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Willingness to Boycott Russian Goods in China: How Political Ideology Shapes Consumer Preferences in an Authoritarian Context

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ABSTRACT

Who is likely to engage in Anti-Russian boycotts in China? While existing literature focuses on ethnocentrism and nationalism as drivers of political consumerism, this article explores political boycotts that contradict the dominant discourse of the Chinese Communist Party. Drawing on original survey data, the article uses two ideological dimensions—social authoritarianism and attitudes to economic organisation – to delineate three distinct ideological leanings in China: liberalism, the New Left and neo-authoritarianism. The article demonstrates that liberals are more likely than others to support the boycott of Russian products. Additionally, all three groups are more willing to boycott Russian goods if they hold egalitarian attitudes. The findings shed light on the causes of anti-Russian sentiment in China and its likely implications for the Russian economy.

KEYWORDS

political participation;
political ideology; boycott;
political consumerism;
Russia; Ukraine

Introduction

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the government of the People's Republic of China has faced criticism for its ambiguous attitude towards the Russian Federation. While not openly condoning the invasion, China refuses to issue a condemnation, and the two countries are reported to have developed stronger diplomatic and economic ties since the war begun.¹ China's close relationship with Russia is also reflected in the attitudes of China's general population. Recent surveys show that most Chinese people hold a positive view of Russia, despite its war with Ukraine.² However, while many Chinese citizens express solidarity with Russia, a small proportion disapprove of its aggression. Only two days after the invasion, Chinese authorities censored an open letter issued by Chinese historians who condemned Russia and called for an end to the war.³ Similarly, a considerable number of posts on

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¹Clara Fong and Lindsay Maizland, 'China and Russia: Exploring Ties Between Two Authoritarian Powers' (*Council on Foreign Relations* 20 March 2024). <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-russia-relationship-xi-putin-taiwan-ukraine>> accessed 10 July 2024.

²US-China Perception Monitor, 'Chinese Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine' (2022). <<https://uscnpm.org/2022/04/19/chinese-public-opinion-war-in-ukraine/>> accessed 10 July 2024; Richard Q. Turcsányi, Klára Dubravčíková, Kristína Kironská, Tao Wang, James Iocovozzi, Peter Gries, Veronika Vaseková, and Andrew Chubb, 'Chinese views of the world at the time of the Russia-Ukraine war. Evidence from a March 2022 public opinion survey' (Palacky University Olomouc and CEIAS, 2022).

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Chinese social media platforms like Weibo denounced Russian aggression and expressed support of Ukraine.⁴ More recently, when Alibaba, a Chinese e-commerce company, ceased to accept payments in Rubles and suspended deliveries to Russia, a group of netizens openly expressed their approval of the company's decision and declared their intention to boycott Russian products.⁵ This article investigates the motives of those Chinese citizens who are against Russia's invasion of Ukraine and oppose the official position of the Chinese government. It explores the attitudes of three distinct ideological groups in China to assess their support for boycotting Russian goods in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. It uses original survey data from 3,029 respondents in China collected as part of the 'Sinophone Borderlands—Interaction at the Edges' project⁶ to better understand the patterns of political engagement in an authoritarian context.

The article offers three distinct contributions to the existing literature. First, it provides a detailed study of political consumerism in an authoritarian setting. This is important, because most literature examines political consumerism in the context of democratic countries, where all channels of political participation are usually open to citizens and boycotts and buycotts are one of many available forms of activism.⁷ While some scholars believe that preferences of voters in authoritarian regimes are unimportant because citizens either cannot vote, or their vote has no impact on political outcomes,⁸ political consumerism can often be one of the few ways for citizens to engage in politics without the fear of repercussions. Consumer preferences are particularly revealing in more constricted political settings like the single party regime in China because they offer insights into possible patterns of current and future political engagement.

Second, this work expands on the existing literature on political consumerism in the Chinese context. While several studies discuss boycotts and buycotts in China, they tend to focus on political activism that is directly linked to animosity, nationalism, and ethnocentric causes.⁹ Political consumerism in these circumstances is not controversial and tends to take place within the framework of the official ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP). Unlike previous work, this study explores boycotts that allow citizens to express political views which contradict the commonly observed pro-Russian attitudes in China.¹⁰ The willingness to boycott Russian products signals a departure from conventional politics and provides an insight into the political activities of divergent ideological groups in China.

³Lily Kuo, 'Amid the roar of nationalism, a few antiwar voices in China emerge over Ukraine crisis' (*The Washington Post*, 28 February 2022). <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/28/china-russia-ukraine-public-opinion/>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁴Zhifan Luo and Muyang Li, 'Online posts may not reflect Chinese opinion when it comes to the Russian invasion of Ukraine' (*The Conversation*, 2022). <<https://theconversation.com/online-posts-may-not-reflect-chinese-opinion-when-it-comes-to-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-179136>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁵Zatankongjianshe, 'Zhenjing! Alibaba jujue jieshou eluosi lubu fukuan, zanting xiang eluosi gonghuo! [Shocking! Alibaba refuses to accept payments in Russian rubles and suspends supplies to Russia!]' (2 June 2024) <<https://www.163.com/dy/article/J3M6194K05566UP9.html>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁶The project was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (project number CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791).

⁷Dietlind Stolle, Marc Hooghe and Michele Micheletti, 'Politics in the supermarket: Political consumerism as a form of political participation' [2005] 26(3) *IPSR* 245-269; Lauren Copeland, 'Value Change and Political Action: Postmaterialism, Political Consumerism, and Political Participation' [2014] 42(2) *American Politics Research* 257-282.

⁸Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu, 'Gauging Preference Stability and Ideological Constraint under Authoritarian Rule' (2020) Twenty-first century China Center Research Paper, 254 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3679076>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁹Jill Gabrielle Klein, Richard Ettenson and Marlene D. Morris, 'The animosity model of foreign product purchase: An empirical test in the People's Republic of China' [1998] 62(1) *Journal of Marketing* 89-100; Jiaxuan He and Cheng Lu Wang, 'Cultural identity and consumer ethnocentrism impacts on preference and purchase of domestic versus import brands: An empirical study in China' [2015] 68(6) *Journal of Business Research* 1225-1233; Viking Bohman and Hillevi Pärup, 'Purchasing with the Party: Chinese consumer boycotts of foreign companies, 2008-2021' (Swedish National China Centre 2022).

¹⁰US-China Perception Monitor, 'Chinese Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine'.

Third, the authors provide a comprehensive framework for how political ideology is likely to impact political participation in China. Since motivation underpins virtually all aspects of political behaviour¹¹ and is highly predictive of political participation,¹² this study delineates possible causes of current and future political consumerism in the country. This is important, because to the author's knowledge, there are currently no studies examining the links between political ideology and political consumerism in China. This article investigates both social and economic dimensions of political ideology and argues that individuals can be grouped according to their support for free market economics and social authoritarianism. It identifies three distinct ideological groups—liberalism, the New Left and neo-authoritarianism. These groups are captured by an interaction between social authoritarianism and support for free-market practices. It finds that more liberal individuals—those who simultaneously support free-market practices and oppose authoritarianism—are the most likely to support the boycott of Russian products. This is an important finding because it demonstrates that when conventional channels of political participation and expression are constrained, those who oppose the regime might nevertheless try to resort to the market to express their political position. Finally, it demonstrates that the effect of ideological groupings, understood as the interaction between the support for free-market practices and social authoritarianism, is further moderated by respondents' egalitarian values. Liberals, the New Left supporters, and neo-authoritarians are all significantly more willing to boycott Russian goods if they believe that all groups in society should be equal. These findings demonstrate that psychological differences offer an important insight into the motivations of potential boycotters in the Chinese setting. Since Russian goods are readily available to Chinese consumers¹³ and China is encouraging more Russian exports to reach its market,¹⁴ the findings shed a light on the extent to which organised political consumerism could affect the Russian economy.

Literature Review

Political Consumerism in the Chinese Context

Consumers increasingly use the market to engage with politics. To become a political act, consumer activities must be guided by social, political, and ethical considerations.¹⁵ Such actions often manifest in two forms: boycotts, when consumers purposefully avoid buying certain products to influence companies' policies, and buycotts, when consumers purchase products from companies whose policies, practices or values they support.¹⁶ For example, consumers concerned with animal rights may choose to boycott products made of down feathers and buycott cosmetic products labelled as 'cruelty free'. Alternatively, patriotic consumers wishing to bolster their country's economy may boycott imported products and opt for goods manufactured within their state.

It is widely accepted that political consumerism is an unconventional form of political participation.¹⁷ Traditionally, political participation is defined as 'activities by private citizens

¹¹Brian J. Gaines and Benjamin R. Kantack, 'How Motivation Influences Political Decision Making' *Oxford University Press* (30 January 2020). <<https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1017>> accessed 10 July 2020.

¹²Tom W. van der Meer, Jan W. van Deth and Peer L. Scheepers, 'The politicized participant: Ideology and political action in 20 democracies' [2009] 42(11) *Comparative Political Studies* 1426-1457.

¹³Even before the war, examples of widely available Russian goods included alcohol, confectionery, tea, seafood and meat products. See: Daxue Consulting, 'The growing popularity of Russian products in China: Ice cream, beer, agriculture and more' (11 November 2020). <<https://daxueconsulting.com/russian-products-in-china/>> accessed 10 July 2024.

¹⁴Alexandra Prokopenko, 'What are the limits to Russia's "yuanization"?' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 927 May 2024). <<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/05/china-russia-yuan?lang=en>> accessed 10 July 2024; Interfax, 'China expands list of beef products Russia can export' (30 May 2024). <<https://interfax.com/news/room/top-stories/102795/>> accessed 10 July 2024.

¹⁵Stolle et al., 'Politics in the supermarket'.

¹⁶Michele Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal and Dietlind Stolle, *Politics, products, and markets exploring political consumerism past and present*. (Transaction Publishers 2004); Stolle et al., 'Politics in the supermarket'.

that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'.¹⁸ In Western democracies, this includes activities such as voting, campaigning, contacting politicians, and engaging in protest activities. However, recent decades have seen an expansion of political participation beyond the traditional realms. Van Deth defined political participation more broadly as 'activities used to express political aims and intentions'.¹⁹ In this context, he included political consumerism, where individuals use consumption to convey political opinions in their daily life. By merging private consumption with civic engagement, political consumers blur the boundaries between private and public political domains, expressing their political or ethical attitudes toward targeted actors.²⁰

Boycotts of foreign goods are a typical manifestation of political consumerism in China, with at least 90 cases of consumer boycotts of foreign companies between 2008 and 2021.²¹ So far, most research has focused on ethnocentric or nationalist boycotts which are in line with the official views of the CCP and directed at countries perceived as hostile to China.²² While existing research offers a valuable insight into political behaviour in China, it is limited to exploring the patterns of participation that are directly linked to or even shaped by the views of the political elite. They are usually triggered by perceived threats to China's foreign or national interests and many of them were directly supported by state affiliated organisations.²³ This research is different because it does not explore existing political campaigns, and its focus is firmly on the potential for political action that goes against the official CCP narrative. It investigates the *willingness* to boycott Russian products, rather than asking participants to clearly declare if they will do it in the future or have done it in the past.

This approach is based on the fact that the act of boycotting Russian goods is likely to be a clandestine activity in China and not many participants are likely to admit to it. While China has not officially supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia remains a key ally of the Chinese regime. Hence, Chinese citizens who boycott Russian goods in the wake of the war in Ukraine are involved in activities that convey a certain degree of disobedience. This is further emphasized by the fact that the Chinese government has been censoring anti-Russia and pro-Ukraine content. For example, on 22 February 2022, Shimian, an online video news outlet associated with the state news, shared instructions requiring 'not to publish news unfavourable to Russia'.²⁴ Similarly, voices critical of Russia were at the time frequently censored in China.²⁵ It's possible that Chinese citizens might feel uncomfortable, if not scared, to admit to having taken part in anti-Russian behaviours. Censorship means that apart from fearing consequences for admitting to having boycotted Russian goods, Chinese citizens would also be less likely to have heard of any organised anti-Russian campaigns and therefore less likely to have participated in them. This is especially pertinent given that the survey used in the article was conducted in 2022, only months after the Russian invasion of

¹⁷Stolle et al., 'Politics in the supermarket'.

¹⁸Sidney Verba and Norman H Nie, *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality* (University of Chicago Press 1987) 2.

¹⁹Jan W. van Deth, 'What is political participation?' (29 September 2021) Oxford University Press, <<https://oxfordre.com/politics/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9,780,190,228,637-e-68>> accessed 13 July 2024, 11.

²⁰Sebastian Koos, 'What Drives Political Consumption in Europe? A Multi-Level Analysis on Individual Characteristics, Opportunity Structures and Globalization' [2012] 55(1) *Acta Sociologica* 37–57; Stolle et al., 'Politics in the supermarket'; Copeland, 'Value Change and Political Action'.

²¹Bohman and Pärup, 'Purchasing with the Party'.

²²Selima Ben Mrad, Shirley Ye Sheng, and Laura K Hart, 'Do rumblings lead to real action? A case of animosity and boycott in China' [2013] 3 (2) *International Journal of China Marketing* 35–48; Klein, Ettenson and Morris, 'The animosity model of foreign product purchase'; He and Wang, 'Cultural identity and consumer ethnocentrism impacts on preference and purchase of domestic versus import brands'; Bohman and Pärup, 'Purchasing with the Party'.

²³Bohman and Pärup, 'Purchasing with the Party'.

²⁴Sanbiaolongmenzhen, 'dui e buli [Unfavourable to Russia]', (*China Digital Times*, February 25, 2022), <<https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/677440.html>> accessed July 10, 2024.

²⁵China Digital Times 404 Archive, 'eluosi ruqin wukelan [Russia's invasion of Ukraine]' [2022] <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/tag/俄罗斯入侵乌克兰>> accessed 10 July 2024.

Ukraine has taken place, with little time for any organised anti-Russian movement to have begun. For the above reasons, this article focuses on the *willingness* to boycott Russian goods.

To understand who is willing to engage in anti-Russian boycotts in China, the authors explore these attitudes through the prism of individuals' political beliefs. Sections below first discuss the role of political ideology in boycott and buycott behaviours in the Western context, and then explore the various dimensions of political ideology in the Chinese context.

Political Ideology as a Driver of Political Participation

Political ideology is a set of beliefs and attitudes about the main aims of society and how these aims ought to be achieved.²⁶ Traditionally, in the West, it is classified along a simple left-wing/right-wing (or liberal-conservative) dimension.²⁷ In the West, left-wing individuals advocate political, social and economic equality, while at the same time preferring progress, flexibility, and non-conformity.²⁸ Right-wing individuals, on the other hand, do not believe that equality is the preferred goal of the society, favouring more hierarchical social structures.²⁹ They tend to value order, stability, and conformity.³⁰

Political ideology is also closely related to some personality traits and attitudes, with left-wing individuals more open to new experiences and right-wing individuals being more conscientious.³¹ These attitudinal differences are thought to have a significant impact on political participation. For example, much of the literature suggests that due to their preference for order and stability, right-wing actors tend to participate in politics through traditional channels such as voting or contacting political representatives.³² Left-wing actors, on the other hand, are more open to change and risky activities and are likely to engage in less conventional acts like protest or signing a petition.³³ While many believe that left-wing values are intrinsically linked to political consumerism,³⁴ this view has recently been challenged. For example, both Copeland³⁵ and Pecot et al.³⁶ demonstrate that it is the strength of political views rather than specific beliefs that explain people's boycott and buycott activities. In other words, those most willing to engage in political consumerism tend to place themselves on the extremes of liberal and conservative ideologies.

Applying existing findings to the Chinese context is challenging because research shows that the traits of left-wing and right-wing individuals in China do not align with their namesakes in Western countries, making it difficult to predict the effect of values on political consumerism.³⁷ For example, left-wing individuals in China hold similar psychological traits

²⁶Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin, *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact* (Routledge 2003).

²⁷John T. Jost, Christopher M. Federico and Jaime L. Napier, 'Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities' [2009] 60 *Annual Review of Psychology* 307-337.

²⁸Seymour Martin Lipset et al., 'The psychology of voting: An analysis of political behavior'. In Gardner Lindzey (eds), *Handbook of social psychology* (Addison-Wesley 1962); Jost et al., 'Political Ideology'.

²⁹Lipset et al., 'The psychology of voting'.

³⁰John T. Jost, Brian A. Nosek, and Samuel D. Gosling, 'Ideology: Its resurgence in social, personality, and political psychology' [2008] 3(2) *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 126-136.

³¹John T. Jost, 'The End of The End of Ideology' [2006] 61(7) *American Psychologist* 651-670.

³²van der Meer et al., 'The politicized participant'.

³³Simone Baglioni 'The effects of direct democracy and city size on political participation the Swiss Case' in: Zittel, T., Fuchs, D. (ed.). *Participatory democracy and political participation* (Routledge 2007).

³⁴Benjamin J. Newman, Brandon L. Bartels, 'Politics at the checkout line: Explaining political consumerism in the United States' [2011] 64(4) *Political Research Quarterly* 803-817; John T. Jost, Melanie Langer, and Vishal Singh, 'The Politics of Buying, Boycotting, Complaining, and Disputing: An Extension of the Research Program by Jung, Garbarino, Briley, and Wynhausen' [2017] 44(3) *Journal of Consumer Research* 503-510. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx084>> accessed 13 July 2024.

³⁵Copeland, 'Value Change and Political Action'.

³⁶Fabien Pecot, Sofia Vasilopoulou and Matteo Cavallaro, 'How political ideology drives anti-consumption manifestations' [2021] 128 *Journal of Business Research* 61-69.

³⁷Deyong Ma and Lina Wang, 'Chinese Netizen's political ideology and their sources: An empirical analysis' [2015] 35(5) *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 142-167; Peter Beattie, Rong Chen, and Karim Bettache, 'When left is right and right is left: The psychological correlates of political ideology in China' [2022] 43(3) *Political Psychology* 457-488.

to those who lean to the right in the West because both groups defer to political authority. Right-wing Chinese citizens, on the other hand, are similar to Western liberals in their support for political liberty and free market practices.³⁸ Both groups additionally endorse greater social and economic equality. However, Chinese right-wing individuals believe that free markets lead to greater economic equality, whereas left-wing individuals hold the opposite view, blaming the free market economy for increasing inequality and polarising the Chinese society.³⁹ To map out the expected relationship between political beliefs and political consumerism in China, the article first discusses an alternative way to capture political ideology in this specific context and then outlines its likely effect on the willingness to boycott Russian products in the wake of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Political Ideology in the Chinese Context

Previous studies identify both economic and social dimensions of Chinese political ideology. For example, Wu and Meng⁴⁰ distinguish between a pro-market/anti-market dimension, while Lu and colleagues⁴¹ discuss economic preferences in terms of liberal and conservative approaches to economic regulation. Chinese citizens have a strong preference for how the economy is organized, with liberal individuals favouring capitalism and pro-market reforms, and conservative individuals favouring a planned economy. Wu and Meng suggest that citizens might also identify along the democratic/authoritarian continuum.⁴² This resembles the sociocultural dimension which 'ranges from liberal to authoritarian views on the trade-off between inclusive and exclusive structures of the community and social values'.⁴³ This democratic/authoritarian dimension corresponds to the 'liberal/authoritarian' dimension suggested in research on Western societies.⁴⁴ It has the potential to reflect the extent to which citizens support centralized forms of power, as well as their support for the sociopolitical *status quo* in China. While closely related, social authoritarianism and overt support for authoritarian political regime are not the same, and this article does not attempt to capture the extent to which Chinese citizens support the one-party state in China. The high levels of political repression and the severe consequences of opposing the regime make it unlikely that citizens would willingly admit to supporting democracy as opposed to authoritarianism. However, research has shown that social authoritarians are more likely to prefer strong leaders and support authoritarian policies,⁴⁵ which suggests that these measures are, to some extent, related.

Support for free market practices and social authoritarianism are useful tools to map three distinct political movements identified in the literature: liberalism, neo-authoritarianism, and the New Left.⁴⁶ These groups embody two prominent splits along economic and social lines which closely correspond to the support for free-market practices and social authoritarianism dimensions. The first split between political movements in China is along economic lines, with liberals and neo-authoritarians

³⁸Beattie et al., 'When left is right and right is left'.

³⁹Licheng Ma, 'Dangdai zhongguo bada shehui sichao' [Eight Social Thoughts in Contemporary China] (shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe [Social Science Academic Press (China)] [2012] 72.

⁴⁰Jason Wu and Tianshu Meng, 'The Nature of Ideology in Urban China' (forthcoming) (20 September 2022 *Comparative Political Studies*).

⁴¹Ye Lu, Yajie Chu and Fei Shen, 'Mass media, new technology, and ideology: An analysis of political trends in China' [2016] 1(1-2) *Global Media and China* 70-101.

⁴²Wu and Meng, 'The Nature of Ideology in Urban China'.

⁴³Pecot et al., 'How political ideology drives anti-consumption manifestations'.

⁴⁴Herbert Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European social democracy* (Cambridge University Press 1994); Stanley Feldman, 'Values, ideology, and the structure of political attitudes' in D. O. Sears, L. Huddy and R. Jervis (Eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Oxford University Press 2003).

⁴⁵Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Harper 1950); Joseph H. Manson, 'Right-wing Authoritarianism, Left-wing Authoritarianism, and pandemic-mitigation authoritarianism' [2020] 167 *Personality and Individual Differences* 110,251.

⁴⁶Mark Petracca and Mong Xiong, 'The concept of Chinese neo-authoritarianism: An exploration and democratic critique' [1990] 30(11) *Asian Survey* 1099-1117; He Li, 'Debating China's economic reform: New leftists vs. liberals' [2010] 15(1) *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 1-23; Lu et al., 'Mass media, new technology, and ideology'.

supporting free-market ideas, and the New Left supporting a traditional planned economy.⁴⁷ It originates from the 1970s market reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping. At the time, the strictly planned communist economy was replaced with a range of liberal adjustments which led to extraordinary economic growth, but also corruption and social problems.⁴⁸ New Leftists believe that these reforms led to an increase in social inequalities and deepened existing class differences in China. Liberals and neo-authoritarians, on the other hand, believe that economic reforms have not gone far enough and that the markets would deliver more just outcomes if they were less regulated by the political elites.⁴⁹ The second split in China concerns those who advocate for democratic reform and those who favour more centralized forms of power. While liberals believe that China should become a liberal democracy,⁵⁰ both neo-authoritarians and the New Left support strong, centralized leadership and traditional hierarchical structures.⁵¹ The New Left are sceptical of liberal democracy as a Western imperialist idea, imposed on China by neo-colonial powers.⁵² They also have a broadly positive assessment of the authoritarian communist rule in China, including the reforms imposed by Mao Zedong.⁵³ Neo-authoritarians, on the other hand, are nationalists with a strong desire for order and stability, which they believe can only be provided by a strong leadership in an authoritarian China.⁵⁴

Based on the discussion above, it is assumed that liberals can be captured by high support for free market policies and low support for social authoritarianism; the New Left can be captured by low support for free market ideas and high support for social authoritarianism; and neo-authoritarians can be captured by high support for free market ideas and high support for social authoritarianism. It is important to note that these three categories represent leanings rather than discrete groups. The way these leanings are captured is discussed in more detail in the Methodology section. [Figure 1](#) below summarizes the placement of the three movements in China on two axes related to political ideology. While there are four potential ideological leanings in [Figure 1](#), the authors found no evidence of political movement that espouses both low authoritarianism and a planned economy in China.

Political Ideology and Anti-Russian Sentiment

The following section outlines how individuals who belong to the three main ideological leanings in China might feel about the prospect of boycotting Russian goods in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Liberal Views on Russia

There are a number of reasons why Chinese liberals would be likely to engage in anti-Russian political consumerism. The first and most obvious reason is the overt support for the West and Western values among Chinese liberals. Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict is often framed as a proxy conflict between the West and its enemies, it is perhaps unsurprising that Chinese liberals would be more likely to side against Russia. Nevertheless, these sentiments ought not to be taken for granted, and the links between Western and Chinese liberal ideologies must be examined more thoroughly.

⁴⁷Youyu Xu, 'The Debates between Liberalism and the New Left in China since the 1990s' [2003] 34(3) *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 6-17.

⁴⁸Li, 'Debating China's economic reform'.

⁴⁹Petracca and Xiong, 'The concept of Chinese neo-authoritarianism'; Xu 'The Debates between Liberalism and the New Left in China since the 1990s'.

⁵⁰Xu, 'The Debates between Liberalism and the New Left in China since the 1990s'.

⁵¹Petracca and Xiong, 'The concept of Chinese neo-authoritarianism'; Lu et al., 'Mass media, new technology, and ideology'.

⁵²Hui Jing, 'Zhongguo xin zuopai sichao de dangdai jixi [A contemporary analysis of the Chinese New Left Thought]' [2018] 1 *Tansuo [Probe]* 111-119.

⁵³Lu et al., 'Mass media, new technology, and ideology'.

⁵⁴Kaplana Misra, 'Neo Left and Neo Right in Post-Tiananmen China' [2003] 43(5) *Asian Survey* 717-744; Ma, 'Eight Social Thoughts in Contemporary China'.

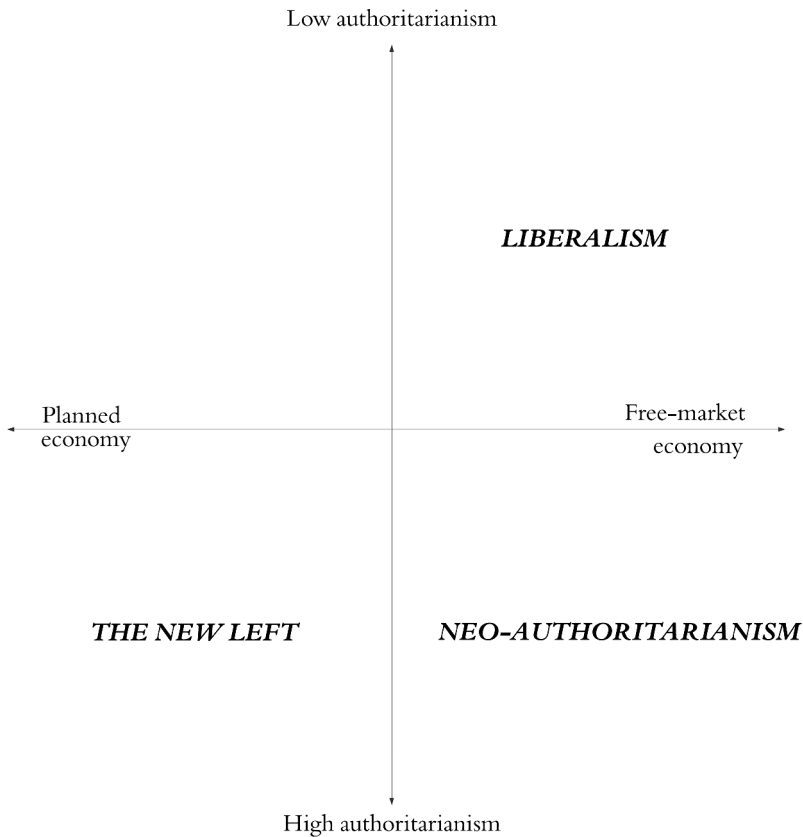


Figure 1. Ideological positions of three political movements in China.

To achieve this, the section below outlines the most important elements of Chinese liberal thought and how it relates to the conflict in Ukraine.

First, much of modern liberalism in China draws heavily on Western political thought. This includes the writings of Locke and Jefferson,⁵⁵ both of whom emphasize the importance of individual rights and express a clear objection to tyranny and dictatorship. As a result, Chinese liberals are likely to believe that the violation of human rights in Ukraine cannot be legitimated by Russia's claims about sovereignty and national interest. This is especially likely given that Russia has used disproportional force in Ukraine and routinely attacked civilian targets to achieve its objectives. For some liberals in China, it is of utmost importance that liberal values transcend national interests.⁵⁶ Many liberals are thus unlikely to be swayed by arguments that supporting Russia is in China's geopolitical or economic interest and are likely to side with democratic Ukraine instead.

Other liberals believe that China should pursue its national interest but insist that this interest can only be realised by China's integration into the liberal international order.⁵⁷ International institutions are thought to help China take full advantage of globalisation and help it open up to the outside world.⁵⁸ From the point of view of liberals, a positive engagement with international institutions

⁵⁵Junning Liu, 'Weishenme minzhu bixu shi ziyoude' [Why must democracy be free?], in Junning Liu (ed), *gonghe minzhu xianzheng: ziyou zhuyi sixiang yanjiu* [Republic, Democracy, Constitutional Rule: Study on Liberal Thoughts] (Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore 1998).

⁵⁶Hui Qin, Liberalism, 'ziyou zhuyi, shehui minzhu zhuyi yu dangdai zhongguo "wenti"' [Social Democracy, and 'problems' of Contemporary China], [2000] 5 *zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management] 83-91.

⁵⁷Yizhou Wang, *Dangdai Guoji Zhengzhi Xilun* (Analyzing Contemporary International Politics) (Shanghai People's Publishing House 1995).

such as the World Bank, the United Nations or the International Criminal Court would influence China's own domestic processes.⁵⁹ In the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, supporting Russia might offer short-term economic gains for China, but it further isolates it from the international community. For example, as a result of its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has already identified China as a significant security threat.⁶⁰ Chinese liberals are therefore highly unlikely to perceive the Sino-Russian partnership through the prism of economic interest. Since Chinese liberals support the rule of law on both the international and domestic stage, they are likely to condemn Russian aggression on the grounds that the United Nations charter only permits the use of force in self-defence against aggression,⁶¹ which does not apply to Russia's actions in Eastern Europe.

While regular Chinese citizens are unlikely to be intimately familiar with the intellectual discussions among China's liberal elites, there is evidence to suggest that liberal ideology is shared by at least a portion of the general population. Two days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a group of prominent historians published an open letter urging Putin to stop the war.⁶² The letter was followed by a petition signed by over a hundred alumni of China's top universities who 'called on the Chinese government to honour commitments made to Ukraine under U.N. Resolution 984, which gave security assurances to countries without nuclear weapons'.⁶³ This clearly indicates that the wish to adhere to international norms and principles is one of the key reasons many individuals might oppose Russian actions. Other citizens who were interviewed in the wake of the petition quoted the value of human life, the importance of conscience, and the Russian invasion of a peaceful country as their main motivations⁶⁴ – all of which broadly align with liberal values. Similarly, as mentioned in the introduction, a number of spontaneous anti-Russian campaigns initiated by Chinese netizens have already taken place since 2022, further demonstrating the prevalence of liberal attitudes among regular citizens.

New Left Views on Russia

The New Left are influenced by the traditional revolutionary discourse of the 1960s and 70s in China.⁶⁵ Some of the main influences on the development of the New Left are the works of Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin or Edward Said.⁶⁶ This means that the World Systems Theory and postcolonial thought shape the New Left's assessment of China's position on the international stage and their judgement of the intentions of major Western actors. For example, The New Left are sceptical of China's participation in the global economic and political systems, believing that international institutions facilitate exploitation and entrench and deepen global inequalities.⁶⁷ Just like some critical theory and left-wing scholars in the West, the New Left are wary of the narrative that NATO is a peaceful organisation aiming to improve security among its members. Instead, they view it as a tool of Western hegemony and are sceptical of the liberal explanations for the causes on Western interventions. Like Western anti-imperialist scholars,⁶⁸ the New Left are likely to perceive the war in Ukraine as a direct result of NATO's aggressive expansion and claim that American imperialism is being

⁵⁸Yaqing Qin, 'Development of International Relations theory in China: progress through debates' [2011] 11(2) *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 231-257.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰NATO Madrid Summit Declaration (29 June 2022) 6.

⁶¹UN Charter art. 2 para 4; UN Charter art. 51.

⁶²Kuo, Kuo, 'Amid the roar of nationalism'.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Waiyee Yip, '5 professors from top Chinese universities wrote an open letter condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, marking a departure from China's pro-Russian online sentiment' [2022] *Business Insider* <<https://www.businessinsider.com/nationalist-china-pro-russian-sentiment-online-anti-war-voices-ukraine-2022-3>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Xu, 'The Debates between Liberalism and the New Left in China since the 1990s'.

⁶⁷Jing, 'A contemporary analysis of the Chinese New Left Thought'.

enforced in Eastern Europe through a proxy war with Russia. It is also important to note that most New Left supporters have a positive assessment of the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong and the past communist rule in both China and the USSR.⁶⁹ As a result, they are likely to view Russia through the prism of its Soviet history and see Ukraine as part of the Russian sphere of influence. Combined with a scepticism of NATO, they are likely to see Russian actions in Eastern Europe as self-defence, rather than aggression. For this reason, they are unlikely to be willing to boycott Russian products in China.

Neo-Authoritarian Views on Russia

Neo-authoritarianism in China became a coherent ideological movement following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, when liberalism was dismissed as 'impractical idealism', and many thinkers begun placing emphasis on order and stability alongside economic growth.⁷⁰ As a result, neo-authoritarianism became the dominant ideology of the CCP, which used it to maintain power in subsequent years.⁷¹ Like the New Left, Neo-authoritarians express deep scepticism of Western international institutions and military alliances. However, they tend to do so not because they believe them to perpetuate Western imperialism, but rather because they see them as a direct threat to China's interests. Neo-authoritarians tend to be deeply nationalistic and see China's relationship with the US (and, by extension, NATO) through the prism of great power politics.⁷² Many nationalist intellectuals believe that the conflict in Ukraine is in fact a proxy war between China and the US, and that the US is purposely attempting to isolate and encircle China.⁷³ They use developments such as the presence of Japan and South Korea at the 2022 NATO summit as one example of this strategy, and the previously discussed portrayal of China as a security challenge at the Madrid NATO summit as another.⁷⁴ Neo-authoritarians are likely to see the new 'no limits' partnership between China and Russia as highly beneficial both economically and politically. In their view, supporting Russia is a form of resistance against the forced imposition of the Western liberal order on both China and Russia. For this reason, neo-authoritarians will not be willing to boycott Russian goods in China.

The expectations about the three main ideological leanings in China can be summarised in the first hypothesis:

H1: Liberal individuals will be more willing than either neo-authoritarians or the New Left to boycott Russian goods.

It is worth noting that the article uses terms such as 'liberals' or the 'New Left' as shortcuts to indicate different combination of ideological tendencies. In other words, hypothesis 1 could state that individuals with higher support for the free-market policies and lower support for authoritarianism are more likely than those with different combination of leanings to boycott Russian goods.

⁶⁸Ido Vock, 'Noam Chomsky: Russia is fighting more humanely than the US did in Iraq' (*The New Statesman*, 29 April 2023). <<https://www.newstatesman.com/the-weekend-interview/2023/04/noam-chomsky-interview-ukraine-free-actor-united-states-determines>> accessed 10 July 2024; Yanis Varufakis, 'What is the point of NATO?' (*Diem25*, 3 January 2024). <<https://diem25.org/what-is-the-point-of-nato/>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Misra, 'Neo Left and Neo Right in Post-Tiananmen China'.

⁷¹Jianli Yang and Xiaochuan He, 'Zhongguo de minzhuhua yu xinqunwei zhuyi' [Democratization and Neo-authoritarianism in China] [1994] (4) *Modern Chinese Studies*.

⁷²Qin, 'Development of International Relations theory in China'.

⁷³Alicja Bachulska and Mark Leonard, 'China and Ukraine: The Chinese debate about Russia's war and its meaning for the world' [2023] *European Council on Foreign Relation* <<https://ecfr.eu/publication/china-and-ukraine-the-chinese-debate-about-russias-war-and-its-meaning-for-the-world/>> accessed 10 July 2024.

⁷⁴Ibid.

The Importance of Egalitarian Values

In addition, a third ideological element—support for egalitarianism—is equally important for determining the willingness to boycott Russian goods in China. It is frequently captured by using the so-called Social Dominance Orientation—a composite measure of the extent to which individuals believe that different groups within society should be equal.⁷⁵ The theory suggests that individuals' support for, or rejection of, egalitarian values is a powerful predictor of how people view the relations between social groups and their judgement of inter-group violence. Those who reject egalitarianism are more likely to believe in ideologies that legitimize oppression and violence, while those who support egalitarianism are more likely to question them.⁷⁶ This mechanism is said to translate directly into people's attitudes towards international conflict. For example, previous studies demonstrate that Americans who support group equality tend to oppose military action of their government that is seen as hegemonic, but support humanitarian interventions.⁷⁷ Others argue that the relationship between egalitarianism and support for international conflict is more complex. It is not the case that those supporting equality oppose violent international conflict, but rather that their support for violence 'depends on the dynamics of the conflict and the status of the perpetrators'.⁷⁸ In other words, individuals who value egalitarianism are more likely to support violence aimed at counter-dominance. For example, Levin and colleagues⁷⁹ show that a strong preference for group equality increases the chances that individuals will identify with the weaker side in the instances of international conflict.

Based on existing evidence, it is expected that Chinese individuals with a preference for egalitarianism will be more likely to oppose Russian actions in Ukraine, and therefore more willing to boycott Russian products. They are more likely to oppose inter-group violence in the international context, and more likely to question Russia's supposedly humanitarian motives for invading Ukraine. Since Ukraine is a much smaller and militarily weaker country than Russia, egalitarian individuals will be more likely to identify with their struggle against what they are likely to see as an unprovoked act of aggression. While Ukraine receives a great deal of military and logistical support from the West in its fight with Russia, the survey was conducted in the first month of the intervention when Western support was minimal, and Ukraine was perceived as a state likely to lose the war. This makes egalitarian values a more powerful explanatory factor in our analysis and should be considered when extrapolating our findings. It is expected that egalitarian values will moderate the effects of political ideology on Chinese respondents' attitudes to Russian products. Liberals, New Left supporters, and neo-authoritarians will all be more willing to boycott Russian goods if they hold highly egalitarian attitudes, compared to individuals who hold highly exclusionary attitudes. In other words, egalitarian values likely transcend ideological positions of Chinese citizens.

H2: Respondents' egalitarian attitudes, authoritarian attitudes and economic attitudes interact such that individuals with high level of support for egalitarianism will be more willing to boycott Russian goods across all three ideological leanings in China than individuals who hold exclusionary attitudes.

⁷⁵Felicia Pratto, Jim Sidanius, Lisa M. Stallworth and Bertram F. Malle, 'Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes' [1994] 67(4) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 741-763.

⁷⁶Jim Sidanius, and Felicia Pratto, 'The inevitability of oppression and the dynamics of social dominance' In P. M. Sniderman, P. E. Tetlock, and E. G. Carmines (Eds.), (*Prejudice, politics, and the American dilemma* Stanford University Press 1993).

⁷⁷Pratto et al., 'Social dominance orientation'.

⁷⁸P. J. Henry, Jim Sidanius, Shana Levin and Felicia Pratto, 'Social Dominance Orientation, Authoritarianism, and Support for Intergroup Violence between the Middle East and America' [2005] 26(4) *Political Psychology* 569-583.

⁷⁹Shana Levin, P. J. Henry, Felicia Pratto and Jim Sidanius, 'Social dominance and social identity in Lebanon: Implications for support of violence against the West' [2003] 6(4) *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 353-368.

Materials and Methods

Data and the Dependent Variable

To test the hypotheses, the article uses data from an original cross-national survey of Chinese citizens conducted as part of the ‘Sinophone Borderlands—Interaction at the Edges’ project funded by the European Regional Development Fund.⁸⁰ A representative sample of 3,039 Chinese citizens was interviewed between the 9th and 23rd of March 2022 using standardized electronic Computer Assisted Web Interviewing. The data was then weighted based first on the quotas of age and gender and then geographically, to reflect the distribution of the population across the many regions of China.⁸¹

The dependent variable records the extent to which Chinese citizens were willing to support or boycott goods imported from the Russian Federation. The responses were recorded on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating the desire to strongly support Russian products, and 7 indicating the desire to strongly boycott Russian products. The question makes no distinction between different types of goods, focusing instead on a general attitude towards Russian imports.

Independent Variables

Political Ideology

To capture the three ideological leanings—liberals, neo-authoritarians, and New Left supporters—the article investigates the interaction between two measures of political ideology: pro-market attitudes and social authoritarianism. Individuals who strongly support free market ideas and score *low* on the scale of authoritarian attitudes best reflect the liberal ideology. Individuals who strongly support free market ideas and score *high* on the scale of authoritarian attitudes best reflect the neo-authoritarian ideology. Finally, individuals who strongly oppose free-market practices and score *high* on the scale of authoritarian attitudes best reflect the New Left ideology. The section below describes how each scale of ideology was created for the purposes of this study.

Economic Attitudes

To capture economic attitudes, the participants were asked the following question:

When it comes to the state’s role in the economy, do you favour a high or low level of state regulation?

Participants were asked to evaluate their attitudes on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (‘Very high level of state regulation’) to 7 (‘Very low level of state regulation’).

Social Authoritarianism Scale

To capture the social leniency/social authoritarianism dimension, respondents were asked to judge the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- (1) ‘To preserve law and order, we have to crack down harder on troublemakers’,
- (2) ‘Our society does NOT need stricter laws and tougher policing’,
- (3) ‘Being kind to loafers and criminals will only encourage them to take advantage of your weakness, so it’s best to use a firm, tough hand when dealing with them’,
- (4) ‘The best way to ensure peace is through military strength’.

⁸⁰Project number CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

⁸¹It is important to note that collecting data on overtly political activities in China has become increasingly difficult following the repressive turn under the rule of Xi Jinping. While every effort was made to ensure that questions are phrased in neutral way that encourages honest answers, it is possible that some respondents did not share their true beliefs in the survey, especially if these beliefs could be perceived as contrary to the official CCP ideology.

The response order was reversed in item 2 and items 1–4 were used to create a scale of attitudes to law and order ($\alpha = 0.66$). Questions which explicitly relate to the support of authoritarian state structures in China were purposely excluded, because these are more likely to be answered affirmatively regardless of the respondents' true beliefs due to the oppressive nature of the regime. The paper includes support for the one-party state and nationalism as control variables in the models, and the variables are discussed in more detail below.

Egalitarian Values

To determine the extent to which individuals value or reject group equality, respondents were asked to judge the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements below. All answers were recorded on a 7-item ordinal scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

- (1) 'We should NOT push for group equality',
- (2) 'Subordinate groups should stay in their place',
- (3) 'We should equalize conditions for different groups'.

The three items are based on the Social Dominance Orientation scale used in previous research.⁸² To create the egalitarianism scale, the order of items 1 and 2 was reversed, and items 1–3 were used to create a scale of attitudes to social equality ($\alpha = 0.54$). While Cronbach's alpha score is low, it is important to note that the authors are mostly interested in how the items work together from a theoretical perspective, rather than guiding their decisions on the data itself. All three items ask clearly about group equality, relate to a well-known measure of egalitarianism, and are highly likely to reflect the respondents' view on the matter, regardless of the Cronbach's alpha score. It is also common that Cronbach's alpha is lower when few items are included in the scale, as in this instance. It is also worth noting that the extended version of the scale has been successfully used in studies of Chinese citizens in the past, returning values of Cronbach's alpha of 0.76 and 0.78 when using almost identical questions.⁸³ This suggests that the low score is linked to a limited number of items, rather than because the Social Dominance Orientation scale is limited in the Chinese context.

It is important to note that higher scores on the scale indicate greater support for egalitarianism, while lower scores indicate a preference for social dominance.

Control Variables

Several theoretically informed control variables in the models are included. This consists of support for the current political system in China, respondents' support for the one-party system, and a variable reporting the respondents' membership of the CCP. A range of ordinal control variables are also included. These are a measure of nationalism, satisfaction with the Chinese economy, support for economic protectionism, and positive attitudes towards Russian foreign policy. These variables are measured on a scale from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating agreement or support.

Finally, several demographic control variables are used. This includes a variable which records whether respondents were 25 years or below at the time of the survey and a measure recording whether survey participants have a university degree or a higher qualification. A variable measuring economic prosperity is also included. To count as well-off,

⁸²Pratto et al. 'Social dominance orientation'.

⁸³Ying Yang, Wenqi Li, Kennon M. Sheldon and Yu Kou, 'Chinese adolescents with higher social dominance orientation are less prosocial and less happy: A value-environment fit analysis' [2019] 54 *International Journal of Psychology* 325; Yida Zhai, Li Ying Chong, Yunzhe Liu, Shuting Yang and Changfa Song, 'Social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and political attitudes toward governmental performance during the COVID-19 pandemic' [2022] 22 *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 150.

Table 1. Summary statistics of control variables

Variable	Mean value	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
<i>Young age (0 = no)</i>	0.14	–	0	1
<i>Higher education (0 = no)</i>	0.69	–	0	1
<i>Economic prosperity (0 = no)</i>	0.52	–	0	1
<i>Economic protectionism</i>	4.06	1.65	1	7
<i>Satisfaction with China's economy</i>	5.23	1.26	1	7
<i>CCP membership (0 = no)</i>	0.17	–	0	1
<i>Support for one-party system (0 = no)</i>	0.76	–	0	1
<i>Nationalism</i>	5.83	1.21	1	7
<i>History of travel to Russia (0 = no)</i>	0.17	–	0	1
<i>Assessment of Russian foreign policy</i>	5.21	1.23	1	7

respondents' annual household income must have at least 100,000 RMB, with families ranging between 100,000 and 500,000 RMB belonging to the middle-income category in China.⁸⁴

Methods

The dependent and independent variables are measured at individual level, but the survey respondents are nested in various regions of China. Given the size of the country and the inevitable social, political, and economic differences between the 31 provinces, it is important that the models capture the hierarchical nature of the data. To do this, linear mixed-effects models with random intercepts were used. These models correct for the within-province dependence of observations (intra-class correlation) and adjust both within and between parameter estimates in relation to the clustered nature of the data. It is worth adding that a random intercept model does not produce an intercept for each Chinese province in the models. Summary statistics of variables used in the models can be found in Table 1.

Results

Among the 3,039 respondents who participated in the survey, nearly two-thirds (69.9%, $N = 2,125$) expressed a willingness to support Russian goods and 19.5% ($N = 591$) remained neutral. Over a tenth (10.6%, $N = 323$) of respondents were willing to boycott Russian exports to China.⁸⁵ While this is a relatively high proportion of respondents, it is important to remain cautious about the implications of this result given the nature of the survey question. In many ways, it is much easier for participants to express their *willingness* to perform an abstract political act than to perform it. At the same time, it is also worth noting that the costs of political consumerism are relatively low for respondents. The act of checking the item's country of origin and choosing not to buy it are not inherently dangerous, and are not easily observed or tracked by others, even in a highly repressive setting. Nevertheless, it is impossible to predict how many individuals expressing their willingness to boycott Russian goods will actually do so in the future. Figure 2 summarizes the key measures of ideology: support for free-market economy, support for egalitarianism and support for social authoritarianism. It is worth noting that unlike the composite scales of egalitarianism and social authoritarianism,

⁸⁴China's National Bureau of Statistics, 'Guojia tongjiju juzhang jiu 2018 nian guomin jingji yunxing qingkuang da jizhewen' [The Director of the NBS Answers Media Questions on China's Economic Performance in 2018], accessed 10 July 2024.

⁸⁵To put this figure in context, we note that the data suggests that 41.8% of Chinese citizens were willing to boycott US products, 35.5% were willing to boycott Japanese products, 18.6% were willing to boycott Taiwanese products and 27.1% were willing to boycott African products. It is clear that respondents were more willing to boycott products from states that have a fraught diplomatic relationship with China (US, Japan) while more accepting of products from friendly regions (Africa, Russia) or states that are culturally similar or considered part of China (Taiwan). This demonstrates that the willingness to boycott specific consumer goods in China is highly politicised.

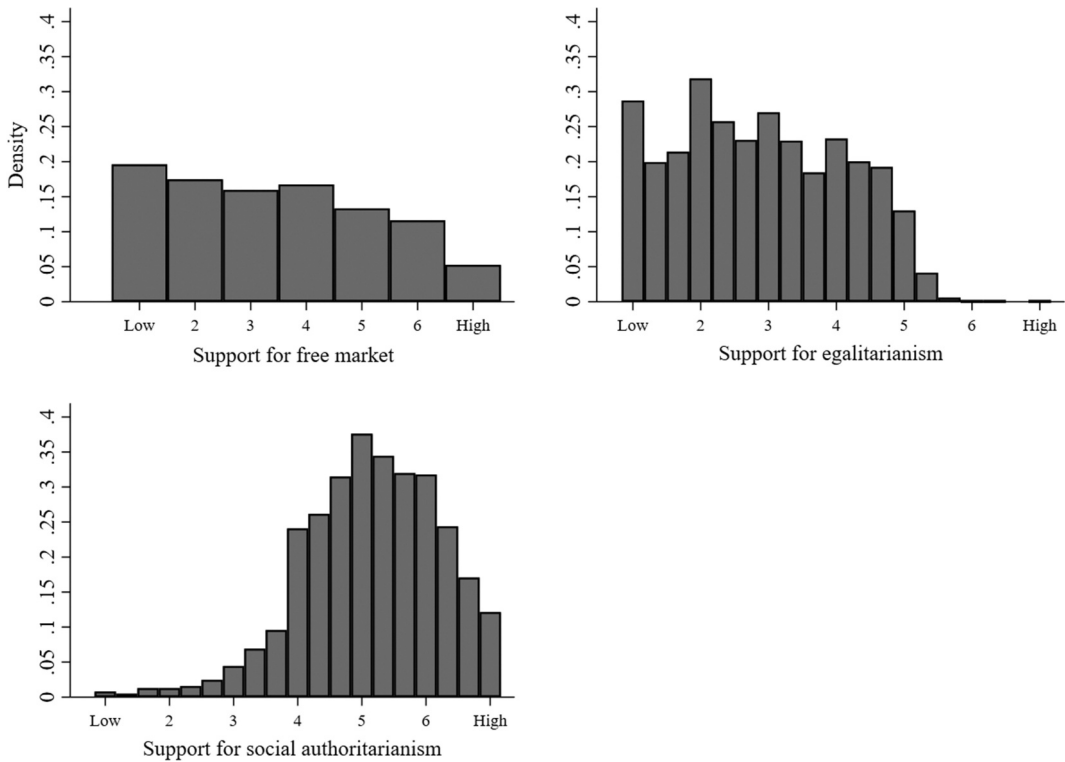


Figure 2. The distribution of attitudes to three measures of political ideology in the sample.

support for free-market economy is an absolute measure, reflecting answers to just one survey question. The distribution of scores on economic and egalitarian attitudes appears relatively uniform, but with a right skew, suggesting that few respondents fully support free-market reform and extreme egalitarianism. The distribution of attitudes to social authoritarianism is skewed left. Respondents were generally more likely to express support for authoritarianism in the sample.

Earlier in the article, two hypotheses were proposed:

H1. Liberals will be more willing than either neo-authoritarians or the New Left to boycott Russian goods.

H2: Respondents' egalitarian attitudes, authoritarian attitudes and economic attitudes interact such that individuals with high level of support for egalitarianism will be more willing to boycott Russian goods across all three ideological leanings in China than individuals who hold exclusionary attitudes.

To test these hypotheses, five models are specified in [Table 2](#). All models present the effects of political ideology on boycotting Russian goods. The dependent variable is the willingness to boycott Russian goods by Chinese respondents. Higher scores of the dependent variable indicate greater support for boycotting the products. Models 1 to 4 are included to demonstrate the robustness of the results, with the effects of main independent variables remaining relatively constants with the addition of subsequent control variables. Model 4 contains items measuring economic attitudes, social authoritarianism, and egalitarian attitudes without interactions. Model 5 includes an interaction between economic attitudes and social authoritarianism and tests hypothesis 1. Finally, Model 6

Table 2. The impact of political ideology on attitudes to Russian goods in China

	Willingness to boycott Russian goods					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Authoritarianism	-0.213*** (-8.52)	-0.191*** (-7.33)	-0.105*** (-3.83)	-0.061* (-2.41)	0.047 (0.97)	0.373*** (3.47)
Egalitarianism	0.174*** (7.67)	0.143*** (6.05)	0.117*** (4.92)	0.104*** (4.73)	0.111*** (5.03)	0.910*** (3.85)
Support for free market	0.027 (1.77)	0.010 (0.67)	-0.005 (-0.35)	-0.003 (-0.24)	0.164* (2.54)	0.439** (3.00)
Young age	0.162* (2.09)	0.244** (3.18)	0.265*** (3.42)	0.240*** (3.34)	0.240*** (3.35)	0.234** (3.27)
Higher education	-0.150* (-2.48)	-0.133* (-2.24)	-0.136* (-2.27)	-0.116* (-2.10)	-0.113* (-2.04)	-0.110* (-2.00)
Economic prosperity	-0.198*** (-3.47)	-0.131* (-2.33)	-0.134* (-2.39)	-0.060 (-1.16)	-0.061 (-1.18)	-0.060 (-1.15)
Economic protectionism	-	0.069*** (3.88)	0.080*** (4.53)	0.091*** (5.57)	0.089*** (5.44)	0.088*** (5.35)
Satisfaction with Chinese economy	-	-0.212*** (-9.81)	-0.141*** (-6.20)	-0.051* (-2.38)	-0.048* (-2.26)	-0.046* (-2.16)
CCP membership	-	-	0.018 (0.26)	0.015 (0.23)	0.018 (0.28)	0.017 (0.26)
Support for one-party system	-	-	-0.227*** (-3.31)	-0.063 (-0.99)	-0.060 (-0.94)	-0.042 (-0.66)
Nationalism	-	-	-0.189*** (-7.56)	-0.099*** (-4.23)	-0.092*** (-3.88)	-0.084*** (-3.55)
History of travel to Russia	-	-	-	-0.445*** (-6.78)	-0.446*** (-6.79)	-0.441*** (-6.72)
Approval of Russian foreign policy	-	-	-	-0.444*** (-20.59)	-0.442*** (-20.47)	-0.441*** (-20.48)
Authoritarianism * free market supp.	-	-	-	-	-0.031** (-2.65)	-0.077** (-2.93)
Authoritarianism * egalitarianism	-	-	-	-	-	-0.141*** (-3.46)
Egalitarianism * free market supp.	-	-	-	-	-	-0.123* (-2.30)
Egalit. * authorit. * free market supp.	-	-	-	-	-	0.021* (2.27)
Constant	3.464*** (22.65)	4.266*** (24.68)	4.806*** (24.99)	5.790*** (31.24)	5.109*** (16.14)	3.182*** (4.92)
Level 1 random intercept	-16.062 (-0.05)	-22.355*** (-5.63)	-18.679*** (-4.46)	-17.316 (-0.02)	-14.018*** (-3.70)	-23.770*** (-5.18)
Level 2 error	0.368*** (28.72)	0.352*** (27.40)	0.333*** (25.65)	0.254*** (19.61)	0.253*** (19.52)	0.251*** (19.32)
AIC	10881.63	10782.80	10436.36	9974.73	9969.70	9960.58
BIC	10935.80	10849.02	10520.31	10070.68	10071.65	10080.51
N	3,039	3,039	2,971	2,971	2,971	2,971

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

includes an interaction term between economic attitudes, social authoritarianism, and egalitarian attitudes and tests hypothesis 2.

Model 5 investigates the interaction between two measures of political ideology in China—social authoritarianism, and economic attitudes. Table 2 demonstrates that support for free-market practices is moderated by social authoritarian attitudes. This is an important finding, because it allows us to explore how different levels of support for these two ideas affects the willingness to boycott Russian goods in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine among Chinese citizens. The earlier section of this article outlined how different combinations of support for social authoritarianism and free-market support translate into recognized political movements in China. It was assumed that respondents' economic and social authoritarian attitudes will interact, and that liberals will be more likely to boycott Russian products than

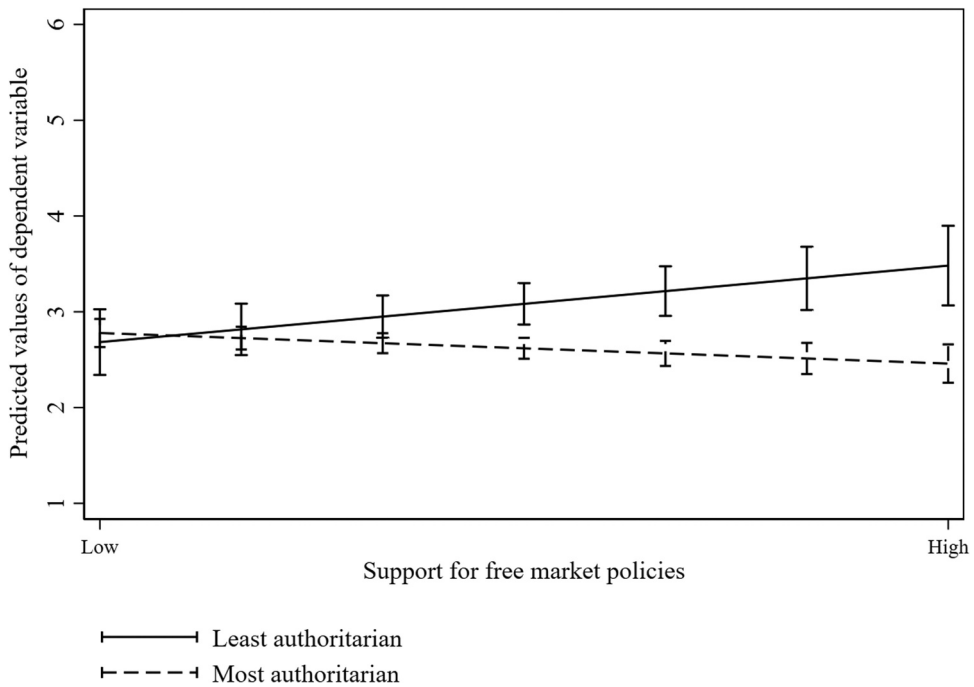


Figure 3. Social authoritarianism moderates the effect of economic attitudes on willingness to boycott Russian goods.

either neo-authoritarians or the New Left supporters. This hypothesis can be visualised better with the aid of [Figure 3](#), which demonstrates the predicted values of willingness to boycott Russian goods depending on the different combinations of political ideology scores. [Figure 3](#) demonstrates the moderating effect of social authoritarianism on support for free market practices in China.

In [Figure 3](#), readers can see that individuals who scored low on social authoritarian attitudes were more willing to boycott Russian goods if they also supported a more free-market economy. Liberals were significantly more willing than people with other leanings to boycott Russian products in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine. These findings provide support for hypothesis 1.

Next, it was proposed that respondents' Social Dominance Orientation will moderate the effect of ideology on willingness to boycott Russian goods. It was assumed that all three leanings will be more willing to engage in the boycott if they hold highly egalitarian attitudes (H2). This hypothesis can better be tested with [Figure 4](#), which demonstrates the interaction between egalitarianism, economic attitudes, and social authoritarianism. Different combinations of social authoritarianism and support for free market have been labelled on the graph as liberals (low social authoritarianism, high support for free-market practices), New Left supporters (high social authoritarianism, low support for free-market practices) and neo-authoritarianism (high social authoritarianism, high support for free-market practices). Low and high levels of egalitarianism and social authoritarianism are defined as values that are one standard deviation above the mean (high) and one standard deviation below the mean (low) to better reflect the distribution of these beliefs in the sample. These scores are 1.59 and 5.26 for egalitarianism and 4.06 and 6.21 for social authoritarianism respectively.

As [Figure 4](#) clearly demonstrates, egalitarianism moderates the effects of political ideology on willingness to boycott Russian goods among Chinese respondents. More specifically, all individuals in the sample, regardless of their political leaning, were significantly more willing to take political action against Russia if they held egalitarian attitudes, in comparison to those who held more preference for social domination. This confirms the assumptions of social dominance theory,

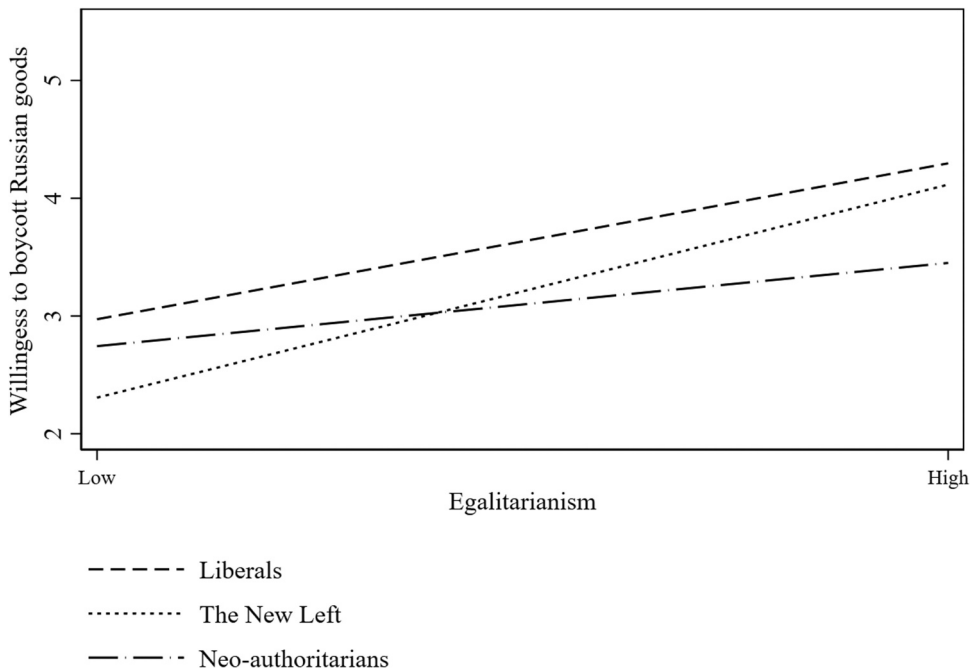


Figure 4. Egalitarianism moderates the effect of political ideology on willingness to boycott Russian goods.

which expects egalitarian individuals to empathize with the victims of violence and oppression and challenge ideologies which promote the dominance of one group over another. In an international context, it confirms the findings of Henry and colleagues⁸⁶ that egalitarian values make individuals more likely to support the weaker side in international conflict. It was assumed that the willingness to boycott Russian goods captures the attitudes of Chinese respondents to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Those more willing to act against Russian producers likely oppose Russian intervention because Russia might be seen as a stronger state attacking a weaker state without a direct military provocation from Ukraine.

Discussion

This article provides a unique insight into potential patterns of political participation in a closed authoritarian regime. Most importantly, the article has demonstrated that over ten percent of respondents in a representative sample of Chinese citizens are willing to boycott Russian goods and most likely disapprove of Russia's actions in Ukraine. This is an important finding which indicates that a substantial minority of the Chinese population might not share the official position of the Chinese Communist Party despite widespread propaganda and censorship. This study suggests that there is potential for anti-Russian political action in China and suggests that a more organised anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian campaigns are possible in the future. If they happen, they have the scope to disrupt the profit margins of Russian companies hoping to escape Western sanctions. In 2023, Russian consumer goods made up 5.1% of China's 2023 imports⁸⁷ and are likely to become even more common in China as Russia becomes more isolated from the Western world. While this share of

⁸⁶Henry et al. 'Social Dominance Orientation, Authoritarianism, and Support for Intergroup Violence between the Middle East and America'.

⁸⁷Alexandra Prokopenko, 'What are the limits to Russia's "yuanization"?' (*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 27 May 2024). <<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/05/china-russia-yuan?lang=en>> accessed 14 July 2024.

the Chinese market might seem like a low figure, it is important to note that China is home to over 1.5 billion consumers and even small decreases in the Sino-Russian trade volume would be a significant loss to Russian companies as the war with Ukraine continues.

Furthermore, by focusing on the interaction between political ideology and political consumerism, the article has identified a group of individuals who are most likely to participate in activities that go against the ideological *status quo* in China. This is a new avenue of research which goes beyond previous studies that focus on ethnocentric and nationalist causes of Chinese boycott and buycott practices. To help determine who is willing to boycott Russian goods, the article delineated three broad political leanings in China: liberals, neo-authoritarians, and the New Left. The results indicated that liberals, who show higher support for free market policies and lower support for social authoritarianism, are more likely than others to express willingness to boycott Russian goods. It was hypothesised that liberal individuals are more supportive of the liberal international order and believe that Russia and China should work with, rather than against, multilateral institutions. This means that individuals with liberal leanings are more likely to interpret NATO's actions in Eastern Europe as defensive and see Russian actions against Ukraine as unprovoked, aggressive and disproportional. At the same time, the article found that individuals with neo-authoritarian and New Left leanings are less likely to support the boycott of Russian goods. Neo-authoritarians, who desire free market reform but support the existing sociopolitical structures, were against boycotting Russian goods. This can be explained by their view that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is an extension of the rivalry between authoritarian China and the liberal United States. They believe that supporting Russia, an allied autocracy, is in China's national interest. For the New Left, the belief that NATO and the liberal international order is a form of neocolonial domination by the United States has also led to greater levels of support for Russian goods.

While it is not surprising that individuals with more liberal leanings are likely to oppose Russian actions, this is the first study to date to clearly demonstrate such a link. By helping to conceptualise and operationalise ideological leanings in China, this article offers a new avenue of research into a wide range of political behaviours and attitudes that go beyond political consumerism. The findings are important because they demonstrate that when citizens of authoritarian regimes disagree with the official ideology of their state, they may be able to express this disagreement through alternative channels of political participation. Political consumerism is particularly worthy of scholarly attention. After all, boycotts and buycotts activities are unlikely to attract the attention of the authorities while allowing the citizens to actively engage in political action.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in figshare repository at <http://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.26310985>.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was granted by the Palacký University Olomouc ethics board and surveys were conducted according to the ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research. All participants provided their written, informed consent prior to taking part in the survey. In the written consent, participants agreed for their responses to be included in our research and they were informed that could withdraw from taking part in the research at any time. We did not collect any information that would identify individual research participants.