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In Search of Self-Censorship

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Abstract
Item nonresponse rates across regime assessment questions and nonsensitive items are used to create a self-censorship index, which can be compared across countries, over time and across population sub-groups. For many authoritarian systems, citizens do not display higher rates of item nonresponse on regime assessment questions than their counterparts in democracies. This result suggests such questions may not be that sensitive in many places, which in turn raises doubts that authoritarian citizens are widely feigning positive attitudes towards regimes they secretly despise. Higher levels of self-censorship are found under regimes without electoral competition for the executive.