British Journal of Political Science

ARTICLE

In Search of Self-Censorship

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(Received 27 March 2019; revised 22 August 2019; accepted 11 November 2019; first published online 16 March 2020)

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 subgroups. 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.

Keywords: preference falsification; item nonresponse; authoritarian; China; self-censorship