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## Gauging Preference for Democracy in Absence of Free Speech\*

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July 2023

### Abstract

Whether people prefer a democratic system is difficult to judge when speaking freely carries personal dangers. We introduce an incentivized experimental task to reveal implicit preference for democracy without referencing politically-sensitive terms. We validate the task with data from émigrés from Greater China living in North America, demonstrating our experimental tool's ability to gauge favorability toward democracy when participants come from backgrounds where eliciting such views is challenging. We corroborate the task's accuracy and its ability to uncover patterns in democratic sentiment with data from a representative US sample and from a diverse set of participants in China.

*JEL Codes: C90, P00, D72, D90*

*Keywords: democracy, autocracy, experiment, survey, preferences, China*

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Whether people prefer a democratic system is difficult to judge when speaking freely carries personal dangers. We introduce an incentivized experimental task to reveal implicit preference for democracy without referencing politically-sensitive terms. We validate the task with data from émigrés from Greater China living in North America, demonstrating our experimental tool’s ability to gauge favorability toward democracy when participants come from backgrounds where eliciting such views is challenging. We corroborate the task’s accuracy and its ability to uncover patterns in democratic sentiment with data from a representative US sample and from a diverse set of participants in China.

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# 1 Introduction

Countries across the globe have recently experienced democratic backsliding, with more than a third of the world’s population now living under an authoritarian regime and more than half living under regimes that cannot be categorized as democracies (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022). Understanding this trend, as well as how (un)likely a democratic (re)emergence is, requires investigation of how citizens view democratic institutions. However, eliciting individuals’ underlying favorability toward democracy is both politically sensitive and prone to self-censorship, particularly in regions that are under autocratic rule.

This paper introduces a novel incentivized decision task to elicit individuals’ preferences for democracy. The task does not reference democracy, avoiding terms that may be politically sensitive. Instead, participants are grouped with four other participants without the possibility of communication, are asked to answer a challenging question, and are told that all group members’ payoffs depend on whether their group arrives at the correct answer. Participants must then state whether they prefer the group’s solution to be the one favored by the majority of members, prefer it to be the one chosen by a group member selected by the researchers to serve as an “authority,” or are indifferent between the two methods. After preferences for decision method are elicited, one group member is chosen at random, the decision method is determined by their preference, and payoffs are determined by that method and members’ answers to the later revealed challenging question. Since participants make their choices without the possibility of interaction, the task is a one-shot incentivized game that elicits preference for majority-based decision processes. We conjecture that this simple task predicts preference for democratic institutions even when direct questions are too politically sensitive.

We test this conjecture by first surveying a representative sample of émigrés from Greater China living in North America. Leveraging targeted ads on Facebook, we surveyed a sample of 1107 first or second-generation immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong who currently live in the United States or Canada, where our tool can be tested and explicit political questions can also be asked without concern about self-censorship. We show that behavior in our decision task robustly predicts participants’ self-reported preference for democracy as a system of government as well as correlating consistently with other survey responses suggesting favorable views of democracy. Importantly, an analysis of responses from another sample of 491 representative US participants indicates that the task’s ability to predict preference for democracy is not specific to individuals originally from Greater China.

We then examine why our measure predicts participants’ preferences for democracy. Us-

ing participants' self-reported beliefs about whether the group's authority would be relatively skilled, plus a randomized intervention to shock their beliefs about the authority's skill, we find that, consistent with intuition, those more strongly anticipating a skilled authority favor the majority method less than others. However, the shock does not affect the methods preference, suggesting that a deep-seated tendency to view an authority as more capable than average people, not an easily altered belief, helps to explain why our measure predicts views about democracy.

Finally, we employ our task on 489 participants in mainland China without asking explicitly political questions. Alongside our North American surveys, the responses let us document several patterns. First, we find substantial variation in preferences across countries of origin, with a stronger revealed preference for democracy in the United States, a weaker revealed preference in mainland China, and an intermediate revealed preference among émigrés from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, we document substantial sorting in democratic sentiment among émigrés from mainland China depending on whether their move to North America was influenced by its political institutions. Specifically, émigrés from mainland China who say political freedom played a part in their move reveal stronger support for democracy than those who report other motivations only. Whereas revealed preferences for democracy among the former are comparable to those of the representative US sample, democratic preferences among the latter are weaker than those of participants in China itself. This suggests that the share of people having a favorable view of democracy is higher among current residents of mainland China than among Chinese émigrés not mentioning a political motive for moving.

Data from China also allow us to examine current correlates of preference for democracy with our decision task. We find that among respondents in China, students tend to reveal a stronger preference for democracy. Conversely, respondents whose families migrated within China during childhood are less likely to favor majority decision. Leveraging province-level economic data, we find that respondents originally from provinces that benefited most from the export boom are less likely to reveal a preference for democracy, suggesting that successful exporting puts the “reform and opening” policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a more favorable light. These correlations are indicative of the many ways in which future researchers might employ our tool to examine how different experiences and shocks shape democratic sentiment in countries in which it is difficult to either ask or answer sensitive questions about political institutions.

Our paper contributes to various strands of literature. Recent research has furthered our understanding of individual behavior through novel survey tools and decision tasks that

elicit deep-rooted preferences (Enke, Rodriguez-Padilla and Zimmermann, 2020, 2022; Galor and Savitsky, 2018; Wang, Rieger and Hens, 2017). Our paper contributes to this literature, in part by demonstrating limits to a supposedly deep-seated cultural disposition to value authority (Chien, 2016)—e.g., the substantial divergence of views between parts of Greater China differing in political experience for a few generations only. It also builds on recent papers that demonstrate the efficacy of survey measures in predicting behavior and their validity when examined alongside incentivized decision tasks (Falk et al., 2018; Kaiser and Oswald, 2022). We use responses to a survey question drawn from nationally-representative surveys to validate a novel incentivized task that can stand in for survey questions in settings where they cannot be safely asked or answered.

Our paper also advances the research on the links between personality traits and political ideology and behavior (Gerber et al., 2010; Mondak et al., 2010), particularly in contexts of mounting authoritarianism (Greene and Robertson, 2017; Truex, 2022; Cantoni et al., 2022). We further this agenda by providing a tool that permits analysis of the link between preference for democracy and various individual-level outcomes.

Crucially, our paper contributes to the literature that studies the drivers of democratic or authoritarian consolidation (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006, 2009; Acemoglu et al., 2021), particularly in Greater China (Cantoni et al., 2017, 2019; Bejara et al., 2021; Campante, Chor and Li, 2023). We reveal a sorting in preference for democracy among émigrés based on whether their decision to migrate or remain abroad included political motivations, and we document substantial variation in preference for democracy between émigrés from mainland China and ones from Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as variation within mainland China. Our measure also allows us to provide direct evidence for both previously undocumented and already unveiled patterns like the association between exporting performance and support for China’s system of government.

The remaining sections are structured as follows. Section 2 describes the novel decision task as well as the details of the protocols that we implemented in North America and mainland China. Section 3 documents the accuracy of our measure in predicting preference for democracy based on a representative sample of immigrants from Greater China in North America. Section 4 leverages auxiliary protocols implemented in the US and China to shed light on empirical patterns pertaining to support for democracy among migrants from Greater China and current inhabitants of mainland China. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 Gauging Preference for Democracy

We created a measure of implicit preference between institutions that grant members of society equal decision rights and ones that assign decision rights to one individual. The measure would serve as a proxy for the attitudes that determine how individuals answer survey questions regarding their opinion about the desirability of “[having] a democratic political system—a system where elected representatives of the people govern the country” versus “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” (Gallup World Poll, 2008), subject to the constraint that it not mention systems of government as such. Our method entails assigning participants to groups of 5 and asking each of them to choose between two ways of making a decision for the group: (i) decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, or (ii) majority rule.

Each participant had to first state their preference for a decision method and then answer a moderately challenging question, of which no details had been provided when selecting the preferred method. Participants were told that the group’s choice of decision method was going to be based on the preference between methods expressed by one randomly chosen member, providing reason for each member to state her preference over decision methods truthfully. If the decision method turned out to be “majority,” the group’s answer to the question would be the one favored by most group members. Conversely, if the decision method turned out to be “authority,” one of the group members would be chosen and her answer would be assigned as the group’s answer. To incentivize the choice, participants were informed that every member of a group that won the prize would nearly double their total payoff relative to those who only earned the base payment for completing the survey.<sup>1</sup> Only groups reaching the correct answer to the “challenging question” through their chosen decision method could win this money prize.<sup>2</sup> Groups were formed following survey completions solely to determine which participants received prizes; they were not referenced and played no role in the rest of our survey.

To capture variation in strength of preference over the decision method, participants had the chance of choosing from “strongly prefer choice by the authority” to “strongly prefer choice by the majority”, with “prefer” options and a no preference option in between. The natural role of chance in the group’s choice of method should the decider select the “no preference” option suggested an extension for operationalizing the non-extreme options as

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<sup>1</sup>In our baseline protocol, survey participants earned a base payment of \$18 for completing the survey, and they earned the chance of receiving an additional \$15 if their group arrived at the correct solution.

<sup>2</sup>Consistent with the information provided to participants, we restricted prizes to a maximum of 25% of groups by randomly selecting from among the correctly answering groups, if more numerous.

decision partnerships with chance (nature). In particular, participants were informed that their group’s decision method would be determined by selecting one member randomly, using her preferred method if she chose a “strongly prefer” response, selecting the method randomly (with equal probabilities) if she chose the “no preference” response, and making a random choice with  $p = 2/3$  for her preferred method and  $p = 1/3$  for the other method if her choice was one of the “preferred” (but not “strongly preferred”) options. Such “preferred” options allow capturing the innate preference of individuals who, despite having an inclination for a decision method, may prefer a stochastic choice and thus would deliberately choose to partner with nature when deciding (Cerreia-Vioglio et al, 2019; Agranov and Ortoleva, 2021).

The question that determined payoffs, which all group members answered individually in case majority method was used or they were chosen as the authority, concerns a “beauty contest game” in which participants selected an average number between 0 and 100 and the winner was the participant whose number is closest to  $2/3$  of the average of all chosen numbers. In our setting, we told participants that this game was played by 200 students at Brown University, and we asked each of them to select whether 12 or 40 is closest to the average number chosen by the students. Choice of majority vs. authority is not affected by the question, since when making that choice participants only knew that the question would be “challenging” and would have two offered answers. Moreover, participants could not communicate with other group members when solving the question, so each participant solved this question without external inputs and knowing that their answer could potentially determine the group’s payoff. The actual answer to the question was 40, which means that only groups that arrived at that answer (regardless of the decision method through which they arrived at it) could earn the prize. Participants never learned what their group’s decision method was or what other participants selected as their preferred decision-method; they only learned at the time of payment (which came after survey completion) whether or not their group had won the prize. Appendix B.1 contains the exact instructions of the decision task.

In sum, we constructed the choice of method task so that (a) a large payment can result (be lost) by choosing a method that generates the correct (wrong) answer, and (b) there is no *a priori* advantage of one method over the other. We relied on (a) to focus attention on the methods decision and incentivize the choice, and we hypothesized that (b) would generate variation in the share of individuals expressing a preference for majority versus authority-based decision, which we expected would correlate with their preference for democracy as a system of government. Absence of a priori advantage of the majority or authority method follows from the fact that whereas there exist conditions under which a majority will be right more often than will a randomly selected individual in the absence of substantial inequalities

of information sets (Black, 1968; Katzner, 1995), we had collected information about the education and self-assessed math ability of each participant and we neither ruled out nor provided any information about the probability of using that information to select a group’s authority. With no basis for guessing which method would prove better *ex-post*, hyper-rational participants can only select a method randomly.<sup>3</sup> In short, our decision task was constructed to function like a weathervane: by removing all other factors that might point subjects’ preferences towards either of the two methods, we hypothesized that variations in decisions would reflect their underlying predispositions towards the notions of majority versus authority control.

## 2.1 Details of Data Collection

We conducted three rounds of surveys, and the choice of methods (and prize opportunity) was included in each of the three surveys.<sup>4</sup> Each round was completed online by a demographically diverse sample of adults drawn from different populations, relying on different recruiting channels. We first collected data from émigrés from Greater China. We thus recruited 1107 adults either born in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan, or Mandarin-proficient children of such individuals, who resided in the U.S. or Canada in 2020, via targeted advertising on Facebook. Prospective respondents passed through an initial filtering step that allowed us to check that participants were indeed émigrés from Greater China while ensuring targets of representation by age, gender, socioeconomic status, non-student versus student status (not more than 30% students, of which less than half attend relatively “elite” universities and colleges), and China ( $\approx 70\%$ ) vs. Hong Kong ( $\approx 15\%$ ) vs. Taiwan ( $\approx 15\%$ ) origin.<sup>5</sup> Appendix B.1 provides details of the questions that accomplished this filtering, Appendix A.1 provides the definition of the variables that we employ in the analysis, and Appendix A.2 provides the summary statistics of the demographic characteristics of participants in the first round. All advertising and survey materials were in simplified (China) and traditional (Taiwan) Chinese, with survey participants able to select either script.

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<sup>3</sup>The exact nature of the challenge to be answered, the advantageousness of relevant skills to a decision-maker, the distribution of skill in the group, and how the authority would be chosen, were all unknown to participants when choosing between the two methods.

<sup>4</sup>Proof of concept was initially obtained through an online pilot survey with 99 Brown University students of diverse backgrounds.

<sup>5</sup>To avoid raising suspicion that our survey had a political agenda, we used the stylized locution “Hong Kong/Macau” in our recruiting materials and accepted individuals from Macau in the same “bin” of participants as ones from Hong Kong. We henceforth use “Hong Kong participants” as short-hand for ones from either Hong Kong or Macau. The proportion of the latter in the set of Hong Kong participants is 7.4%, or 1% of the overall sample.



Besides asking about social preferences, ideology, political rights, and demographics, this survey-round included questions to elicit respondents' views on other political issues, such as preference for seeing a successor to China's current leader who is "a reformer". Moreover, we asked subjects to state the three main reasons behind their decision to migrate to North America, and allowed them to select from a set of choices that included political freedom.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, in a survey question separated from the incentivized task by eleven questions, we asked participants about their preference for democracy as follows:

*"There are a number of possible ways to govern a country, including having a strong leader who is not constrained by a legislature and elections, and having a democratic political system in which elected representatives of the people govern the country. Do you have a preference between these alternatives, and if so, which do you prefer and how strongly?"*

Participants selected an option from 1 = "strongly prefer a strong unconstrained leader" through 5 = "strongly prefer a democratic political system." Appendix A.3 leverages data from Latinobarometro and the World Values Survey to show that similarly-worded questions are indeed predictive of democratic behavior in different contexts. The five-point scale of this survey question parallels the choice set of the incentivized task but also matches that of many other questions in the survey, making it unlikely participants would see those two in particular as directly linked.

We introduced two randomizations to further examine why our incentivized task predicts reported preference for democracy, if it does so. The first randomization exogenously manipulates participants' beliefs about the skill of the participant who would be selected as an authority in the task. Specifically, when displaying the rules of the task, we exposed half of participants to a statement that we would use information about respondents' math ability and education, if at all, to assign a more rather than less skilled individual to the role of authority.

The second embedded randomization exposed some participants, prior to the task, to anecdotal narratives about life experiences reflecting positively or negatively on the CCP's policies. To focus attention, each narrative preceded an incentivized comprehension question. The positive narrative discussed the case of an entrepreneur from a modest background who, thanks to China's heavy investments in internet connectivity, was able to build a successful

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<sup>6</sup>More exactly, participants were asked "What are the most important factors that cause you to be living in the U.S. or Canada rather than in China or Hong Kong or Macao or Taiwan now?" This wording leaves open the possibility that some participants are not permanently settled in N. America and may not view themselves as émigrés.

business. The negative narrative discussed the case of a farmer who had to move off of his land due to the construction of an urban development that went on to become a ‘ghost town’. A third of our participants in the first round read the positive narrative, a second third read the negative one, while the remaining third were exposed to either no narrative or to a neutral narrative about Chinese cuisine.<sup>7</sup> These primes reinforce or counter the notion that the CCP’s policies have been effective, following the tradition of recent research showing that anecdotal primes may be more effective than facts at moving people’s perceptions (Alesina, Miano and Stancheva, 2023). We use this intervention to explore whether behavior in the task reflects participants’ views of the CCP’s accomplishments or blunders.

In our second round of data collection, we recruited 491 participants through the online platform Prolific, which ensured a sample that is representative of the US. Respondents in this round participated in the same decision task and answered similar survey questions as those in the first round, omitting prompts and questions related to current affairs in China. This round allows us to examine the validity of our task when studying participants who have grown up and lived in a western cultural setting under western-style institutions. In the third round, we recruited 489 participants in China through the online platform Wenjuanxing, which has a panel of 2.6 million members that allowed us to survey a diverse sample of subjects from different socioeconomic backgrounds and regions. This last round omitted politically-sensitive questions and was limited mostly to collecting individual characteristics and choices in our decision task.<sup>8</sup> Both the second and third round include the randomization about skilled authority but omit the randomized narratives about China.

### 3 Validity of the Decision Task

We begin with an examination of the correspondence between our decision task and the survey measure of preference for democracy. Table 1 presents standardized coefficients from OLS regressions of self-reported preference for democracy on choices in the decision task. Column 1 presents the raw bivariate relationship, showing that an increase of one standard deviation in preference for a solution method in the task is associated with an increase of 0.209 standard deviations in reported preference for democracy. Crucially, Columns 2-5 sequentially control for characteristics that are exogenous to respondents, including indicators

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<sup>7</sup>Appendices A.1 and B.1 provide further details of the two embedded randomizations.

<sup>8</sup>As anticipated, the platform’s website states that no questions can be included that are harmful to national security, related to the overthrow of the government or destruction of the state, or that endanger the interests of the Party, the state, or the government.

for country of birth as well as a host of controls for parental characteristics like their educational attainment, countries of birth, and their urban/rural origin. Overall, Column 5 indicates that behavior in the task robustly predicts reported preference for democracy even when comparing respondents born in the same country with comparable ancestral backgrounds. Appendix A.4 further documents the coincidence between these two measures by showing the resemblance of their distributions. Importantly, the validity of the decision task in robustly predicting preference for democracy does not depend on participants whose ancestral origins are in Greater China. As Appendix A.5 shows, behavior in the decision task also predicts reported preference for democracy in a representative sample from the US, and it consistently correlates with other dimensions of democratic sentiment in the US survey.

**Table 1:** Behavior in the Decision Task Robustly Predicts Reported Preference for Democracy

	Preference for Democracy				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Majority Method	0.209 (0.032)	0.187 (0.031)	0.198 (0.032)	0.198 (0.032)	0.196 (0.032)
Observations	1107	1107	1107	1107	1107
R-squared	0.044	0.121	0.133	0.136	0.137
Gender		✓	✓	✓	✓
Country of Birth FE		✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother’s Country FE			✓	✓	✓
Father’s Country FE			✓	✓	✓
Parents’ Educational Attainment				✓	✓
Parents’ Urban Controls					✓

Each column reports standardized coefficient(s) from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variable(s) described in the row heading(s). An observation is an émigré from Greater China living in North America who was recruited via Facebook targeted ads to complete an online survey (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1 to 5 scale. Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with 1 corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Gender is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports identifying as a female, 0 otherwise. Country of Birth FE, Mother Country FE, and Father Country FE correspond to fixed effects for the respondent’s, her mother’s, and her fathers countries of birth, respectively. Parents’ Educational Attainment corresponds to indicators for whether each parent completed high school or more. Parents’ Urban Controls corresponds to indicators for whether each parent came from an urban background. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis.

We next assess the role of beliefs about the authority’s competence in explaining the task’s ability to predict preference for democracy. After stating their methods preference and answering the challenging question, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought that the authority in the task would be skilled. Answer options ranged from 0 (did not think about it at all) to 5 (thought it was very likely). Panel A of Table 2 shows OLS regressions in which the dependent variable is either behavior in the decision task

or reported preference for democracy, while the explanatory variable is given by responses to the above question (which we call ‘Skilled Authority’). Notably, subjects who thought that the authority would be skilled were significantly less likely to reveal a preference for a majority-based method and to report preferring democracy.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2:** Role of Beliefs About the Competence of the Authority

	Majority Method		Preference for Democracy		Skilled Authority	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Panel A</b>						
Skilled Authority	-0.257 (0.030)	-0.231 (0.031)	-0.148 (0.030)	-0.128 (0.030)		
R-squared	0.066	0.102	0.022	0.117		
<b>Panel B</b>						
Authority Treatment	0.013 (0.060)	0.015 (0.060)	0.041 (0.060)	0.022 (0.058)	0.207 (0.060)	0.203 (0.060)
R-squared	0.000	0.050	0.000	0.101	0.011	0.046
<b>Panel C</b>						
Skilled Authority Residual	-0.260 (0.030)	-0.235 (0.031)	-0.152 (0.030)	-0.130 (0.030)		
R-squared	0.067	0.102	0.023	0.117		
Observations	1107	1107	1107	1107	1107	1107
Gender		✓		✓		✓
Country of Birth FE		✓		✓		✓
Mother’s Country FE		✓		✓		✓
Father’s Country FE		✓		✓		✓
Parents’ Educational Attainment		✓		✓		✓
Parents’ Urban Controls		✓		✓		✓

Each panel-column reports results from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variable(s) described in the row heading(s). An observation is an émigré from Greater China living in North America (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1-5 scale. Majority Method is the preference over a method to assign a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with 1 corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Authority Treatment is an indicator that equals 1 if, before the decision task, the respondent was shown a prompt suggesting that a skilled participant could be selected as an authority in the decision task. Skilled Authority is a participant’s reported belief in the likelihood that the authority in the task would be skilled, on a 0-5 scale. Skilled Authority Residual is the residual of regression in Panel B, Column 5. Gender is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports identifying as a female, 0 otherwise. Country of Birth FE, Mother’s Country FE, and Father’s Country FE correspond to fixed effects for the respondent’s, her mother’s, and her father’s countries of birth, respectively. Parents’ Educational Attainment corresponds to indicators for whether each parent completed secondary education or more. Parents’ Urban Controls corresponds to indicators for whether each parent came from an urban background. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis.

<sup>9</sup>The option ‘Did not think about it at all’ was originally meant to correspond to a value of 0. However, Appendix A.6 shows that the wording and value of this option are not driving the strong association between beliefs about the skill of the authority and behavior in our task. Indeed, the association is robust to dropping those observations who selected 0 or to assigning a different numerical value to this option.

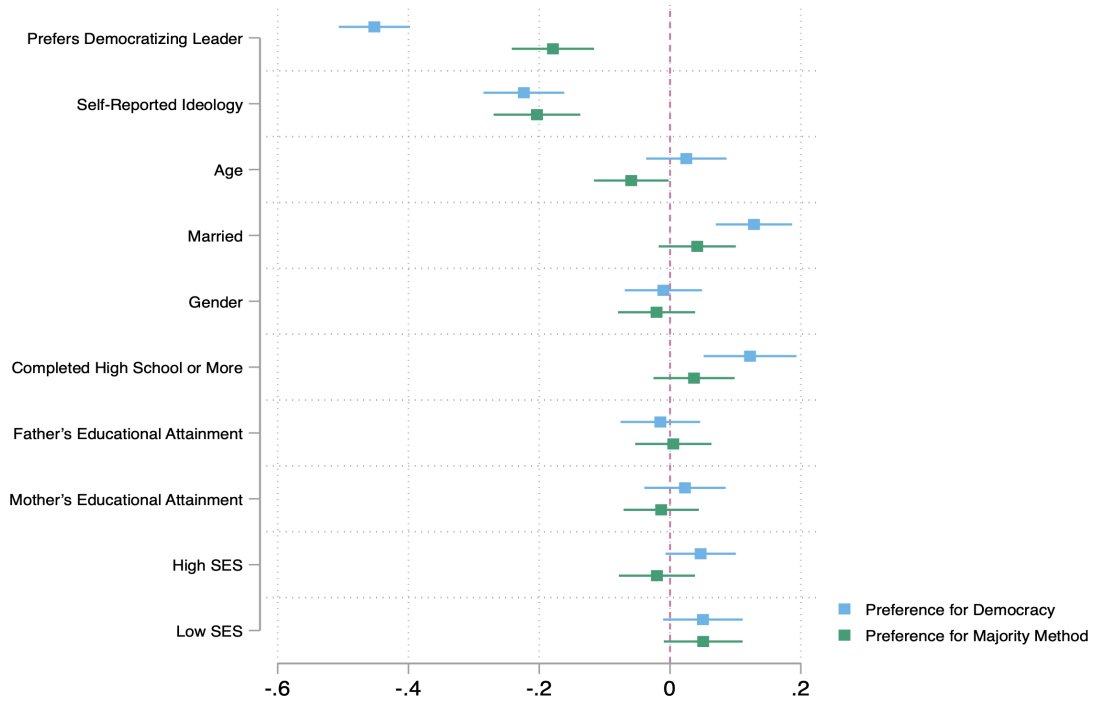
The fact that reported preference for democracy correlates with beliefs about the competence of the authority suggests that the latter may also capture a broader belief about an authority’s competence relative to the average person. We assess this by examining the randomization that exposed half of participants to a message saying higher math ability or education would be favored if used at all in selecting their group’s authority. Panel B in Table 2 shows that this intervention had no significant effect on reported preference for democracy (Columns 1-4), even though it did significantly shift beliefs about the skills of the authority in the task (Columns 5-6) and the latter is negatively correlated with preference for the majority method (Panel A, Columns 1-2). The intervention’s results thus suggest that ‘Skilled Authority’ predicts a stronger (reported and revealed) preference for democracy because it captures views about authority held by subjects independently of the information associated with the task. Indeed, Panel C shows that behavior in the task and reported preference for democracy are strongly associated with the residual of the regression of Skilled Authority on the above intervention. Deep-seated beliefs about the relative competence of authorities may thus underlie the task’s ability to predict preference for democracy, although this doesn’t preclude the possibility that some variation of the method preference is based on other factors like desire for ordinary people’s voices to have weight, or concerns about the potential arbitrariness of unchecked authorities.

To what extent is behavior in our decision task reflective of beliefs about the effectiveness of the specific government that comes to mind for participants? To answer this, we leverage our second embedded randomization, which randomly exposed different participants to anecdotal stories casting a negative, positive, or neutral light on the CCP. Crucially, Appendix A.7 shows that the economic and statistical significance of these interventions is negligible, suggesting that participant responses are not mainly reflecting mental associations with a specific regime.

We next examine whether the correlations between observable attributes and behavior in our task are comparable to those between the former and reported preference for democracy. Figure 1 illustrates standardized OLS coefficients and 95% confidence intervals of bivariate regressions where the outcome variable is either behavior in the task or reported preference for democracy, while the independent variables are different individual characteristics, one at a time. The correlations with the mechanism choice and view of democracy variables are generally alike. Importantly, method preference and reported view of democracy tend to correlate consistently with self-reported ideology and with preference for a future democratizing leader.

Finally, we assess whether offering five options for expressing mechanism preference,

**Figure 1:** Correlates of Majority Method Compared to Correlates of Preference for Democracy



The figure shows the point estimates and confidence intervals at the 95% level of different bivariate OLS regressions of Preference for Democracy (in blue) or Majority Method (in green) on the variables in the row headings and a constant, one at a time. Data comes from survey responses of émigrés from Greater China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1 to 5 scale. Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with one corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Prefers Democratizing Leader is the preference for a hypothetical future leader who would pursue democratizing reforms in China versus another one who would favor the maintenance of the existing political system, on a 1 (=strongly prefer the reformist leader) to 5 (=strongly prefer the stability leader) scale. Self-reported Ideology is participants' reported political views on a 1 (= very liberal) to 5 (=very conservative) scale. Online Appendix A.1 provides further details about the definition and the scale of the other variables.

including chances to partner with nature by choosing a “prefer” rather than “strongly prefer” response, is pivotal to our results. Appendix A.8 examines the association between the self-reported preference for democracy and behavior in our decision task after either (a) combining participants who preferred or strongly preferred a decision method into single categories, or (b) excluding those observations that selected “prefer” options. The results are economically and statistically consistent with results presented in Table 1 and Appendix A.4, which suggests that researchers who chose to implement a three rather than five option method preference tool would also probably be able to capture preference for democracy with such a modified task. However, important nuance might thereby be lost. Appendix A.9

shows that reported preference for democracy for those who chose ‘strongly prefer majority method’ in the task is significantly higher than the average for those who chose ‘prefer majority method’, while the latter is significantly higher than the corresponding average for those who were indifferent between methods.<sup>10</sup>

## 4 Preference for Democracy in Greater China

Having established the strength of our incentivized task in predicting democratic sentiment, we now examine whether it is capable of capturing overall differences in preference for democracy across samples from different backgrounds and regions. In particular, émigrés from Taiwan and Hong Kong are plausibly different than those from mainland China given their greater exposure to western institutions. Representative Americans are conjectured to favor democracy more than representative adults in mainland China. Émigrés who left mainland China and stay in N. America partly for political reasons are likely different than those who report no political motivation. Figure 2 displays the distribution of choices in the task for each of these subsamples, while Appendix A.11 shows the average choice for each subsample and the significance of the difference between them.

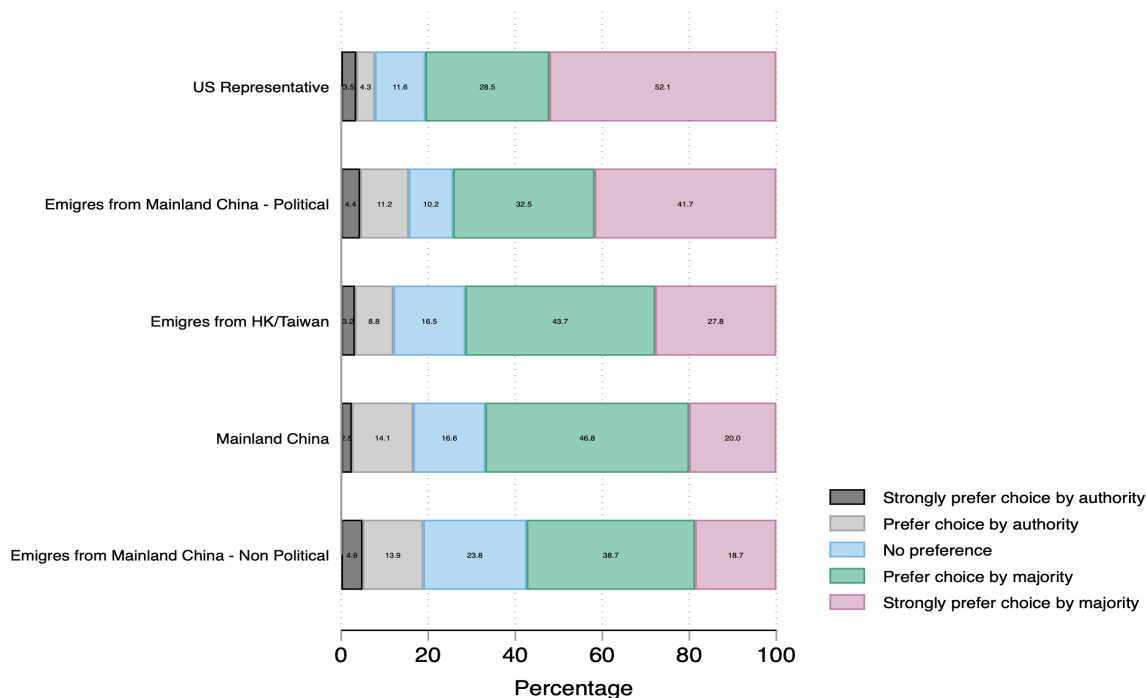
Several patterns emerge from these figures. First, preference for democracy as proxied by the decision task is strongest in the US. On the other hand, democratic sentiment among participants in mainland China is weaker than among émigrés from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Strikingly, there seems to be a clear sorting in democratic sentiment based on the self-report of whether political freedom was among the top three reasons for being in N. America: among all participants from Greater China or still living in mainland China, émigrés who report a political reason express a democratic sentiment closest to that of our US sample. Conversely, migrants who give only non-political reasons for living in N. America exhibit the weakest democratic sentiment.

The fact that the pattern in Figure 2 matches our prior expectations about favorability towards majority rule in the U.S. versus China may strike some readers as self-evident. Yet representative national surveys sometimes fail to support related beliefs—e.g. in the

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<sup>10</sup>One reason for considering a three rather than five choice design could be concern that those who select “prefer” are fundamentally different—e.g. perhaps they are irrational, not rationally choosing to partner with nature. Appendix A.10 compares those who chose “prefer” in either side of the spectrum with those who revealed either a strong preference or indifference. The differences between these types of participants across an array of attributes are economically and statistically insignificant (particularly when examining differences in education, parental education, math skills, or time to survey completion), which suggests that selecting “prefer” instead of “strongly prefer” is not due to lower cognitive skills or irrationality.

**Figure 2:** Choices in the Decision Task Across Different Samples



The figure shows the share of respondents in each subsample that chose each of the options available in the decision task (see section 2.1 and online Appendix A.1 for further details of each of the options available in the decision task). US Representative corresponds to a representative sample of the US (491 participants) recruited through the online platform Prolific. Mainland China corresponds to a diverse sample (489 participants) recruited with the assistance of the online platform Wenjuanxing. Emigres from Mainland China - Political (206 participants) corresponds to participants from China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads and who reported that one of the three main reasons motivating their migration was political freedom. Conversely, Emigres from Mainland China - Non Political (589 participants) corresponds to participants from China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads and who did not include political freedom as one of the three main reasons motivating their migration. Emigres from HK/Taiwan (284 participants) corresponds to participants from Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan living in North America, who were also recruited via Facebook targeted ads.

2017 – 2020 wave of the World Values Survey, more Americans than Chinese expressed a favorable view of “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.”<sup>11</sup> That seeming anomaly raises the possibility that the indirect, incentivized measure we devised captures the underlying disposition towards majority rule better than

<sup>11</sup>Between 2005 and 2020, the World Values Survey asked participants about the appropriateness of “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections”. That scenario was judged “very good” or “fairly good” by a smaller proportion of Chinese than of U.S. respondents, a difference that rose sharply in the 2017-20 wave in which fully 52% of U.S. respondents were approving of a strong leader, vs. only 41% of Chinese. The proportion judging having such a strong leader as good or very good rose over time in both countries: from 13% to 41% in China and from 29% to 52% in the U.S. between the 1999-2004 and the 2017-2020 waves of the WVS. However, almost a quarter of Chinese respondents versus less than 5% in the U.S. chose not to answer the question, which illustrates the challenge of adequately eliciting democratic sentiment in contexts of censorship when the question deals with politically sensitive issues.



that well-known direct survey did. More important, the fact that the average responses to the survey in China fall in between those of emigres from the country who do and do not mention political motivation for living in N. America suggests that people who live in China may themselves have diverse views about democracy. Among the people who left China for North America, that is, a self-reported political reason behind migration allows us to distinguish a subset who view democracy favorably. The fact that revealed preference for democracy is higher on average among participants in China than among migrants who moved for non-political reasons (p-value of difference= 0.0167) suggests that the share of people inclined favorably towards democracy within the PRC is non-negligible.

Although our omission of sensitive questions from the PRC survey leaves us without a sorting variable as transparent as is the reason behind migration variable for émigrés, data from that survey allow us to assess some correlates of (un)favorability towards democracy within the country. Table 3 presents bivariate OLS regressions of behavior in our task on respondents' characteristics (Panel A) as well as their economic experiences (Panel B). The table shows that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status are not significantly associated with democratic sentiment. However, students (mainly in colleges and universities) in China reveal a significantly stronger democratic sentiment, which is also in line with a positive association between the latter and educational attainment (although this last association is imprecisely estimated). Also, while respondents who were born and raised in urban settings don't answer the methods question differently than those who were not, participants whose families engaged in rural-urban or urban-rural migration within China during their childhood exhibit a significantly weaker favorability towards democracy, perhaps because they tend to perceive such migration as a move up in the world that became possible only during the CCP's "reform and opening" era. Third, respondents from provinces that experienced stronger exporting performance in the past two decades reveal a significantly weaker democratic sentiment, a result that aligns with recent papers documenting the effect of exporting performance on political stability in China (Campante, Chor and Li, 2023). These associations thus suggest that economic changes in China that likely improved the material wellbeing of individuals and their families predict a lower proclivity to favor democracy as a system of government.

**Table 3:** Correlates of Revealed Preference for Democracy in Mainland China

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Panel A: Individual Characteristics</b>						
	Dependent Variable: Majority Method					
Age	-0.008 (0.005)					
Gender		0.035 (0.093)				
Married			-0.149 (0.087)			
High SES				0.099 (0.109)		
High Educational Attainment					0.262 (0.273)	
Current University Student						0.174 (0.092)
R-squared	0.005	0.000	0.005	0.002	0.002	0.005
<b>Panel B: Economic Experiences</b>						
	Dependent Variable: Majority Method					
Urban Background	0.091 (0.075)					
Migrated Within China During Childhood		-0.186 (0.068)				
Province GDP Growth(Average 92-19)			-0.216 (3.526)			
Province Imports/GDP(Average 92-19)				-0.288 (0.278)		
Province Exports/GDP(Average 92-19)					-0.625 (0.230)	
Province FDI/GDP(Average 92-19)						-0.100 (0.083)
R-squared	0.002	0.007	0.000	0.003	0.012	0.003
Observations	489	489	489	489	489	489

Each panel-column reports results from a single OLS regression of Majority Method on the variable described in the row heading. Individual-level data comes from information shared by survey respondents in mainland China who were recruited with the assistance of the online platform Wenjuanxing (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection), whereas province-level data comes from China's National Bureau of Statistics and the UNDP National Human Development Report. Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with 1 corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Province-level information is linked to a respondent based on her reported province of origin. Online Appendix A.1 provides further details about the definition and the scale of each variable in the row heading. Panel A presents robust standard errors in parentheses, while Panel B presents robust standard errors clustered at the province of origin of the respondent.

## 5 Conclusion

We introduce a simple incentivized task in which participants reveal their preference for a decision method that relies on the majority versus one that relies on an authority, and we show that it robustly predicts preference for democracy versus authoritarianism as political systems despite avoidance of explicitly political questions. Given the recent rise of authoritarianism in different regions of the world and the increasing ability of autocratic regimes to censor free speech, this measure provides a way in which scholars can gauge democratic sentiment in contexts where such research is politically sensitive.

We validated our experimental decision task with data from émigrés from Greater China in North America, as well as a representative sample in the US, relying on a survey question that predicts democratic behavior in different contexts. Beliefs about the competence of an authority relative to the average person appear to partially explain our task’s ability to gauge preference for democracy, but this does not preclude the role of other considerations, such as willingness to foster people’s participation or to curb the arbitrariness of an authority, in driving variations in democratic sentiment. Results of randomizations embedded in the survey suggest that beliefs about experimenters’ intentions, as well as immediate associations between the task and the government that come to participants’ minds, play no role in explaining their choices.

Our measure allows us to document substantial variation in support for democracy across multiple demographics. Unsurprisingly, it suggests that favorability towards democratic choice is greater in the U.S. than in mainland China, with the views of émigrés from Taiwan and Hong Kong lying intermediate between these. More interestingly, émigrés from mainland China who indicate that political freedom is among the factors explaining their remaining in N. America show greater favorability towards democracy than average Taiwan and Hong Kong émigrés, while mainland émigrés who do not include political freedom among their motives are even less inclined towards majority rule than average participants in China. The latter fact implies that our measure detects the presence of some pro-democracy sentiment in the PRC. Although we omitted politically sensitive questions from our PRC survey, we could detect some correlates of favorability towards majority rule, including that current students tend to display stronger democratic sentiment, while participants from provinces that benefited most from China’s export boom tend to view democracy less favorably. Its ability to detect such patterns underscores our measure’s potential usefulness to researchers interested in studying democratic support in China as well as in other contexts where eliciting such views is challenging.

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Online Appendix

# Gauging Preference for Democracy in Absence of Free Speech

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## Appendix A.1 - Definition of Variables

- Age: Participant’s reported age. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.
- Authority Treatment: Indicator that equals 1 if, before making a decision in the incentivized task, the participant was shown a prompt indicating that information about participants’ education and abilities could be used in a way that would be consistent with selecting a skilled authority, if a group’s solution method in the task turned out to be the authority method. See Section 2 and Online Appendix B.1 for more details about the task.
- China – Non-Political: Indicator that equals 1 if the respondent reports being originally from mainland China, or if she is a direct descendant of someone from mainland China, and does not report “political freedom” as one of the three main reasons that motivated her move to North America. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America). Alternative options were “came here as a child with my family,” “I was attracted here by educational opportunities for myself and/or my children,” “it was/is my spouse’s preference,” “better job opportunities for me,” “better job opportunities for my spouse,” “better opportunities in general for my children,” “my relatives live here,” “cleaner air,” “lifestyle factors,” “political freedom,” “other reasons,” and “not sure.”
- China – Political: Indicator that equals 1 if the respondent reports being originally from mainland China, or if she is a direct descendant of someone from mainland China, and reports “political freedom” as one of the three main reasons that motivated her move to North America (see previous item). Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America).
- Completed BA or more: Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports having completed university studies or post-graduate education. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.
- Completed High School or More: Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports having an educational attainment of high school or higher. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.

- **Current University Student:** Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports being a university student at the time of the survey. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.
- **Electoral College Undemocratic:** A participant’s view on the Electoral College in the US as an institution that is in line or not with a fully functioning democracy. Answers were on a 1 (strongly agree with the Electoral College being democratic) to 5 (strongly disagrees with the Electoral College being democratic). Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative).
- **Father’s Educational Attainment:** Indicator that equals 1 if a respondent reports that their father reached an educational attainment of high school or higher. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America) and in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative).
- **Father’s Urban Origin:** Indicator that equals 1 if a respondent reports that their father lived in an urban setting. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America).
- **Freedom of Speech:** A participant’s reported view on the relevance of freedom of speech on a 1 (not very important) to 5 (extremely important) scale. Information recorded in the rounds of data recruited in North America through Prolific and Facebook targeted ads.
- **Gender:** Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports identifying as female and 0 otherwise. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.
- **High SES (US):** Indicator that equals 1 if, when asked what best describes her current socioeconomic status, the participant selected the following option: “Combined household earnings above \$135,000. Usually, at least one family member completed college, may also have post-college education; the family usually owns its housing and enjoys vacations and travel; the family may have several cars.” Information recorded in the round of data recruited via Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America) and in the round of data recruited via Prolific (US representative).



- High SES (China): Indicator that equals 1 if, when asked about her family’s average disposable income per person, the respondent reported that the average exceeds 40,000 yuan. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through the online platform Wenjuanxing (participants in mainland China).
- Hong Kong: Indicator that equals 1 if the respondent reports being originally from Hong Kong or Macau, or if she is a direct descendant of someone from Hong Kong or Macau. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America).
- Low SES (US): Indicator that equals 1 if, when asked what best describes her current socioeconomic status, the participant selected the following option: “Combined household earnings below \$45,000. Usually, adults in family have high school education or less; housing typically rented; family has one or no cars.” Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America) and in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative).
- Low SES (China): Indicator that equals 1 if, when asked about her family’s average disposable income per person, the respondent reported that the average does not exceed 7,400 yuan. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through the online platform Wenjuanxing (participants in mainland China).
- Majority Method: Participants’ reported preference for a method to assign a decision for a group of 5 in the incentivized task. Answers were on a 1-5 scale, with 1 and 2 corresponding to a strong preference and a preference for the authority method, respectively, 3 corresponding to indifference, and 4 and 5 corresponding to a preference and a strong preference for the majority method, respectively. See Section 2 and Online Appendix B.1 for more details about the task. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.
- Married: Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports being married and 0 otherwise. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.
- Migrated Internally Within China in Childhood: Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports that they were born in a rural setting and moved to an urban one (or

vice versa) during their childhood. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through the online platform Wenjuanxing (participants in mainland China).

- **Mother’s Educational Attainment:** Indicator that equals 1 if a respondent reports that their father reached an educational attainment of high school or higher. recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America) and in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative).
- **Mother’s Urban Origin:** Indicator that equals 1 if a respondent reports that their mother lived in an urban setting. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America).
- **Negative CCP Narrative:** Indicator that equals 1 if, before making a decision in the incentivized task, the participant was asked to read a text (followed by incentivized comprehension question) describing the experience of a small farmer who had to move from his land because of the construction of a city that turned out to be abandoned. See Section 2.1 and Online Appendix B.1 for more details about the protocol. Information present and recorded only in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America). [Participants in that round were randomly assigned at most one out of this, a Positive CCP Narrative (see below), and a Neutral Narrative (see below), with a sixth of participants having none of the items.]
- **Neutral Narrative:** Indicator that equals 1 if, before making a decision in the incentivized task, the participant was asked to read a text (followed by an incentivized comprehension question) discussing Chinese cuisine. See Section 2.1 and Online Appendix B.1 for more details about the protocol. Information present and recorded only in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America). [Participants in that round were randomly assigned at most one out of this, a Negative CCP Narrative (see above), and a Positive CCP Narrative (see below), with a sixth of participants having none of the items.]
- **Number of Children:** Number of children that the participant reports she currently has. Information recorded in all rounds of data collection.

- **Positive CCP Narrative:** Indicator that equals 1 if, before making a decision in the incentivized task, the participant was asked to read a text (followed by incentivized comprehension question) describing the experience of a young entrepreneur who was able to consolidate a successful business that would not have been possible without China’s investment in internet connectivity. See Section 2.1 and Online Appendix B.1 for more details about the protocol. Information present and recorded only in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America). [Participants in that round were randomly assigned at most one out of this, a Negative CCP Narrative (see above), and a Neutral Narrative (see above), with a sixth of participants having none of the items.]
- **Preference for Democracy:** Participants’ reported preference for democracy as a system of government versus having a strong unconstrained leader (one a 1-5 scale, with 1 corresponding to strong preference for the latter and 5 to a strong preference for the former). Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America) and in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative).
- **Preference for Democratizing Leader:** A participant’s reported preference for a hypothetical successor to Xi Jingpi who would be a democratizing leader versus a hypothetical successor who would look for consensus within the CCP. Answers were on a 1 (strong preference for democratizing leader) to 5 (strong preference for a stability leader). Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America).
- **Province GDP Growth (Average 92-19):** Calculated from data on Provincial Per Capita Gross National Income in 2011 PPP in USD given in U.N.D.P. National Human Development Report 2019, Table A5.7. We link this province-level information to a respondent based on the province of origin of her mother, as reported by the respondent in our survey conducted in Mainland China.
- **Province Imports/ GDP (Average 92-19):** From National Bureau of Statistics of China (<https://data.stats.gov.cn/english/>) regional/annual by province/indicators/foreign trade and economic cooperation/ total value of imports and exports commodities by destination and catchments. We link this province-level information to a respondent

based on the province of origin of her mother, as reported by the respondent in our survey conducted in Mainland China.

- Province Exports/ GDP (Average 92 -19): See previous item. We link this province-level information to a respondent based on the province of origin of her mother, as reported by the respondent in our survey conducted in Mainland China.
- Province FDI/GDP (Average 92-19): From National Bureau of Statistics of China (<https://data.stats.gov.cn/english/>) regional/annual by province/indicators/foreign trade and economic cooperation/registration of foreign-funded enterprises (year-end)/total investment of foreign-funded enterprises (USD million). We link this province-level information to a respondent based on the province of origin of her mother, as reported by the respondent in our survey conducted in Mainland China.
- Self-reported Ideology: A participant's reported ideology on a 1 (very liberal) to 5 (very conservative) scale. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America) and in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative).
- Skilled Authority: A participant's reported belief about the likelihood that a skilled participant would be assigned as the group's authority if the authority method ended up determining a group's decision in the incentivized task. Answers were on a scale of 0 (did not think about it at all) to 5 (thought that it was very likely). Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America), in the round of data recruited through Prolific (US representative), and in the round of data recruited through the online platform Wenjuanxing (participants in mainland China).
- Taiwan: Indicator that equals 1 if the respondent reports being originally from Taiwan, or if she is a direct descendant of someone from Taiwan. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through Facebook targeted ads (émigrés from Greater China in North America).
- Urban Background: Indicator that equals 1 if the participant reports that they were born and grew up in an urban setting. Information recorded in the round of data recruited through the online platform Wenjuanxing (participants in mainland China).

## Appendix A.2 - Summary Statistics

	Obs	Mean	Std	Min	Max
<b>Panel A: Emigres Greater China living in North America</b>					
Age	1,107	37.78	13.65	18.00	78.00
Authority Treatment	1,107	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00
China	1,107	0.74	0.44	0.00	1.00
Completed BA or More	1,107	0.78	0.41	0.00	1.00
Completed High School or More	1,107	0.98	0.14	0.00	1.00
Currently University Student	1,107	0.27	0.45	0.00	1.00
Democratizing Leader	1,107	2.39	1.15	1.00	5.00
Father's Educational Attainment	1,107	0.84	0.37	0.00	1.00
Father's Urban Origin	1,107	0.66	0.47	0.00	1.00
Gender	1,107	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00
High SES	1,107	0.18	0.38	0.00	1.00
Hong Kong	1,107	0.12	0.33	0.00	1.00
Low SES	1,107	0.33	0.47	0.00	1.00
Married	1,107	0.49	0.50	0.00	1.00
Majority Method	1,107	3.68	1.12	1.00	5.00
Migration: Political Freedom	1,065	0.24	0.43	0.00	1.00
Mother's Educational Attainment	1,107	0.80	0.40	0.00	1.00
Mother's Urban Origin	1,107	0.72	0.45	0.00	1.00
Number of Children	1,107	0.86	1.08	0.00	5.00
Negative CCP Narrative	1,107	0.33	0.47	0.00	1.00
Neutral Narrative	1,107	0.16	0.37	0.00	1.00
Positive CCP Narrative	1,107	0.34	0.48	0.00	1.00
Preference for Democracy	1,107	3.70	1.12	1.00	5.00
Second Generation (born in N. Am.)	1,107	0.04	0.19	0.00	1.00
Self-reported Ideology	1,107	2.43	0.98	1.00	5.00
Skilled Authority	1,107	2.44	1.73	0.00	5.00
Taiwan	1,107	0.13	0.34	0.00	1.00
<b>Panel B: Participants in US Representative Survey</b>					
Age	484	45.78	15.94	18.00	92.00
Authority Treatment	491	0.51	0.50	0.00	1.00
Completed BA or More	491	0.58	0.49	0.00	1.00
Completed High School or More	491	0.94	0.24	0.00	1.00
Currently University Student	491	0.10	0.31	0.00	1.00
Electoral College Undemocratic	477	3.65	1.49	1.00	5.00
Father's Educational Attainment	478	0.86	0.35	0.00	1.00
Gender	491	0.51	0.50	0.00	1.00
High SES	486	0.12	0.32	0.00	1.00
Low SES	486	0.38	0.49	0.00	1.00
Married	490	0.42	0.49	0.00	1.00
Majority Method	491	4.22	1.04	1.00	5.00
Mother's Educational Attainment	481	0.86	0.35	0.00	1.00
Number of Children	491	1.20	1.44	0.00	6.00
Preference for Democracy	491	4.51	0.90	1.00	5.00
Self-reported Ideology	490	2.59	1.14	1.00	5.00
<b>Panel C: Participants in Mainland China</b>					
Age	489	31.39	8.56	18.00	65.00
Authority Treatment	489	0.49	0.50	0.00	1.00
Completed BA or More	489	0.73	0.44	0.00	1.00
Completed High School or More	489	0.98	0.15	0.00	1.00
Currently University Student	489	0.23	0.42	0.00	1.00
Gender	489	0.57	0.50	0.00	1.00
High SES	489	0.24	0.42	0.00	1.00
Low SES	489	0.13	0.34	0.00	1.00
Married	489	0.64	0.48	0.00	1.00
Majority Method	489	3.68	1.02	1.00	5.00
Migrated Within China During Childhood	489	0.29	0.45	0.00	1.00
Number of Children	489	0.79	0.71	0.00	3.00
Urban Background	489	0.49	0.50	0.00	1.00

## Appendix A.3 - Reported Preference for Democracy Predicts Democratic Behavior in Different Contexts

### Appendix A.3.1 - Preference for Democracy Predicts Democratic Behavior, Evidence from Latinobarometro

	Voted		Voting Matters	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Preference for Democracy	0.099 (0.008)	0.082 (0.007)	0.200 (0.009)	0.183 (0.005)
R-squared	0.012	0.065	0.039	0.065
Observations	41834	41834	161984	161984
Mean Dep. Var	0.754	0.754	0.617	0.617
Countries	19	19	19	19
Clusters	317	317	317	317
Subnational Region FE		✓		✓
Survey-Round FE		✓		✓

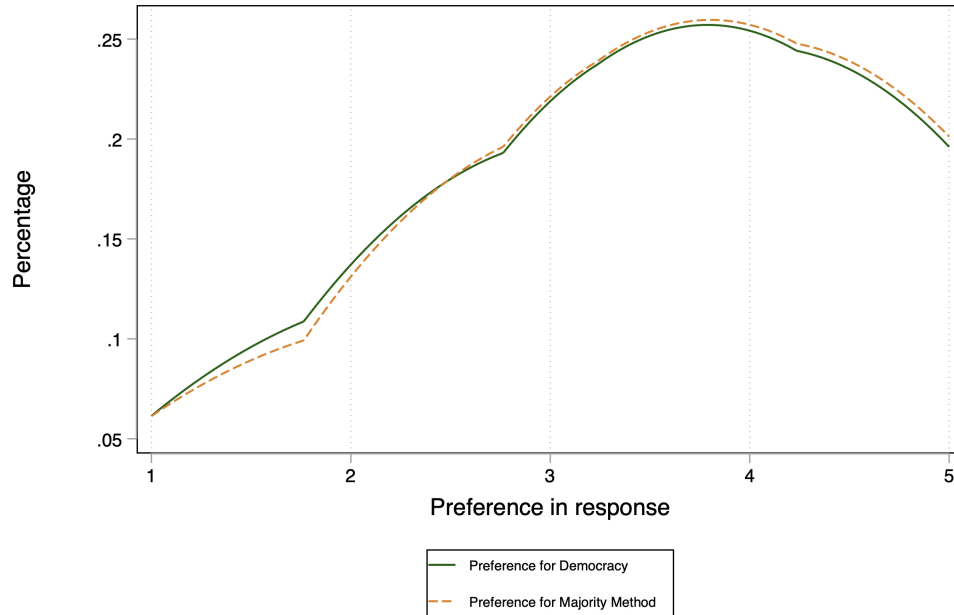
The table uses data from Latinobarometro between 1995 and 2020 to show that reported preference for democracy predicts actual democratic behavior. Each Column shows the results of a single regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variables described in the row headings. Preference for Democracy is an indicator variable that equals 1 for respondents who reported that democracy is preferred over other kinds of governments, 0 for those who reported that it does not matter or that an authoritarian ruler may be desirable under some circumstances. Variables in the column headings are indicators that equal 1 if the respondent reports having voted (columns 1 and 2) or agrees with the claim that voting is important (columns 3 and 4). Subnational Region FE and Survey-round FE correspond to fixed effects for participants' subnational region and the survey-round in which they were interviewed, respectively. Standard errors clustered at the subnational region in parentheses.

### Appendix A.3.2 - Preference for Democracy Predicts Democratic Behavior, Evidence from the World Values Survey

	Always Votes in Local Elections		Always Votes in National Elections	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Perceived Importance of Democracy	0.028 (0.002)	0.020 (0.001)	0.031 (0.002)	0.022 (0.002)
R-squared	0.015	0.205	0.018	0.204
Observations	78343	78343	79304	79304
Mean Dep. Var	0.565	0.565	0.599	0.599
Countries	55	55	55	55
Clusters	757	757	757	757
Subnational Region FE		✓		✓

The table uses data from the 6th round of the World Values Surveys to show that reported preference for democracy predicts actual democratic behavior. Each Column shows the results of a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variables described in the row headings and a constant. Perceived Importance of Democracy is a participant's view of the relevance of democracy as a system of government on a 1-10 scale (higher values corresponds to stronger preference for democracy). Variables in the column headings are indicators that equal 1 if the respondent reports always voting in local elections (columns 1-2) or always voting in national elections (columns 3-4). Subnational Region FE corresponds to a set of fixed effects for participants' subnational region. Data comes from 55 countries and it excludes respondents from Greater China. Standard errors clustered at the subnational region in parentheses.

## Appendix A.4 - Distribution of Preference for Democracy Compared to Distribution of Majority Method



The figure displays the kernel distribution of participants' reported preferences for democracy vis-a-vis the kernel distribution of participants' choices in the decision task. Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1 to 5 scale. Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with one corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Data comes from émigrés from Greater China living in North America, who were recruited with the assistance of Facebook targeted ads.



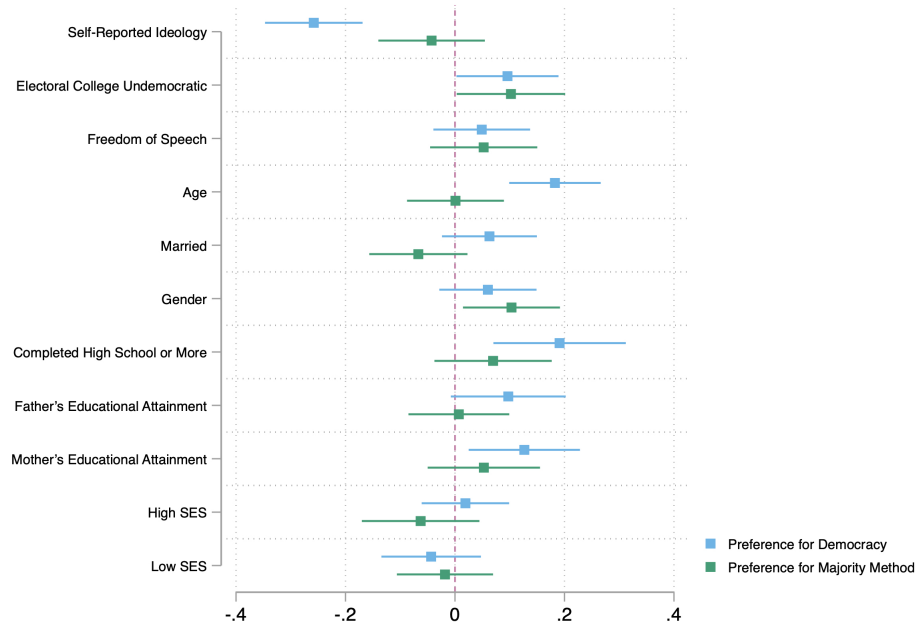
## Appendix A.5 - Performance of Decision Task in the US

### Appendix A.5.1 - Correlation Between Preference for Democracy and The Decision Task in the US

	Preference for Democracy			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Majority Method	0.117 (0.055)	0.112 (0.055)	0.113 (0.055)	0.117 (0.054)
Observations	491	491	491	491
R-squared	0.014	0.016	0.022	0.044
Gender		✓	✓	✓
Region of Birth FE			✓	✓
Father's Continent of Birth FE				✓

The table shows that behavior in the decision task robustly predicts preference for democracy for a representative sample of the US. Each column reports standardized coefficient(s) from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variable(s) described in the row heading(s). An observation is a respondent in the US who was recruited via Prolific to ensure a representative sample of US adults (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1 to 5 scale. Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with one corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Gender is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports identifying as a female, 0 otherwise. Region of Birth FE corresponds to fixed effects for whether the respondent was born in the Northeast, Atlantic Region, South, Mid-West, or West in the US. Parents' Educational Attainment corresponds to indicators for whether each parent completed high school or more. Parents' Urban Controls corresponds to indicators for whether each parent came from an urban background. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis.

## Appendix A.5.2 - Correlates of Majority Method Compared to Correlates of Preference for Democracy in the US Representative Sample



The figure shows the point estimates and confidence intervals at the 95% level of different bivariate OLS regressions of Preference for Democracy (in blue) or Majority Method (in green) on the variables in the row headings and a constant, one at a time (online Appendix A.1 provides further details about the definition and the scale of each variable). Data comes from survey responses of US respondents who were recruited via Prolific to ensure a representative sample of US adults (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1 to 5 scale. Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with one corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule.

## Appendix A.6 - Robustness of the Association Between Majority Method and Skilled Authority

	Majority Method			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Skilled Authority - Alternative 1	-0.150 (0.038)	-0.129 (0.038)		
Skilled Authority - Alternative 2			-0.159 (0.033)	-0.136 (0.033)
Observations	817	816	1107	1107
R-squared	0.022	0.067	0.025	0.068
Gender		✓		✓
Parents' Urban Controls		✓		✓
Country of Birth FE		✓		✓
Mother's Country FE		✓		✓
Father's Country FE		✓		✓
Parents' Educational Attainment		✓		✓

The table shows that the association between behavior in the decision task and beliefs about the competence of the authority is robust to different definitions of the latter. Each column reports standardized coefficient from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variable(s) described in the row heading(s). An observation is an émigré from Greater China living in North America who was recruited via Facebook targeted ads to complete an online survey (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with one corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Skilled Authority -Alternative 1 and Skilled Authority - Alternative 2 are based on a participant's reported belief in the likelihood that the authority in the task would be skilled, on a 0-5 scale; Alternative 1 defines 0 as a missing, whereas Alternative 2 inputs a value of 3 to respondents who selected a 0. Gender is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports identifying as a female, 0 otherwise. Country of Birth FE, Mother Country FE, and Father Country FE correspond to fixed effects for the respondent's, her mother's, and her father's countries of birth, respectively. Parents' Educational Attainment corresponds to indicators for whether each parent completed high school or more. Parents' Urban Controls corresponds to indicators for whether each parent came from an urban background. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis.

## Appendix A.7 - Narratives About the CCP Have No Effect on Behaviors in the Decision Task

	Preference for Majority Method			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Negative CCP Narrative	-0.070 (0.073)	-0.063 (0.087)	-0.089 (0.072)	-0.080 (0.088)
Positive CCP Narrative	-0.023 (0.072)	-0.016 (0.087)	-0.043 (0.071)	-0.033 (0.087)
Neutral Narrative		0.014 (0.100)		0.019 (0.099)
Observations	1107	1107	1107	1107
R-squared	0.001	0.001	0.051	0.051
Gender			✓	✓
Parents' Urban Controls			✓	✓
Country of Birth FE			✓	✓
Mother's Country FE			✓	✓
Father's Country FE			✓	✓
Parents' Educational Attainment			✓	✓

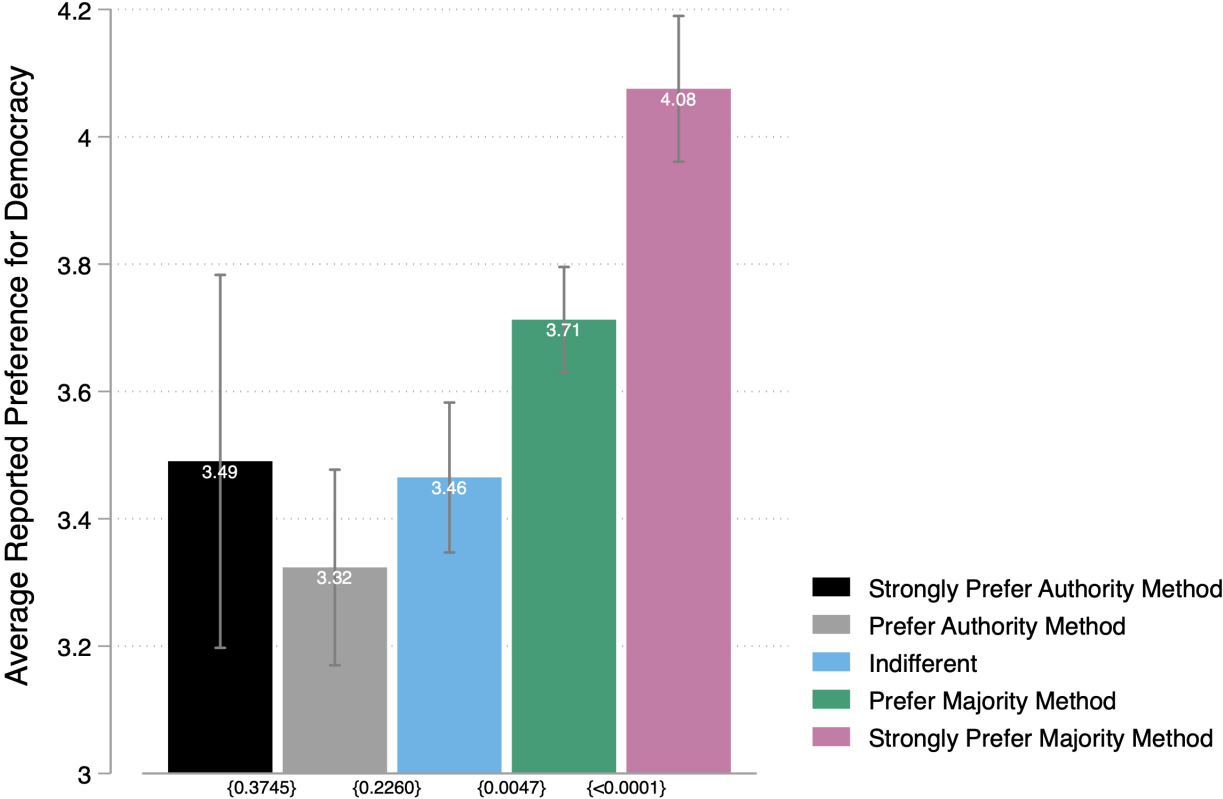
The table shows that exposing participants to different narratives about the policies of the Chinese Communist Party has an insignificant and economically small effect on behavior in the task. Each column reports the coefficients from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variables described in the row headings. An observation is an émigré from Greater China living in North America who was recruited via Facebook targeted ads to complete an online survey (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Majority Method is the preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task, with one corresponding to a strong preference for a decision by an authority designated by the experimenter, and 5 corresponding to a strong preference for majority rule. Positive CCP Narrative, Negative CCP Narrative, and Neutral Narrative are indicators that equal 1 if, before participating in the decision task, the respondent was shown a narrative (followed by an incentivized comprehension question) that casts a positive, negative, or neutral light on the CCP (see Appendix A.1 for more information about these indicators). Gender is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports identifying as a female, 0 otherwise. Country of Birth FE, Mother Country FE, and Father Country FE correspond to fixed effects for the respondent's, her mother's, and her father's countries of birth, respectively. Parents' Educational Attainment corresponds to indicators for whether each parent completed high school or more. Parents' Urban Controls corresponds to indicators for whether each parent came from an urban background. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis.

## Appendix A.8 - Association Between Preference for Democracy and Alternative Definitions of Majority Method

	Preference for Democracy			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Majority Method - Alternative 1	0.243 (0.046)	0.229 (0.047)		
Majority Method - Alternative 2			0.182 (0.030)	0.166 (0.031)
Observations	543	541	1107	1107
R-squared	0.054	0.133	0.033	0.127
Gender		✓		✓
Parents' Urban Controls		✓		✓
Country of Birth FE		✓		✓
Mother's Country FE		✓		✓
Father's Country FE		✓		✓
Parents' Educational Attainment		✓		✓

The table shows that the association between preference for democracy and behavior in the task is robust to different ways of defining the latter. Each column reports coefficients from a single OLS regression of the dependent variable described in the column heading on the variable(s) described in the row heading(s). An observation is an émigré from Greater China living in North America who was recruited via Facebook targeted ads to complete an online survey (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection). Preference for Democracy corresponds to the strength with which participants report preferring democracy as a system of government over a system in which the authority is unconstrained, on a 1 to 5 scale. Majority Method - Alternative 1 and Majority Method - Alternative 2 are based on a participant's preference over a method to determine a decision for a group in the incentivized task. Alternative 1 treats "Prefer Authority Rule" and "Prefer Majority Rule" as missing values (i.e., it only examines participants who strongly preferred either rule or those who were indifferent). Alternative 2 holds a value of 1 when the participant strongly preferred or preferred an authority rule in the decision task, a value of 2 when she was indifferent, and a value of 3 when she preferred or strongly preferred a majority rule. Gender is an indicator that equals one if the respondent reports identifying as a female, 0 otherwise. Country of Birth FE, Mother Country FE, and Father Country FE correspond to fixed effects for the respondent's, her mother's, and her father's countries of birth, respectively. Parents' Educational Attainment corresponds to indicators for whether each parent completed high school or more. Parents' Urban Controls corresponds to indicators for whether each parent came from an urban background. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis.

### Appendix A.9 - Average Preference for Democracy Across Choices in the Decision Task



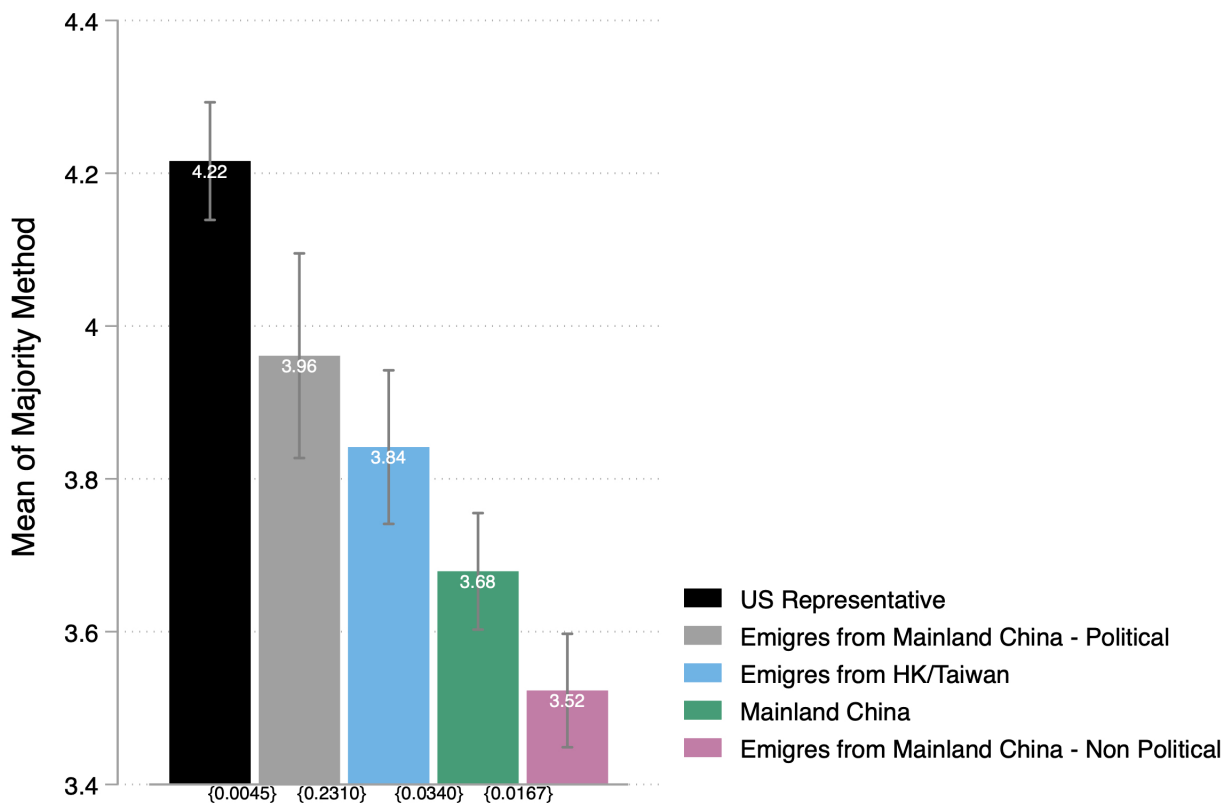
The figure shows the average of the reported Preference for Democracy among participants who selected each of the options in the decision task, along with confidence intervals of each of those averages at the 90% level. The numbers appearing below and under each pair of bars represent the p-value of a test that the average preference for democracy is the same in each case (for example, a test that the average preference for democracy of those selecting prefer majority method and of those selecting strongly prefer majority method is the same rejects that hypothesis with  $p < 0.0001$ ). Data comes from émigrés from Greater China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads to complete an online survey (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection).

## Appendix A.10 - Characteristics of Participants Who Selected ‘Prefer’ Compared to Those Who Selected ‘Strongly Prefer’

	Prefer	Strongly Prefer or Indifferent	OLS coefficient	SE	Obs.
Age	38.92	36.59	2.33	0.82	1,107
Female	0.51	0.50	0.01	0.03	1,107
High SES	0.17	0.18	-0.01	0.02	1,107
Married	0.49	0.49	0.00	0.03	1,107
Number of Children	0.91	0.81	0.10	0.07	1,107
Completed High School or More.	0.98	0.98	-0.00	0.01	1,107
Completed BA or More	0.78	0.78	-0.00	0.02	1,107
Father’s Educational Attainment	0.84	0.84	0.00	0.02	1,107
Mother’s Educational Attainment	0.80	0.80	0.00	0.02	1,107
Time Duration (sec)	1,560.58	2,116.20	-555.62	398.43	1,107
Math Ability (1 to 5)	3.80	3.96	-0.16	0.06	1,107
Self-reported Trust	3.24	3.29	-0.05	0.07	1,107
Self-reported Ideology	2.46	2.41	0.04	0.06	1,107
Number of Observation	564	543			1,107

The table shows the average of the characteristics described in the row headings for participants who chose Prefer Authority Method or Prefer Majority Method in the decision task (labeled ‘Prefer’) and the corresponding average for those who chose Strongly Prefer either method or who were indifferent (labeled ‘Strongly Prefer or Indifferent’). Each row in the column labeled ‘OLS coefficient’ comes from a regression of the dependent variable in the row heading on an indicator that equals one for respondents who chose Prefer Authority Method or Prefer Majority Method in the decision task, while the column labeled ‘SE’ presents the corresponding robust standard errors of those coefficients. Data comes from émigrés from Greater China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads to complete an online survey (see Section 2.1 and online Appendix B.1 for further details about the data collection).

## Appendix A.11 - Average of Majority Method Across Different Samples



The figure shows the average of Majority Method (i.e., response on preferred decision method in the incentivized task, ranging from 1 = strongly prefer authority method to 5 = strongly prefer majority method) for different subsamples, along with confidence intervals of each of those averages at the 90% level. The numbers appearing below and under each pair of bars represent the p-value of a test that the average preference for Majority Method is the same in each case (for example, a test that the average preference for Majority Method of the US representative sample and of Emigrés from mainland China who moved for political reasons is the same rejects that hypothesis with  $p = 0.0045$ ). US Representative corresponds to a representative sample of the US (491 participants) recruited through the online platform Prolific. Mainland China corresponds to a diverse sample (489 participants) recruited with the assistance of the online platform Wenjuanxing. Emigres from Mainland China - Political (206 participants) corresponds to participants from China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads and who reported that one of the three main reasons motivating their migration was political freedom. Conversely, Emigres from Mainland China - Non Political (589 participants) corresponds to participants from China living in North America who were recruited via Facebook targeted ads and who did not include political freedom as one of the three main reasons motivating their migration. Emigres from HK/Taiwan (284 participants) corresponds to participants from Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan living in North America, who were also recruited via Facebook targeted ads.