ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Critical citizens and discontented citizens: Education, perceptions of fairness, and support for anti-COVID measures in China

Jinjin Liu [1] | **Yingzhu Pu**[2] | **Tony Huiquan Zhang** [2]

[1]Department of Policy Advisory, Shandong Academy of Governance, Jinan, China

[2]Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Macau, Macau SAR, China

Correspondence
Tony Huiquan Zhang, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Macau, Macau SAR 999078, China.
Email: huiquanzhang@um.edu.mo

Funding information
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Macau, Grant/Award Number: MYRG2022-00085-FSS

Abstract

How and why people support or disapprove of governmental responses to public crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is an important issue in public opinion research. Since 2020, China's strict anti-COVID policy has protected lives but faced resistance. Drawing on Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) 2021 data, we investigated the covariates associated with the support for the anti-COVID measures in China, arguing that "critical citizens" (measured by university-level education) and "discontented citizens" (measured by perceptions of fairness) were more likely to disapprove of the anti-pandemic measures, and political trust would moderate the association. The findings showed that less educated and more satisfied citizens supported the government measures no matter what, whereas educated and discontented citizens showed conditional support—only when they had high political trust. These findings suggest reasons for the backlash to China's zero-COVID policy and have broader implications for political trust and public opinion research.

KEYWORDS
China, COVID-19, critical citizens, perceptions of fairness, political trust, zero-COVID policy

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 had an unprecedented impact on the world and took millions of lives (Georgarakis, 2023). It triggered various responses from governments worldwide, and citizens reacted to these government measures differently (Altiparmakis et al., 2021). China's anti-pandemic measures were among the most radical: the country adopted lockdowns, mass surveillance, long quarantines and isolations, strict travel

restrictions, and border controls (Keng et al., 2023). During the first 2 years of the pandemic (2020–2021), these measures were effective and received mostly positive feedback. Chinese people overall demonstrated a high level of compliance and supported the government's efforts, at least for the first 2 years. In August 2021, China officially announced an elevated anti-pandemic plan: the zero-COVID policy. The central government demanded that all provincial and local governments strictly follow the protocols and clear all infections. At first, the zero-COVID policy was praised by the public for its effectiveness in curbing the spread of the virus.[1] However, domestic and international critics emerged and pointed to the policy's potential harm to economic activity, global travel and trade, the fiscal sustainability of the public health systems and local governments, and human rights. The highly contagious variants of SARS-CoV-2 virus such as Omicron weakened the effectiveness of anti-pandemic measures and therefore worsened the situation.

After more than a year of strict policy implementation, a wave of protests erupted and spread across China in late November 2022. The wave of protests caught the attention of both media and academia, with people wondering who and why individuals no longer supported the anti-pandemic policies. The same curiosity motivated us to perform the study reported here. Chinese people conventionally show high levels of political trust, policy support, and compliance (Zhai, 2022). Given this social reality, it is important to see who, when, and why some subgroups show distrust and disobedience (Li, 2016). To better understand the anti-COVID protests, we drew on the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) data gathered in the summer of 2021 (June–July). Since these data were collected in the middle of the pandemic, they reveal Chinese people's attitudes after experiencing the pandemic and anti-COVID measures for more than a year (December 2019 to June 2021). The CGSS 2021 dataset has another attractive feature: it collected data from Hubei Province, allegedly the source of the outbreak, where the earliest infections were reported in December 2019. Hubei was also the first province to be locked down, with a lockdown lasting more than 2 months in the spring of 2020 (Guardian, 2020).[2] These data therefore gave us a valuable opportunity to gauge Chinese people's attitudes to government policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We investigated the relationship between citizens' sociodemographic characteristics, political attitudes, and support for anti-COVID measures using multilevel modeling. Consistent with previous works, we found males, the elderly, urban residents, and members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) showed higher support for China's anti-COVID measures. Two groups showed less policy support: the university-educated and those who felt society was unfair. We labeled the former "critical citizens" and the latter "discontented citizens." Unlike the unconditional supporters of the regime, critical citizens and discontented citizens gave the government conditional support: if their political trust was high, their policy support was high; otherwise, they did not support it. The less educated and those who felt society was fair supported the anti-COVID measures. In other words, political trust was a moderator in the association. We conducted several robustness checks of our findings by excluding possible outliers and using propensity score matching to assure us of the validity of our findings.

The findings shed light on the changes in Chinese people's compliance with the anti-pandemic policies. During 2020 and early 2021, the effectiveness of anti-COVID measures won wide support; only some educated groups such as scholars, journalists, lawyers, and intellectuals criticized them, citing human rights concerns and legal consequences. Their criticisms

---

[1]Paul Haenle, "China's Zero COVID Policy Is a Double-Edged Sword". Web link via: https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2022/12/chinas-zero-covid-policy-is-a-double-edged-sword?lang=en.

[2]See reports by the Guardian, web link via: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/07/liberation-as-wuhans-coronavirus-lockdown-ends-after-76-days.

were primarily ideological, not motivated by material causes. Yet when the anti-pandemic policies entered their third year—especially after the Shanghai lockdown—more people felt the negative impact of the measures in their lives, including a drop in income and inconvenience during travel, work, and life. This sentiment was boosted by perceptions of inequality during the pandemic: while most Chinese had economic losses (e.g., pay cuts, layoffs, business shutdowns, and bankruptcies), some resourceful businesspersons and powerholders benefited from the anti-pandemic sectors, including those manufacturing and distributing face masks, vaccines, nucleic acid test kits, medicine, and groceries. Under such circumstances, critical citizens and an increasing number of discontented citizens disliked the anti-pandemic policies, triggering the 2022 protests.

This study contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it seems that even among the most supportive and compliant populations, policy support can be conditional. Information, education, media, and freedom of expression can all foster citizens who use critical thinking to question policies (Zhang et al., 2021). As education expands and more people have access to the Internet, the number of people with a critical mindset continues to grow, posing a challenge for the regime. Second, reinforcing social equity and fairness could be a critical target for governments hoping to gain wide popular support. The perception of unfairness can hurt political trust and policy support—even among the most conventionally supportive and compliant populations. Third, the results partially answer the puzzle of "authoritarian resilience" in China studies. Arguably, when there are not enough critical citizens, and most people benefit from economic growth, the regime will enjoy a high level of legitimacy and support. Yet when growth slows and inequality intensifies, support may weaken. Governments need to do a better job in redistribution and the provision of social welfare to maintain political trust.

WHO DISAPPROVES OF POLICIES? CRITICAL CITIZENS AND DISCONTENTED CITIZENS

To explain public attitudes towards government policies in China during the pandemic, it is essential to first review the literature on political trust and policy compliance. Political trust, sometimes termed institutional trust or confidence in institutions, refers to citizens' confidence in and support for their government and its institutions (Jiang & Zhang, 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Zhong & Zhan, 2021). Political trust serves as a crucial foundation for quality governance and regime stability, significantly influencing how citizens interact with their government (Garritzmann et al., 2023; Lalot et al., 2023; Zhai, 2022). Political trust represents a more stable and longer-term mindset than policy compliance, as it measures overall confidence in the regime, including its legitimacy and its policies (Zhai, 2022; Zhong & Zhan, 2021). Policy compliance is a more specific and shorter-term phenomenon, mainly targeting how individuals respond to certain government policies and practices (Andersen & Curtis, 2015; Guntermann & Persson, 2023; Keng et al., 2023; Zhai, 2022), such as how American citizens feel about Obama care, or how Chinese people feel about the one-child policy.

Political trust and policy compliance are closely related. People who have high political trust usually tend to comply with state policies and vice versa. A large body of research has noted that political trust affects everyday compliance with law enforcement and policy implementation (Wang & You, 2016; Zhong & Zhan, 2021). For instance, the public administration literature has shown that low political trust can increase the costs of governance, taxation, and social control (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Jiang & Zhang, 2021; Zhai, 2022). Furthermore, in societies where trust in institutions is low, individuals are more likely to disobey police directives or show reluctance to assist law enforcement (Zhong & Zhan, 2021). This relationship suggests trust is more than a passive sentiment—it is an active driver of civic behavior, influencing how communities respond to government authority, especially during crises.

Since political trust and policy compliance are related, they share a number of covariates. Certain demographic variables, such as being older, male, married, and having higher socioeconomic status, are related to more conservative attitudes and greater support for government rules and policies, arguably due to increased life experience, economic stability, and perceived benefits from the system (Altiparmakis et al., 2021). In contrast, being younger, female, or a minority is related to lower levels of trust, driven by different life experiences and socioeconomic challenges (Jiang & Zhang, 2021). Socioeconomic factors, such as occupation, employment status, and social class, are also important (Flavin & Keane, 2012). For example, lower classes usually lean towards redistributive policies, while upper classes tend to be more conservative in taxation and welfare policies (Garritzmann et al., 2023). Social class can also be conditioned by macro- and mesosocial contexts, such as the level of social inequality (Andersen & Curtis, 2015).

Ideological factors can affect political trust and policy support as well, such as religiosity, including religious affiliation and religious commitment (Pan & Xu, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019); media usage, including source of information, habit of media consumption, and frequency of consumption (Fang & Repnikova, 2018); and education-related factors, such as level of education, major and field of study, and so on (Jiang & Zhang, 2021). In our study, we explored the roles played by education and perception of fairness in society, examining their association with Chinese people's policy compliance. Education is a critical factor in shaping one's political attitudes and nurturing a mindset of critical thinking; perception of fairness in society is relevant as it reflects one's social situation and their overall satisfaction with the government, especially its policies. Therefore, they may be relevant in shaping policy compliance. Furthermore, we asked whether political trust might moderate this association and if so, why.

Education

Education is one of the most important contributors to a person's political beliefs and attitudes (Han, 2022; Sandset & Villadsen, 2023). For most people, education is part of their early socialization and is a main source of gaining scientific knowledge, training in thinking, and learning social norms (Kim, 2023). Education may shape political attitudes and policy support in several ways. It may increase support for certain policies, especially those requiring a progressive, liberal mindset or issues that need scientific knowledge to process. In this scenario, education equips people with knowledge and facts, prepares them to embrace possibilities and diversities, and suppresses ignorance and bigotry. For example, understanding the efficacy and risks of vaccines could prevent people from irrational fear of vaccinations and increase willingness to be vaccinated (Jolley & Douglas, 2014). At the same time, education can discourage policy support by enabling critical thinking, which is essential to the formation of opinions and judgment in modern critical citizens (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhong & Zhan, 2021). Well-educated individuals are more willing to question authority, including but not limited to political, religious, and cultural authority.

Education is an empowering process. Educated individuals are likely to have higher social status and to amass more economic and cultural capital; therefore, they may be more vocal. Education's role in empowering people to be critical and vocal has been studied under the critical citizen thesis (Norris, 1999; Wang, 2005). Numerous studies in a range of countries have found educated people are more critical of governments and authorities (Jiang & Zhang, 2021). They are more active in political expression both offline (e.g., protests, voting, political campaigns) and online (e.g., political debates, online petitions).

Better-educated individuals tend to have higher expectations of governments and officials. They expect more transparency, accountability, and responsiveness from public employees (Jiang & Zhang, 2021). If governments and officials fail them through misconduct

or corruption, they are likely to be more judgmental (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). In addition, the well-educated often scrutinize government performance from an ideological point of view, not a material one (Wang & You, 2016). For instance, during the anti-COVID campaign in China, it was mainly the intellectuals and scholars who criticized the government for violating human rights, property rights, and privacy.[3] Meanwhile, most Chinese people paid little attention to these issues; they were more worried about material interests and practical challenges (e.g., loss of income, failure to show up at work) than ideological issues such as human rights violations. The above discussion suggests education helps to shape individuals' attitudes towards governments and their practices. This leads to our first hypothesis:

> **H1.** (Critical citizen thesis) Highly educated persons will show less support for the government's anti-COVID measures.

Perception of fairness

Perception of fairness is usually defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of or judgment on the impartiality, equitability, and justness of a particular situation, process, decision, or distribution of resources (Bobzien, 2023). A closely related notion is the feeling of relative deprivation, whereby people feel their legitimate interests are unfairly taken away either by the upper class or by the government and other power-holders (Bobzien, 2023). A general feeling of unfairness or relative deprivation is detrimental to the harmony and order of any society (Power, 2018) and can lead to social unrest, including surging crime, waves of protests, or even rebellions and revolutions (Davies, 1974). Feelings of unfairness can also hurt people's daily support of local governments and officials at the micro-level (Ravenelle et al., 2023). For example, African American communities' disobedience of law enforcement has been a social problem for the United States (Pryce & Chenane, 2021).

In China, people care about social inequality, and their sense of social fairness may affect their loyalty and obedience to the government. This tradition can be traced to early philosophers, such as Confucius and Mencius. As Confucius said in his Analects, the primary problem for a society is "not scarcity but inequality, not poverty but instability." Under the Confucian tradition's influences, the majority in Chinese society resents inequality. In contemporary China, Maoism further added the weight of egalitarianism. Deng's market reforms initiated an economic miracle—40 years of high-speed growth—and most Chinese have a better standard of living as a result. However, one side effect is the surging inequality, which started to weaken the basis of regime support and social stability (Hou, 2020). In the past decade, more Chinese, especially youth, have expressed the feeling that China's wealth distribution is unfair (Wu, 2009), and some of them turned to orthodox Maoism as a result (Zhao, 2016).

The rising awareness of social inequality and unfairness has weakened people's support for and compliance with government policies. The COVID pandemic exacerbated this discontent. As discussed, many lost their jobs or suffered financial burdens because of the strict anti-COVID measures. Yet powerholders benefited from the measures. The beneficiaries included those who could issue passes for vehicles,[4] allocate anti-pandemic supplies, distribute medi-

---

[3]China's lockdown protests: What you need to know. https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/28/china/china-lockdown-protests-covid-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html.

[4]During the anti-pandemic campaign, many cities, communities, neighborhoods, and enterprises restricted their entrances and exits. However, vehicles for public interests (e.g., police cars, fire engines) or other authorized cars could still move freely. Issuing passes for vehicles became an opportunity for rent-seeking.

cines and vaccines, or run nucleic acid test centers. Not surprisingly, those who suffered the most from the measures began to feel unfairly deprived compared to those in charge of the anti-COVID measures. Based on this line of thinking, we argue that people who perceive themselves as deprived are less likely to support government anti-COVID initiatives, leading to our second hypothesis:

> **H2.** (Discontented citizen thesis) Citizens who feel relatively deprived will show lower support for the government's anti-COVID measures.

Political trust as a moderator

Political trust influences individuals' attitudes towards government and their support for government policies (Bobzien, 2023). Those with a high level of confidence in their governments and political systems in general may be more likely to support a specific agenda or certain policies (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Inkpen et al., 2023). Those who lack confidence may be less likely to comply (Cena & Roccato, 2023; Easton, 1975). One example is the draft resistance among African American communities during the Vietnam War (Gartner & Segura, 2000). Another is the widespread distrust between African American communities and the police in the United States (Pryce & Chenane, 2021; Wu & Cao, 2018). East Asians are repeatedly found to have higher respect for authorities (Wang, 2016), arguably attributable to the Confucian legacy (Jennings, 1997). Overall, Chinese people show exceptionally high political trust in central leadership (Keng et al., 2023), but not all Chinese have the same level of political trust (Zhang et al., 2019). A gap between those with high political trust and those with low trust is likely to appear in attitudes towards government policies.

Moreover, the variation between those who do and do not trust the government may moderate the effects of other mechanisms, such as education and feelings of fairness discussed in previous sections. We argue that for those people who unconditionally support all government policies—hypothesized as less educated and less satisfied individuals—political trust is less relevant. They will support government measures even with a low level of political trust. In contrast, policy support among critical citizens and discontented citizens is conditional. They will support anti-COVID measures if they trust the government. Therefore, we hypothesize:

> **H3.** Political trust in governments will be related to support for anti-COVID measures.

> **H3a.** The association between political trust and support for anti-COVID measures will be stronger among university-educated individuals and weaker among those with less education.

> **H3b.** The association between deprivation and support for anti-COVID measures will be stronger for those with higher feelings of relative deprivation and weaker for those with lower feelings of relative deprivation.

METHOD

Data: Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS 2021)

We selected the CGSS as the primary data source as it contains information about citizens' sociodemographic characteristics, political attitudes, and support for anti-COVID measures.

The CGSS project was jointly launched by Renmin University of China (RUC) and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). It represents one of the earliest and longest-lasting nationally representative social surveys in mainland China and is considered the Chinese counterpart of the General Social Survey (GSS) in the United States. The CGSS team initiated the first nationwide survey in 2003; so far, the CGSS project has collected 12 waves of surveys data[5] in 31 provincial-level divisions.[6] The CGSS project employs a stratified multi-stage PPS sampling design to ensure a probability sample representative of the national population.

The CGSS 2021 data are publicly accessible[7] to researchers. The CGSS 2021 survey took place in 19 provinces in China. This number was lower than previous years, largely due to the impact of COVID-19 and corresponding anti-pandemic measures (e.g., travel restrictions limiting the ability of survey teams to enter the field). CGSS 2021 sampled 8148 persons; the sample sizes in the dataset range from 100 in smaller territories to 800 in more populous regions. Missing information is not a serious concern. More than 96.8% of respondents give valid responses on the variables of interest. Variables like age, gender, education, location of residence, health status, and CCP membership are complete. Missing data represent less than 3.2%, and cases are evenly distributed across provinces. The missing not-at-random (MNAR) problem is not a concern. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of all the individual-level variables.

Dependent variable: Support for anti-COVID measures

Our outcome variable was people's overall support for anti-COVID measures. Previous studies measuring support for government measures and policies have used behavioral and attitudinal indicators (Guntermann & Persson, 2023; Krosnick, 1988). For the former, scholars have found compliance or cooperation with government officials or law enforcement can determine how much a new policy or practice is supported (Dai et al., 2011). For the latter, researchers often use survey items asking whether a respondent approves of a certain policy or practice, usually measured on a Likert scale. Importantly for our purposes, the CGSS uses 4-level Likert scales to measure dimensions of agreement with antipandemic policies and measures.

The CGSS 2021 data include a series of questions, asking respondents: "Do you think our government has the authority to do the following things during a serious epidemic?" Possible responses include: (1) shutting down a workplace; (2) asking people to stay at home; (3) tracking infected patients with mobile devices; (4) implementing face mask order; (5) banning public gatherings; (6) quarantining infected people; (7) shutting down schools; and (8) locking down national borders. Respondents select from four levels of agreement, descending from highest to lowest support: 4 = "They definitely have the power to do so"; 3 = "They may have the power to do so"; 2 = "They probably cannot do so"; 1 = "Of course they cannot do so".

We applied confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the relationships between the unobserved latent variables and measured indicators (Brown, 2015) to test the substantive hypotheses. The factor loadings are shown in Table 2. In the table, all items demonstrate substantial factor loadings on the single factor (MR1), ranging from .49 to .67, indicating each item is

---

[5]The 12 waves of publicly accessible data are CGSS 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2021.
[6]In China, provincial-level administrative divisions refer to provinces, ethnic autonomous regions, and directly controlled municipalities. The CGSS project does not include Taiwan, Macau SAR, and Hong Kong SAR in its sampling frame.
[7]The official website of CGSS project: http://cgss.ruc.edu.cn/english/home.htm.

TABLE 1   Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Summary
Gender	
Female	4469 (54.85%)
Male	3679 (45.15%)
Age (18–103)	34.64 (17.57)
Higher education	
High school or lower	6957 (85.38%)
University or higher	1191 (14.62%)
Higher education (broadly defined)	
High school or lower	6477 (79.49%)
University or higher	1671 (20.51%)
Higher education (strictly defined)	
High school or lower	7293 (89.51%)
University or higher	855 (10.49%)
Location of residence	
Rural	3574 (43.86%)
Urban	4574 (56.14%)
CCP membership status	
Not a CCP member	7182 (88.14%)
CCP member	966 (11.86%)
Self-rated health (worst = 1 to best = 5)	3.48 (1.09)
Perception of fairness (very unfair = 1 to very fair = 5)	3.46 (.97)
Political trust (none = 1 to most = 5)	4.47 (.78)
Support for anti-COVID measures (1–4 scale)	3.92 (.22)
Complete obs.	7891 (96.8%)
Imputed complete obs.	8148 (100%)

Note: Frequencies and percentages for categorical variables; mean and *SD* for continuous ones.

significantly associated with the underlying factor. All items show a complexity value of 1, indicating they load onto only one factor, thus supporting the one-dimensionality of the dependent variable.

We assessed the overall fit of the factor model using various indices. The root mean square of the residuals (RMSR) was .06, and the degree-of-freedom corrected RMSR was .07, both of which are within the acceptable range, suggesting a good fit. The Tucker Lewis Index of factoring reliability was .864, and the RMSEA index was .096, with a 90% confidence interval of .092 to .10, indicating that the model fit the data well. The measures of factor score adequacy showed a high correlation (.90), a multiple *R* square of .81, and a minimum correlation of factor scores of .62, indicating the factor scores were reliable and valid. Further details about our confirmatory factor analysis are in Table 2.

Since the eight items are high internal reliability and consistency, we constructed a 1–4 scale based on the row average of all eight items, and most respondents in China reported a high average above 3.7. This serves as a continuous variable ranging from 1 to 4. Other than using this constructed continuous measure, we also tried alternative models by converting the average into dummy variables using different cutoff points, such as "above average" = 1 versus "below average" = 1. Considering most Chinese people gave straight "yes" to all items, we treat

TABLE 2   Factor loadings of items composing the dependent variable.

Variables in CGSS	Question wording: When the risk of COVID-19 is high, do you agree that governments are authorized to take the following anti-pandemic measures?	Factor loading (MR1)	Communality (h2)	Uniqueness (u2)
D27a	Shutting down workplaces	.57	.33	.67
D27b	Implementing lockdown	.64	.41	.59
D27c	Tracking mobile devices	.56	.31	.69
D27d	Implementing face-mask order	.67	.45	.55
D27e	Restricting gathering	.64	.40	.60
D29a	Isolating infected individuals	.52	.27	.73
D29b	Shutting down K-12 schools and kindergartens	.55	.31	.69
D29c	Restricting entrance to China	.49	.24	.76

them as 1, and those who dare to give a "no" to any single item as 0. These alternative coding schemes of dependent variables do not alter the reported pattern in the present paper.

Independent variables

For our independent variables, we focused on two predictors of support for policy: education and perception of fairness. Education was operationalized as a binary variable according to whether a person attends university or receives higher education. In our later robustness checks (see section "Robustness checks"), we measured higher education in alternative ways to ensure our findings for education were robust to different cutoff thresholds. Although there are multiple dimensions of fairness, in people's real lives, considering fairness based on a certain decision cannot fully explain behavior (You, 2012). What drives behavior is the overall perception of fairness, so this was our focus. The survey asks: "In general, do you think the social fairness today is unfair?" Responses are marked on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = "completely unfair" to 5 = "completely fair", with higher values representing a positive evaluation of the societal level of fairness. In addition to these key predictors, we controlled a few important features of respondents that are previously found relevant to political trust (Jiang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022), including gender (0 = female, 1 = male), age (in years, ranging from 18 to 103), residence (0 = rural, 1 = urban), CCP membership status (0 = non-member, 1 = CCP member), self-rated health conditions (a 1–5 scale, worst = 1 to best = 5), and political trust (a 1–5 scale, lowest trust = 1, highest trust = 5).

Model specifications

We employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to estimate the support for anti-COVID measures. HLM is a robust and flexible method that can address the issue of data clustering and examine the nested structure of the data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In our study, respondents were Level 1 observations nested within provinces, which served as Level 2 observations. This approach allowed us to account for structural inequalities between provinces and estimate individual variations within provinces. At the individual level, all models controlled for gender, age, CCP membership, location of residence and personal health condition. The focal predictors were education, perception of fairness, and confidence in government

practice. We started with a baseline model containing the main effects of our variables. This baseline model tested Hypotheses 1 and 2, the critical citizen theory and the discontented citizen theory, respectively. Model 2 added the perception of fairness and political trust interaction to test Hypothesis H3a. Model 3 added education status and political trust interaction to test Hypothesis H3b. Finally, we included both interaction terms in Model 4. The models can be summarized as follows:

- Model 1: Baseline model (with main effects of all predictors) to test H1/H2.
- Model 2: Model 1 plus the perception of fairness * political trust interaction effects to test H2.
- Model 3: Model 1 plus the university-educated * political trust interaction effects to test H3.
- Model 4: Previous model plus perception of fairness * political trust and university-educated * political trust.

Robustness checks

To ensure the robustness and validity of our findings, we conducted an additional series of analyses as robustness checks. First, we considered different samples by excluding extreme cases. As Hubei was the place reporting the initial outbreak of COVID-19 and also the first province to be fully shut down, we conducted an analysis excluding respondents from Hubei Province (596 cases) in Model 4a. The rationale for this exclusion was to ensure the extreme experience of Hubei respondents did not alter the pattern elsewhere. Second, we fitted two models with one key predictor, university education. In Model 4b, we adopted a strict definition of "university education," excluding graduates from technical and vocational school programs (*daxue zhuanke*). In Model 4c, we employed a broadly defined categorization of "university education," including degree holders from continuing education (*jixu jiaoyu*) or further education programs.[8] Using the three different coding strategies (original models, Models 4b and 4c), we explored the potential variations caused by the different cut-off points in measuring education. We also tested the results after handling missing values using multiple imputation in Model 4d.

Finally, we used the propensity score matching (PSM) method to deal with a potential selection bias related to the variable of education. Selection bias is a valid concern, as education is an achieved status, not an ascribed one. Individuals who complete their university/college degrees may differ from those who fail to do so, and the differences could come from family backgrounds, parental socioeconomic status, biological attributions, behavioral dispositions, exposure to various environmental factors such as neighborhoods, schools, and peers, and so on. To ensure we were analyzing comparable populations, we adopted the nearest neighbor algorithm in PSM (Austin, 2014). This allowed us to control for potential confounding factors that may not have been completely balanced during the matching process, thereby providing a more precise estimate of the treatment effect. By employing this approach, we could draw conclusions with greater confidence that the observed effects could be attributed to the treatment variable rather than other unobserved factors.

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution of data using PSM, comparing a treatment group of university-educated individuals to a control group with high school education or less. Of the 8148 respondents, only 1191 report a university/college degree. We used PSM

---

[8]In China, these programs are called "chengren jiaoyu" (Adult Education), "chengren zikao" (Self-Taught Higher Education), or "jixu jiaoyu" (continuing education) programs. Though the quality of education provided in these programs is on average lower than what regular undergraduate programs can offer, the degrees granted are theoretically "equivalent" with bachelor's degrees.

TABLE 3 Frequency distribution tables of matched data based on propensity score matching (percentage/standard errors in parentheses).

Matched sample	Control group (high school or less education)	Treatment group (university educated)	*p*-Value
N	1191	1191	
Age (mean/*SD*)	37.46 (15.77)	37.08 (16.32)	.564
Male (female = 0)	627 (52.6)	589 (49.5)	.129
CCP = 1 (%)	234 (19.6)	352 (29.6)	.001
Urban (rural = 0)	1038 (87.2)	1022 (85.8)	.369
Health (mean (*SD*))	3.94 (.87)	3.92 (.84)	.668

methods to select the most comparable individuals ($N = 1191$) from the remaining 6957 cases, yielding a subsample of 2382 respondents. As Table 3 shows, the two matched samples are similar in age, gender, location of residence and health condition; the only difference is CCP membership. After matching, we fitted the regression models on the matched sample; the results are reported in Table 5, Model 4e. We discuss the robustness of our analysis in the Results.

RESULTS

Our main findings from the multilevel models are displayed in Table 4. Model 1 examines the main effects of education, perception of fairness, and political trust. The intercept shows the baseline level is 3.67 on the 1–4 scale of support for anti-COVID measures. Regression analysis reveals that highly educated people are .02 points less supportive of pandemic-related policies ($b = -.02$, $p < .01$) as predicted by the critical citizen thesis (H1). People with a high sense of subjective fairness are more supportive of the government's policy ($b = .01$, $p < .01$), as predicted by the discontented citizen thesis (H2). Similarly, people with a high level of political trust are more supportive of the government's policy ($b = .04$, $p < .001$). Findings from the control variables are consistent with previous work; males are slightly more supportive of anti-COVID policies than females ($b = .01$, $p < .01$); city residents and CCP members are more supportive than rural residents and non-CCP members. Model 2 adds the interaction term between perception of fairness and political trust to Model 1. The interaction is significant ($b = -.01$, $p < .01$), indicating that in a context characterized by low levels of political trust, there is a positive relationship between a lower sense of relative deprivation and a higher level of support for anti-COVID measures. Model 3 adds the interaction effect between university education and political trust to Model 1. The interaction terms are significant ($b = .03$, $p < .01$).

Model 4 displays the result when both interaction terms are included and is the best fitting model based on the comparison of the information criteria statistics (AICs, BICs, log-likelihoods). The interaction between political trust and perception of fairness is estimated at −.01 ($p < .01$). When the respondent has a high sense of fairness, the marginal effect of political trust is weaker; in other words, policy support is less dependent on the level of political trust. When the respondent has a high sense of unfairness, policy support is strongly associated with political trust, indicating a conditional support pattern. Figure 1 visualizes this pattern in a more intuitive way. The interaction between political trust and education is noteworthy, at .03 ($p < .01$). Although education's main effect is negative, this positive interaction term illustrates a compensating effect of high political trust: for a university graduate with the lowest level of political trust, education's total effect on policy support is −.14; for a university graduate with the highest level of political trust, education's overall influence on policy support can reach

TABLE 4 Multilevel models predicting standard deviations from support for anti-COVID measures.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	No interactions	**Interaction of fairness**	**Interaction of education**	**Both interactions**
(Intercept)	3.67***	3.55***	3.68***	3.56***
	(.02)	(.05)	(.02)	(.05)
Individual-level predictors				
Male (female = 0)	.01**	.01**	.01**	.02**
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Age, in years	.88***	.89***	.87**	.88***
	(.27)	(.27)	(.27)	(.27)
Age, squared term	−1.34***	−1.35***	−1.36***	−1.36***
	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)
Urban (rural = 0)	.02***	.02***	.02***	.02***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Health	.00	.00	.00	.00
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
CCP (non-member = 0)	.02*	.02	.02	.02
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Education (high school or less = 0)	−.02**	−.02**	−.17***	−.17***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.05)	(.05)
Perception of fairness (1–5 scale)	.01**	.04**	.01**	.05***
	(.00)	(.01)	(.00)	(.01)
Political trust (1–5 scale)	.04***	.07***	.04***	.07***
	(.00)	(.01)	(.00)	(.01)
Interaction terms				
Perception of fairness * Political trust		−.01**		−.01**
		(.00)		(.00)
Education * Political trust			.03**	.03**
			(.01)	(.01)
AIC	−1464.37	−1469.89	−1472.16	−1477.92
BIC	−1380.69	−1379.23	−1381.50	−1380.29
Log likelihood	744.19	747.94	749.08	752.96
Num. obs.	7891	7891	7891	7891
Num. groups: PROV	19	19	19	19
Var: PROV (intercept)	.00	.00	.00	.00
Var: residual	.05	.05	.05	.05

Note: Higher values = more supportive of the government's anti-COVID measures. *Data source*: CGSS 2021.
***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

−.02. Considering that most Chinese reported a high policy support within the range of 3.7 to 4.0 this difference of .12 points on a 1–4 scale, is noteworthy.

Table 5 details the results of the robustness checks. These models are based on different handling of the sample: the exclusion of outliers from Hubei Province (Model 4a), the different definitions of university education (Models 4b and 4c), the multiple imputation (Model
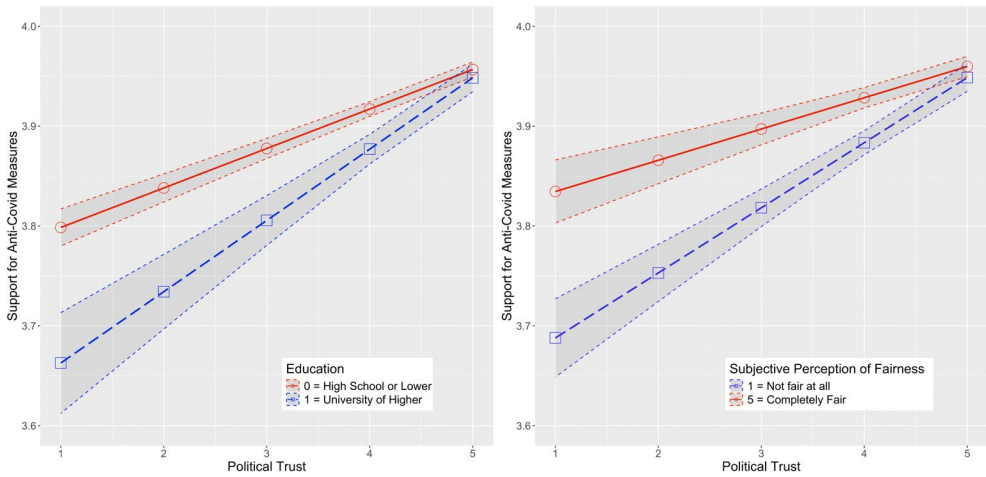
FIGURE 1 Effects of education and subjective perception of fairness on support for anti-COVID measures.

4d), and the PSM matched sample (Model 4e). All five robustness checks consistently show a stable and significant pattern as reported in our final model, Model 4 in Table 4. On average, older persons, males, urban residents, and CCP members show higher policy support, while university-educated and discontented individuals show less support, and political trust serves as a moderator of the association between the outcome variables and education and perception of societal fairness. Note that these analyses did not alter our main findings, and the estimates from the interaction terms also remained stable, which assured that our reported findings are robust. We present the results of our robustness analyses in Table 5.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we analyzed the CGSS 2021 data to reveal several factors associated with support for anti-pandemic policies in China. Descriptive analyses and multi-level models yielded the following patterns. First, we found Chinese citizens in general display a high level of support for government efforts fighting COVID-19, but their support varies based on sociodemographic factors and political attitudes. More specifically, males, urban residents, youth, and CCP members show higher support than females, rural residents, the elderly, and non-CCP members. Second, we found supporting evidence for the critical citizen thesis and the discontented citizen thesis: well-educated people and those feeling society is unfair are associated with lower support for anti-pandemic measures. Third, political trust moderates these associations. We found almost no correlation with policy support among people with high political trust, university education, and feelings of unfairness; education and feelings of unfairness matter much more among those with low political trust.

These findings are important to scholars, policymakers, and the public. Our evidence rejects the previously popular perception that Chinese people have unconditional political trust and policy compliance. Instead, our findings suggest critical citizens and discontented citizens need to have political trust to support state policies. This pattern echoes the demographic composition of the participants in the white-paper movement in November 2022. Critical citizens, mainly comprising university students, activists, journalists, lawyers, and workers in the media and IT sectors, disapproved of the anti-COVID policy, because they were worried about the

TABLE 5 Multilevel models for robustness checks by excluding outliers on different variables.

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
	Excluding Hubei Province	**Univ. edu. strictly defined**	**Univ. edu. broadly defined**	**Multiple imputation sample**	**Propensity score matching**
(Intercept)	3.56***	3.56***	3.56***	3.56***	3.46***
	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.11)
Individual-level predictors					
Male (female = 0)	.02**	.02**	.02**	.02**	.01
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Age, in years	.77**	.88***	.91**	.92***	1.12***
	(.27)	(.27)	(.28)	(.26)	(.26)
Age, squared term	−1.42***	−1.36***	−1.39***	−1.32***	−.30
	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)
Urban (rural = 0)	.03***	.02***	.02***	.03***	.03*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Health	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.01)
CCP (non-member = 0)	.01	.02	.01	.02*	.02
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Education (High school or less = 0)	−.17***	−.17***	−.15***	−.17***	−.14*
	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.05)	(.06)
Perception of fairness (1–5 scale)	.04**	.05***	.05***	.05***	.06*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.03)
Political trust (1–5 scale)	.07***	.07***	.07***	.07***	.09***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)
Interaction terms					
Education * Political trust	.03**	.03**	.03***	.03**	.03**
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Perception of fairness * Political trust	−.01*	−.01**	−.01**	−.01**	−.01**
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
AIC	−1320.90	−1477.92	−1474.35	−1505.47	−408.23
BIC	−1224.32	−1380.29	−1376.72	−1407.39	−327.50
Log Likelihood	674.45	752.96	751.17	766.73	218.11
Num. obs.	7322	7891	7891	8148	2360
Num. groups: PROV	18	19	19	19	19
Var: PROV (Intercept)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Var: Residual	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05

Note: Higher values mean more support for the government's anti-COVID measures. The sample sizes differ across models as they are fitted on different samples. *Data source*: CGSS 2021.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

violation of human rights, property rights, and personal freedom.[9] [9]Protests Against Zero-COVID Are Rocking China. Here's What You Need to Know. https://time.com/6237068/china-zero-covid-protests/. Discontented citizens were mainly those living paycheck to paycheck: vendors, construction workers, restaurant

workers, delivery persons, and small business owners, who had no choice but to crash blockades and resume working. The former group disagreed with the government policies because they disagreed ideologically, and the latter disagreed because of relative deprivation. Their convergence led to a nationwide wave of protests.

This study has the following merits. First, we used the latest nationally representative data collected after COVID-19 to investigate people's support of anti-pandemic measures in China. The CGSS data are extremely valuable, as they contain observations from Hubei Province, where the first wave of pandemic hit hard, and the anti-COVID measures were implemented very strictly. Second, we engaged with the critical citizen thesis and the discontented citizen thesis and found supportive evidence for both. Third, our comprehensive robustness checks add to our confidence in our reported findings. Our study helps us to explain why in late 2022, attitudes towards anti-COVID measures in China changed in a sudden and unexpected way. When the pandemic entered its third year and many people had experienced income loss, unemployment, or bankruptcy, the number of discontented citizens rose, and people started to question the zero-COVID measures. In other words, when previously satisfied individuals become dissatisfied, their support of the government may no longer be unconditional. This is a lesson for not only for the Chinese government but also for governments elsewhere. As education continues to expand, we anticipate a rise in the number of critical citizens. Specifically, as China's economic growth slows down and local governments face increasing fiscal difficulties, the number of discontented citizens is likely to grow. Consequently, the effectiveness of censorship may diminish in silencing the people (Zhang et al., 2024), which signals uncertainty for China's social stability.

The study has some weaknesses which may suggest possible directions for future work. First, our findings are based on cross-sectional data, thus restricting our ability to infer causal relationships between our focal variables. Future research could use alternative data sources and research designs to reveal the causal mechanisms at work in shaping public support for anti-pandemic measures and government policies in general. Second, since the dataset does not extend beyond 2021, we could not capture longitudinal changes or the potential evolution of public opinion that may have occurred following significant events or policy adjustments in 2022 and later. This limits the applicability of the findings to future or ongoing shifts in public sentiment. Third, while the inclusion of data from Hubei Province enriches the study's contextual relevance, it raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different exposure levels to the pandemic or varying degrees of policy enforcement. Future work that includes more regions, countries, and populations may produce more insights, especially with respect to the roles played by different political systems, religious backgrounds, and social contexts. For example, do societies with distinct political and cultural traditions show different reactions towards government policies? Finally, the data availability prevented us from examining other covariates with public support for anti-pandemic measures. Future work could explore these possibilities, including but not limited to the roles of occupations, social media usage, political orientations, and partisanship.

ORCID

Jinjin Liu 🄳 https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0117-5648
Tony Huiquan Zhang 🄳 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3587-5910

REFERENCES

Altiparmakis, A., Bojar, A., Brouard, S., Foucault, M., Kriesi, H., & Nadeau, R. (2021). Pandemic politics: Policy evaluations of government responses to COVID-19. *West European Politics, 44*(5–6), 1159–1179. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1930754

Andersen, R., & Curtis, J. (2015). Social class, economic inequality, and the convergence of policy preferences: Evidence from 24 modern democracies. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie, 52*(3), 266–288. https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12077

Austin, P. C. (2014). A comparison of 12 algorithms for matching on the propensity score. *Statistics in Medicine, 33*(6), 1057–1069. https://doi.org/10.1002/sim.6004

Bobzien, L. (2023). Income inequality and political trust: Do fairness perceptions matter? *Social Indicators Research, 169*(1), 505–528. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03168-9

Brown, T. A. (2015). *Confirmatory factor analysis for applied research* (2nd ed.). Guilford.

Cena, L., & Roccato, M. (2023). Desires of technocracy in pandemic times: A multilevel study. *Social Science Quarterly, 104*(3), 195–201. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13254

Citrin, J., & Stoker, L. (2018). Political trust in a cynical age. *Annual Review of Political Science, 21,* 49–70. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050316-092550

Coenders, M., & Scheepers, P. (2003). The effect of education on nationalism and ethnic exclusionism: An international comparison. *Political Psychology, 24*(2), 313–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00330

Dai, M., Frank, J., & Sun, I. (2011). Procedural justice during police-citizen encounters: The effects of process-based policing on citizen compliance and demeanor. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 39*(2), 159–168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2011.01.004

Davies, J. C. (1974). The J-curve and power struggle theories of collective violence. *American Sociological Review, 39*(4), 607–610. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094425

Easton, D. (1975). A re-assessment of the concept of political support. *British Journal of Political Science, 5*(4), 435–457. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400008309

Fang, K., & Repnikova, M. (2018). Demystifying "little pink": The creation and evolution of a gendered label for nationalistic activists in China. *New Media & Society, 20*(6), 2162–2185. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817731923

Flavin, P., & Keane, M. J. (2012). Life satisfaction and political participation: Evidence from the United States. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 13*(1), 63–78. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9250-1

Garritzmann, J. L., Neimanns, E., & Busemeyer, M. R. (2023). Public opinion towards welfare state reform: The role of political trust and government satisfaction. *European Journal of Political Research, 62*(1), 197–220. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12501

Gartner, S. S., & Segura, G. M. (2000). Race, casualties, and opinion in the Vietnam war. *Journal of Politics, 62*(1), 115–146. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00006

Georgarakis, G. N. (2023). Yikes! The effect of incidental disgust and information on public attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Political Psychology, 44*(3), 493–513. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12865

Guntermann, E., & Persson, M. (2023). Issue voting and government responsiveness to policy preferences. *Political Behavior, 45*(2), 561–584. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09716-8

Hakhverdian, A., & Mayne, Q. (2012). Institutional trust, education, and corruption: A micro-macro interactive approach. *The Journal of Politics, 74*(3), 739–750. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381612000412

Han, K. J. (2022). Education level and affective polarization: The mediation effects of psychological engagement in politics and authoritarian attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly, 103*(7), 1633–1646. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13228

Hou, R. (2020). Maintaining social stability without solving problems: Emotional repression in the Chinese petition system. *The China Quarterly, 243,* 635–654. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019001528

Inkpen, R., Ghaemmaghami, A., Newiss, G., Smith, P., Charman, S., Bennett, S., & Ilett, C. (2023). "Othering" by consent? Public attitudes to Covid-19 restrictions and the role of the police in managing compliance in England. *The Sociological Quarterly, 64*(2), 205–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2022.2066030

Jennings, M. K. (1997). Political participation in the Chinese countryside. *American Political Science Review, 91*(2), 361–372. https://doi.org/10.2307/2952361

Jiang, A., Wang, Z., & Zhang, T. H. (2022). Radicalizing and conservatizing: Ageing effects on political trust in Asia, 2001–2016. *Social Indicators Research, 162*(2), 665–681.

Jiang, A., & Zhang, T. H. (2021). Political trust in East and Southeast Asia: The joint effects of education, corruption perception, and urbanization. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 33*(4), 911–926. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edab008

Jolley, D., & Douglas, K. M. (2014). The effects of anti-vaccine conspiracy theories on vaccination intentions. *PLoS One, 9*(2), e89177. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0089177

Keng, S., Zhong, L., & Xie, F. (2023). Why did China's zero-COVID policy persist? Decision urgency, regime type, and political opportunity structures. *Journal of Contemporary China, 33*(146), 206–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2023.2193143

Kim, Y. (2023). Absolutely relative: How education shapes voter turnout in the United States. *Social Indicators Research, 168*(1), 447–469. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03146-1

Krosnick, J. A. (1988). The role of attitude importance in social evaluation: A study of policy preferences, presidential candidate evaluations, and voting behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 55*(2), 196–210. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.55.2.196

Lalot, F., Abrams, D., Heering, M. S., Babaian, J., Ozkececi, H., Peitz, L., Davies Hayon, K., & Broadwood, J. (2023). Distrustful complacency and the COVID-19 vaccine: How concern and political trust interact to affect vaccine hesitancy. *Political Psychology, 44*(5), 983–1011. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12871

Li, L. (2016). Reassessing trust in the central government: Evidence from five national surveys. *The China Quarterly, 225,* 100–121. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015001629

Liu, Y., Wang, H., Liu, J., & Zhang, T. H. (2022). Racial diversity, majority–minority gap, and confidence in the criminal justice system. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 64*(3), 26–48.

Norris, P. (1999). *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government*. OUP Oxford.

Pan, J., & Xu, Y. (2018). China's ideological spectrum. *The Journal of Politics, 80*(1), 254–273. https://doi.org/10.1086/694255

Power, S. A. (2018). The deprivation-protest paradox: How the perception of unfair economic inequality leads to civic unrest. *Current Anthropology, 59*(6), 765–789. https://doi.org/10.1086/700679

Pryce, D. K., & Chenane, J. L. (2021). Trust and confidence in police officers and the institution of policing: The views of African Americans in the American south. *Crime & Delinquency, 67*(6–7), 808–838. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128721991823

Raudenbush, S. W., & Bryk, A. S. (2002). *Hierarchical linear models: Applications and data analysis methods*. Sage.

Ravenelle, A. J., Conley, J., & Newell, A. (2023). Left behind: Yachts, dinghies, and perceptions of social inequality in COVID-19. *The Sociological Quarterly, 64*(3), 367–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2022.2133755

Sandset, T., & Villadsen, K. (2023). Pandemic modelling and model citizens: Governing COVID-19 through predictive models, sovereignty and discipline. *The Sociological Review, 71*(3), 624–641. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261221102023

Wang, C.-H. (2016). Government performance, corruption, and political trust in East Asia. *Social Science Quarterly, 97*(2), 211–231. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12223

Wang, Z. (2005). Before the emergence of critical citizens: Economic development and political Trust in China. *International Review of Sociology, 15*(1), 155–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906700500038876

Wang, Z., & You, Y. (2016). The arrival of critical citizens: Decline of political trust and shifting public priorities in China. *International Review of Sociology, 26*(1), 105–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2015.1103054

Wu, X. (2009). Income inequality and distributive justice: A comparative analysis of mainland China and Hong Kong. *The China Quarterly, 200,* 1033–1052. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741009990610

Wu, Y., & Cao, L. (2018). Race/ethnicity, discrimination, and confidence in order institutions. *Policing: An International Journal, 41*(6), 704–720. https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-03-2017-0031

You, J. (2012). Social trust: Fairness matters more than homogeneity. *Political Psychology, 33*(5), 701–721. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00893.x

Zhai, Y. (2022). Government policy performance and central–local political trust in China. *Journal of Public Policy, 42*(4), 782–801. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X22000162

Zhang, R. J., Liu, J. H., Milojev, P., Jung, J., Wang, S., Xie, T., Choi, H., Yamaguchi, S., & Morio, H. (2019). The structure of trust as a reflection of culture and institutional power structure: Evidence from four east Asian societies. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 22*(1), 59–73. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12350

Zhang, T. H., Sun, J., & Cao, L. (2021). Education, Internet use, and confidence in the police: Testing the "informed citizen" thesis in the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Criminology, 16,* 165–182. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-020-09323-2

Zhang, T. H., Xu, J., & Liu, J. (2024). How do toothless tigers bite? Extra-institutional governance and internet censorship by local governments in China. *The China Quarterly*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741024000602

Zhao, S. (2016). Xi Jinping's Maoist Revival. *Journal of Democracy, 27*(3), 83–97. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0051

Zhong, P., & Zhan, J. V. (2021). Authoritarian critical citizens and declining political trust in China. *The China Review, 21*(2), 117–152.