

Rules for Thee but Not for Me: Selective Privacy Enforcement in Chinese Court Judgments

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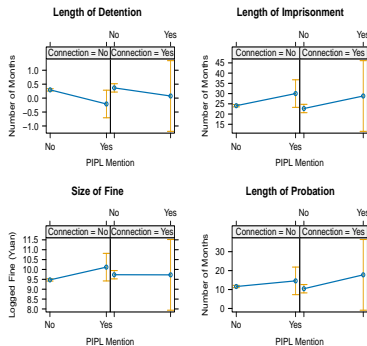
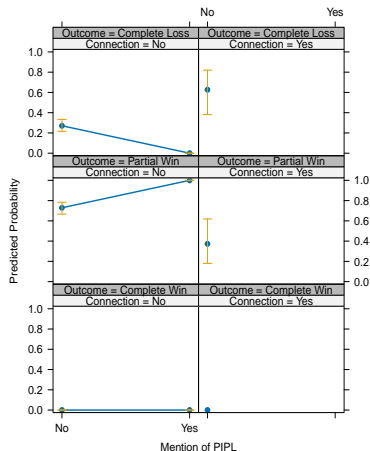
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- ▶ It has been a global trend to enact privacy laws to regulate data-related activities.
 - ◊ 79% of countries had enacted privacy protection laws as of July 2, 2025, according to UNCTAD.
 - The European Union's *2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*
 - The patchwork system of the United States characterized by various sector- and industry-specific federal privacy laws supplemented by state laws
 - China's *2021 Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL)*
- ▶ Question
 - ◊ Does China's privacy legislation facilitate privacy protection?
- ▶ Hypothesis
 - ◊ In authoritarian contexts, privacy legislation may protect citizens' privacy only when the violator is a private actor.

Methods

1. Data and coding: 6,370 privacy lawsuits (532 civil and 5,838 criminal) collected from the China Judgments Online website and coded by AI with human verification
2. Variables
 - ◇ Litigation outcome (civil): (1) complete win; (2) partial win; (3) complete loss
 - ◇ Litigation outcome (criminal): (1) public surveillance; (2) detention; (3) imprisonment; (4) fine; (5) probation
 - ◇ Defendent identity
 - ◇ PIPL mention: 1=mentioned; 0=not mentioned
 - ◇ Legal representation, age, gender, education
 - ◇ Amount of compensation claimed by plaintiffs (civil)
 - ◇ Scale of infringements: the total number of personal data compromised (criminal)
 - ◇ Criminal histotry: yes=1; no=0 (criminal)
3. Models
 - ◇ OLS and multinomial regressions with year and provincial fixed effects
 - ◇ Standard errors clustered at the provincial level

Findings



► No interactive effects were found in criminal cases.

► In conclusion, authoritarian privacy laws can play a positive role in privacy protection, but only when the private sector is involved, or when the case is criminal in nature.