

Consultation and Selective Censorship in China

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Abstract



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Supplemental Material



Abstract

Conventional theories of authoritarianism view the need to suppress criticism as a key function of censorship. In a 2013 article, King, Pan, and Roberts challenged this wisdom by arguing that the paramount goal of censorship is defusing collective action, not silencing dissent. After accounting for collective action potential, they argue that criticism has no bearing on censorship. In this research note, we point out that a significant portion of sampled posts in King et al.'s analysis coincided with state-led consultation campaigns that were aimed at soliciting critical public input on policy proposals. This introduces the potential for bias by combining solicited and unsolicited criticism under the generic title of criticism. After reanalyzing King et al.'s aggregate data, studying Chinese censorship directives, and offering a statistically guided thought experiment, we conclude that a more conservative version of their original thesis is in order.