当地烟花爆竹市场的 10%。据统计，当地当年因烟花爆竹而遭受经济损失的人数为 4000 人，烟花爆竹相关的人身伤害事件减少了 300 个。

That year, Country W's relevant governmental agencies restricted or closed off the economic activities of 480 local firework producers or retailers, accounting for 10% of the city's entire firework industry. A total of 4000 residents suffered financial loss, and the number of firework-related incidents declined by 300.

4.3 Web Series

**Law**

Yes	No
<p>2016 年初，W 国电视节目管理部门出台了《关于进一步加强网络电视剧内容管理的规定》，明确了 20 条网络电视剧的审核标准。该文件，</p> <p>In 2016, Country W's media regulator issued a legal document titled "Further Regulations to Supervise Television Content", introducing 20 content moderation standards for online television series.</p>	<p>2016 年初，W 国电视节目管理部门向各大网剧播放平台传达了国家关于“净化网络环境、维护公共道德”的会议精神。会议</p> <p>In 2016, Country W's media regulator conveyed to all Internet platforms the spirit of the meeting the national department held on “purifying the online media environment and protecting social morality.”</p>
<p>要求各平台充分履行平台审核责任，鼓励传播积极向上、抵制传播有损公共道德的电视作品。</p> <p>The authorities asked all online media platforms to fulfill their duties of reviewing online television series, promoting positive values, and removing negative content that harms public morals.</p>	

**Transparency**

Yes (with Law)	No (with Law)	No Law
<p>《规定》全文向社会公开。</p> <p>The media regulator published the document in full on government portals.</p>	<p>各网剧平台都收到了《规定》的全文，但</p>	<p>会议精神仅在政府和网剧平台内部传播，电视管理部门未向社会大众展开宣传。</p>

---

《规定》的细节并未向社会公开。

The spirit of the meeting was promulgated internally but never shared with the public.

All Internet platforms received the document, but the regulator did not publicize its details.

---

不久后，C 网剧平台在公司内部多次组织“净化网络环境、维护公共道德”的研讨会，

Not long after, C, a streaming platform, held internal seminars on “purifying the online media environment and protecting public morals,”

要求员工认真学习《规定》细则，根据新标准来重新审核平台上的所有网剧。

asking its employees to strictly follow the standards set by the document when reviewing existing television series on the platform.

要求员工认真学习会议精神，增强道德意识，重新审核平台上的所有网剧。

asking its employees to study the spirit of the meeting, uphold moral values, and review existing television series on the platform.

---

## Training

---

Yes

No

---

在颁布《规定》的同时，W 国电视节目管理部门还组织了政策培训会，向各大网剧平台的工作人员细致讲解了修改后的审查标准。S 网剧平台的网剧审核员们参加了政策培训，并于同年通过了 W 国举办的影视剧审查资质考试。

After publishing the regulations, Country W's media regulator also held training sessions, explaining to employees at the online platforms

W 国电视节目管理部门没有就审核问题对各大网剧平台的工作人员进行培训，S 网剧平台的工作人员直接开始了审核工作。

Media regulators in Country W did not organize training sessions for employees at the country's various streaming

---

---

what each standard of the new regulation entailed. Content reviewers at Platform C all participated in the training and passed the national examination held that year on content moderation.

---

platforms. Employees at Platform C started reviewing content right away.

2017 年，原计划从韩国引进的热播网剧《危机时刻》被 C 网剧平台下架。

In 2017, *The Critical Point*, a popular online television series imported from South Korea, was removed from Platform C.

韩剧迷小张对此剧期待已久，看到平台公告后向 C 平台进一步询问该剧被下架的原因。

Mr. Zhang had been greatly looking forward to seeing *The Critical Point*. When he saw that the series was removed from Platform C, he asked the platform for an explanation.

---

### Responsiveness

---

Yes

No

---

C 平台回复小张，下架原因是《危机时刻》不符合《认定标准》关于“限制暴力、低俗内容总时长”的规定。

平台未予答复。

Platform C did not respond.

Platform C wrote to him that *The Critical Point* violated the regulation's statute on the total amount of screen time allowed for "violent and vulgar" content.

---

2017 年间，C 网剧平台禁止了 20 部网剧上架，占该年所有申请上架网剧总数的 10%。

根据多方市场调查，2017 年用户对网剧平台的视频满意度约为 80%。

That year, Platform C removed 20 television series in total, accounting for 10% of all television series on the platform. Several market research surveys show that 80% of users were satisfied with Platform C.



#### 4.4 Forum Posting

---

### Law

---

Yes

No

---

2016年，W国相关部门制定了《净化网络环境治理条例》，

In 2016, Country W's relevant government departments issued a legal document titled Regulations to "Clean Up" Cyberspace.

2016年，W国相关部门向各大互联网平台传达了国家关于“净化网络环境”的相关会议精神，

In 2016, Country W's relevant government departments conveyed to all Internet platforms in the country the spirit of the meetings the departments held on "cyberspace purification."

---

要求各平台充分履行审核责任，正确引导舆情，抵制负能量传播。

The authorities asked the platforms to fulfill their duties of moderating content, guiding public opinion, and removing negative content.

---

### Transparency

---

Yes (with Law)

No (with Law)

No Law

---

在与各大网络平台负责人的通气会上，W国有关部门领导分发了《条例》，

During a meeting Country W officials held with executives at the content platforms, officials distributed the regulations

---

随后在政府网站上公开了《条例》细则。	但没有公开发布《条例》细则。	会议精神仅在政府内部宣传，未在社会公开宣传。
and published the document in full on government portals.	but did not publicize details of the regulations.	The spirit of the meeting was promulgated internally but never shared with the public.

H 社交平台在拿到《条例》后立即在公司内部举办了“净化网络环境”的学习分享会，要求内容审核员按照《条例》的规定，对用户发表在平台的文章严格把关。

Upon receiving the regulations, social media platform H immediately held internal seminars on the clean-up campaign, asking its content moderators to strictly follow the standards set by the document when moderating user-generated posts on the platform.

H 社交平台高度响应国家会议精神，在公司内部举办了“净化网络环境”的学习分享会，要求内容审核员按照会议精神，对用户发表在平台的文章严格把关。

Social media platform H carefully studied the spirit of the meetings and immediately held internal seminars on the clean-up campaign, asking its content moderators to strictly follow the spirit of the meetings when moderating user-generated posts on the platform.

## Training

Yes

No

W 国有关部门还组织了培训会，向平台工作人员逐条讲解新颁布的《条例》。H 平台的内容审核员全部参加了培训，对删帖标准有较为清晰、统一认识，并通过了相关考试，获得了“网络监督员”证书。

Officials in Country W's relevant government departments also held training sessions, explaining to employees at the social media platforms what each article of the regulation entailed. Content moderators at Platform H all participated in the

W 国有关部门迫于时间压力，并没有对各平台工作人员就删帖标准进行培训。H 平台的内容审核员直接开始了工作。

Due to time constraints, relevant authorities in Country W did not organize training sessions for employees at various Internet companies regarding content moderation. Content moderators at Platform H started working right away.

---

training and developed a clear, consistent understanding of content moderation. They all passed the relevant tests and obtained certificates.

---

2017年，张某开始在H平台定期发表文章。同年9月3日，其发布的一篇文章先是登上了平台的当日收藏排行榜，后被删除。

In 2017, Mr. Zhang started posting articles on social media platform H on a regular basis. On September 3rd, one of Zhang's articles was removed after initially appearing on that day's "most favorited" list.

---

### Responsiveness

---

Yes

No

---

张某向平台进一步询问删帖原因，平台客服表示，张某文章的第二、第三自然段违反了《净化网络环境治理条例》第11条B例——“发帖必须遵守国家相关法律法规，不得传播任何虚假、辱骂、情色等非法信息。”

张某向平台进一步询问删帖原因，平台未作答复。

Zhang asked the platform for further explanation but received no response.

Zhang asked the platform for further explanation. A customer service representative at Platform H said that the second and third paragraphs of his article violated Article 11, Paragraph B of Country W's Regulations to "Clean Up" Cyberspace: "Posters must adhere to the relevant laws and regulations of the Country W and must not spread content that is false, derogatory, pornographic, or otherwise against the law.

---

当年，H平台共删除了用户文章1000万篇，占年度论坛帖子总量的5%，其中包括虚假、辱骂、情色等各类文章。

**That year, Platform H removed 10 million user-generated posts in total, accounting for 5% of all posts published on the platform. Many were labeled "false," "offensive," or "pornographic."**