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Local–national political trust patterns: Why China is an exception

Cary Wu
University of British Columbia, Canada

Rima Wilkes
University of British Columbia, Canada

Abstract

Is political trust in China anomalous? In most countries there are systematic differences in the level of trust in national and local government that take one of three patterns. In some countries, individuals trust the national government more than local government (hierarchical trust); in others individuals trust local government more than national government; while in some countries individuals trust both levels of government equally. Of 11 Asian societies, the only country where hierarchical trust predominates is China. Elsewhere the norm is to put more trust in local levels of government. While previous studies have described the pattern of trust in China, no study has considered relative trust as an outcome or comparatively. Taking advantage of the 2006 and 2010 Asian Barometer Survey data we consider whether the hierarchical trust pattern in China is the result of political control, culture, and/or performance. We find that political control explains the hierarchical trust pattern in China.

Keywords

Local–national trust patterns, political trust, China

Introduction

In *The Analects of Confucius*, the disciple Tsze-kung asked Confucius about government whereupon Confucius replied that 'the requisites of government are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and *the confidence of the people in their ruler*…. *If the people have no faith in their rulers there is no standing for the state*' (Confucius, 2010: part 12). Soon after

Corresponding author:
Cary Wu, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia, 6303 NW Marine Dr., Vancouver, V6T 1Z1, Canada.
Email: carywooruc@gmail.com

in Europe, Thucydides made a similar point about political trust, writing that without citizen support, good laws are no better than bad ones that are never changed (Thucydides, 1988). As Mara (2001: 823) notes, for Thucydides and other classical scholars, political trust is an essential ingredient of a vibrant and healthy political life. More recent scholarship also asserts that political trust matters – leading to more efficient social, economic, and political relationships (Hetherington and Husser, 2012) and facilitating civic and political engagement (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006).

The principal aim of this article is to contribute to conceptual and empirical work on relative political trust. In the predominant approach, political trust, which is the belief that government leaders and institutions serve the people's interest, is conceptualized additively (Li, 2004; Shi, 2014). Typically political trust is operationalized via an index where respondents are given a series of questions about different political institutions that are then summed to denote their overall level of political trust (Catterberg and Moreno, 2006, Wong et al., 2011). While this additive approach gauges general levels of trust averaged across any given set of institutions, it overlooks important differences in trust levels across institutions or levels of government. As Klüwer and Waaler (2006: 158) state, 'a subject trusts a variety of entities, but with different degrees of confidence.' The kinds of relative judgements citizens make about these different levels of government are important because they reflect an active and critical political citizenry.

We build on work on relative political trust by considering why China has a different distribution of relative political trust than other Asian societies. In most Asian societies the majority of citizens are more trusting of local government and are less trusting of national government; the exception is China where the vast majority of citizens are more trusting of national government and are less trusting of local government (Li, 2004, 2013, 2016; Saich, 2007). This pattern is called hierarchical trust. What can account for the predominance of this pattern in China compared to other Asian societies? To answer this question, we use the 2006 and 2010 Asian Barometer Survey data and consider the impact of political control, performance, and culture in China compared to other Asian societies. In so doing, this article refines theoretical work on relative trust patterns and also provides the first study to consider multiple relative political trust patterns as an outcome and to do so in comparative perspective. We demonstrate that, in China, the predominance of the hierarchical trust pattern is reflective of the effects of political control.

Relative political trust patterns in comparative perspective

One of the major developments to follow the publication of Easton's (1965) *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* was greater attention to the objects of political support. While Easton focused on whether the object of political trust/support was the authorities or the regime, many others have considered different levels of government as objects of trust. In Europe, Newton and Norris (2000), for example, consider confidence in different public governmental institutions such as the civil service, Parliament and the armed forces. Turning to Asia, Kim (2010) focuses on the determinants of trust in local and central government in Japan and South Korea. These and other studies of this kind have clearly demonstrated the extent to which trust varies across institutions.

The issue of consequence addressed in this paper is that, not only are there differences across institutions in the level of trust, but these differences exhibit distinct patterns. In the United States citizens see 'government officials who are far away as lazy, incompetent, and probably dishonest', but they do not apply this thinking to the local level where they still 'trust and even revere those government officials who are near at hand' (Frederickson and Frederickson, 1995: 165–168). This pattern runs contrary to expectations: citizens should either trust or distrust government on all levels or according to performance. More recent studies confirm this pattern: Americans have higher trust and confidence in specific institutions and the bureaucrats whom

they encounter, but they hold negative views towards general government and public administrators in the abstract (Jennings, 1998; see also Chang and Chu, 2006 for Taiwan, Christensen and Lægreid, 2005 for Norway).

In contrast to the US and other Western nations, in China the pattern of political trust takes the opposite form – there is more trust in the national government than in local government. Li (2016) calls this pattern of relative trust 'hierarchical trust' and contrasts it to the pattern of trusting local more than national and to the pattern of equal trust/distrust in institutions across levels. Using several surveys Li shows that Chinese citizens who hold hierarchical trust tend to be less satisfied with political democracy, which he treats as a proxy indicator of latent trust in central government. Since so many respondents (up to 63%) hold hierarchical trust (who are less satisfied with political democracy), in referring to the very high levels of trust found among many national and local surveys he concludes that 'trust in the central government in China is significantly weaker than it looks' (Li, 2016:14). And, as can be seen in Figures 1 to 11, which are created from the most recent two waves of Asian Barometer Survey data, hierarchical trust clearly predominates in China.

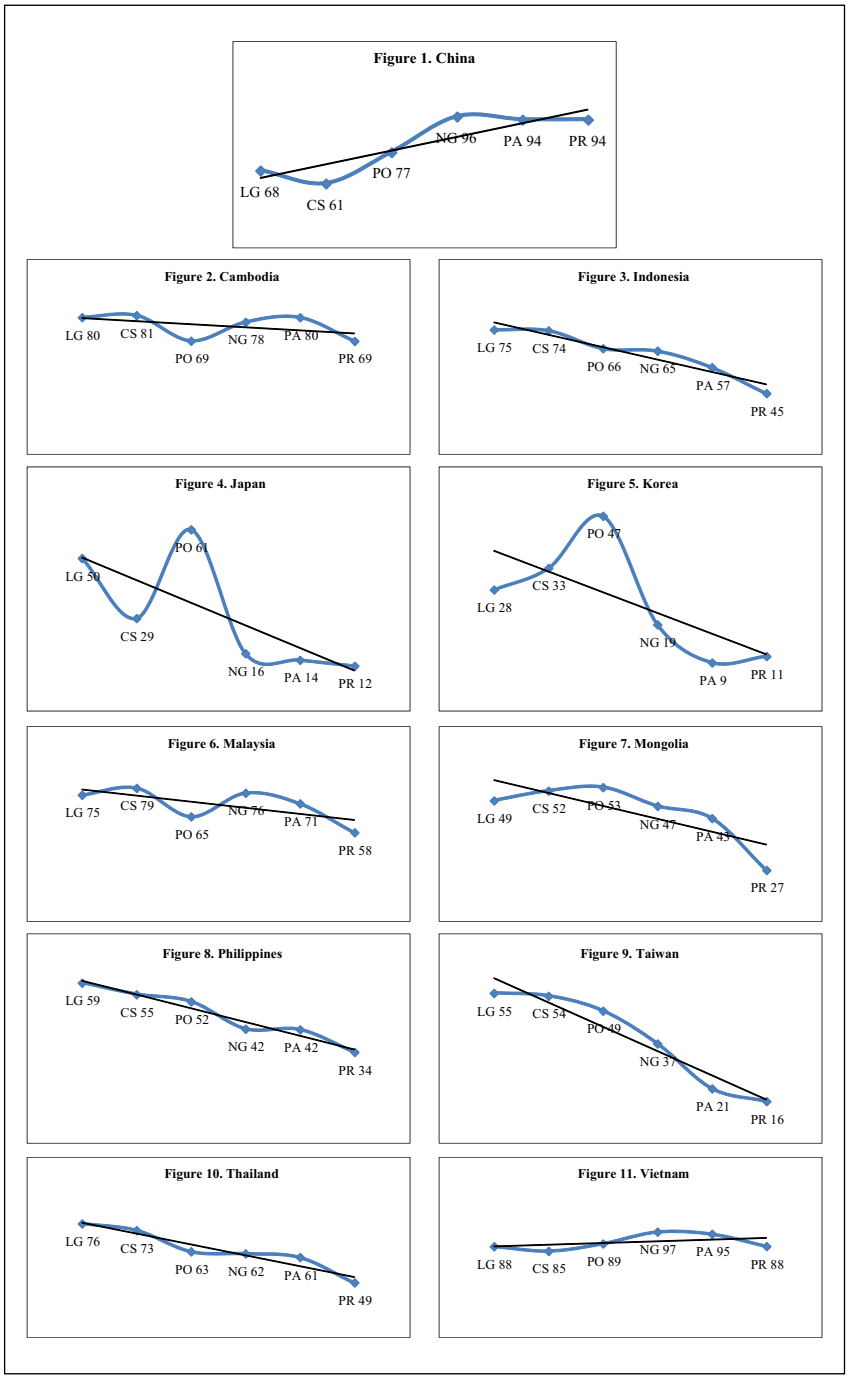
The series of country-specific line graphs in these figures show respondents' trust in six political institutions: national government; political parties; Parliament; police; local government; and the civil service. In China, trust in the higher levels of these political institutions is very high and it falls dramatically for the police, local government, and the civil service (see Figure 1), the 'hierarchical' trust pattern noted by Li (2016). In contrast, citizens in almost all other Asian societies, express more trust in lower level governmental organizations such as civil service organizations, local government, and the police. They express less trust in higher level institutions, including the national government and the Parliament (see Figures 2–11).[1] Therefore the pattern of trusting local more than national predominates in the rest of Asia.

Why is China so different? While existing research has focused on relative trust and the role of hierarchical trust within Chinese society, explaining the particular pattern of relative trust has not been subject to investigation. Along with Frederickson and Frederickson (1995) and Li (2016) we call for more theoretical attention to the relative aspect of political trust. The vast majority of studies that note that there is a pattern of trust still use an additive approach to consider different or more specific targets of political trust. Zhong (2014), for example, draws attention to the extent to which citizens in ten cities trust the Chinese national government compared to their local municipal governments but considers the factors that affect each separately. Lewis-Beck et al. (2014) also note the hierarchical structure of government in China but only consider trust in central government as a predictor of satisfaction with the central government.

The exception is Li (2016) who identifies four patterns of trust: hierarchical trust; equal trust in all levels; equal distrust in all levels; and local more than national (he calls this paradoxical trust) – his focus remains on a single pattern – hierarchical trust. We refine this pattern-based approach to relative trust in two ways. We provide the first study to focus on relative patterns as a group, emphasizing the vertical versus horizontal dimensions of relative trust by collapsing two categories – equal trust in all levels and equal distrust in all levels into one category – parallel trust. The study is also the first to provide specific hypotheses that might explain the pattern of relative political trust in China and why it differs from other Asian societies.

Explaining the predominant relative political trust pattern in China

To account for the relative trust pattern in China, and the predominance of hierarchical trust, we draw on a growing body of literature that considers the effects of cultural orientations and institutional performance on trust within the Chinese context (Li, 2004, 2013, 2016; Shi, 2014; Sun et al.,



Figures 1–11. The structure of institutional trust in Asian Societies (%).
Note: Data from Asian Barometer Survey, 2006–2010. Local level institutions: local government (LG), civil service (CS), and police (PO): National level institutions: national government (NG), Parliament (PA), and political parties (PR). Numbers refer to percentages of trust in particular institution averaged across both years (trends are similar within years), e.g. Figure 1 China, LG 68 denotes 68% trust local government.

2013; Wang, 2005; Yang and Tang, 2010). In the discussion that follows we develop expectations about how culture and performance could explain Chinese exceptionalism to the relative trust pattern found in other Asian societies. Given its particularly important function within the larger Chinese political environment we also consider the role of political control (see Newton, 2001; Uslaner, 2002). We begin with this latter issue.

Political control

China is an authoritarian country. The relatively high political trust in the national government expressed by Chinese citizens could reflect political control insofar as people in China fear the national government. As a result of this 'intimidation', responses to survey questions about the national government may not be genuine or reliable (Newton, 2001; Uslaner, 2002; Wang, 2005: 159). Scholars argue that the degree of response bias due to this kind of intimidation can be assessed by considering expressed levels of political fear (Shi, 2001; Steinhardt, 2016). This fear is largely directed at the national level. Research shows that while there were more than 100,000 relatively unheard of and unknown 'mass incidents', the vast majority were at the local level (Cai, 2010; Wang, 2014).

Political control is also manifest via a massive immersion in information generated, managed, and distributed by the state. The Chinese censorship effort, aimed at maintaining the stability of the national authoritarian state, is by far the world's most extensive (King et al., 2013). This censorship effort typically leads to media stories with particular slants: Chinese media, for example, frequently report on the problems plaguing new democracies. The aim is to 'drive home the point that had China taken the same path, it would have experienced similar political instability, economic decline, national disintegration, even civil war' (Zhong, 2014: 38). Many studies confirm that higher consumption of state media leads to greater government support (Kennedy, 2009; Lu and Shi, 2015). However, even more important is that, when there is criticism of government, it takes a top-down format.

Research on Chinese media and on Chinese news also shows that censorship is aimed at limiting criticism of particular levels of government rather than limiting criticism of government per se (Göbel and Ong, 2012). Chan's (2002) study of China's media policy shows that criticism of lower levels of government is relatively common on China Central Television. Indeed, the national level party and government use the media to mobilize popular support by criticizing local level institutions (Steinhardt, 2016). For example, the regime-controlled media often portrays corruption as a local phenomenon that the center is battling against (Shi, 2008). Li notes that 'in China, the lack of free media enhances villagers' trust in Beijing' and says that 'one tactic for boosting public confidence in it (center) is to occasionally condemn local officials for disobeying the Center and mistreating the people' (Li, 2004: 235). The state-owned media scapegoat local officials in order to preclude citizen discontent (Li, 2016). Thus, control over traditional news media may lead those in China who consume it to be more likely to trust the national compared to local government.

However, compared with traditional media, the sheer number of users and ease of content production has meant that the internet has proven far more difficult to control (Tang and Huhe, 2014). Due to such difficulty the state government adopts a strategic censorship policy, only banning online discussions that might lead to social unrest (Lorentzen, 2014). As King et al. (2013: 326) point out, 'negative and even vitriolic criticism of the state, political elites'', and policies is largely allowed on the internet, so long as web users do not fuel collective activities (see also Tang and Huhe, 2014). Moreover, Chinese web users often interpret sanctioned news in ways that often run counter to state intentions (King et al., 2013). For example, state media often characterize corruption as local, isolated and the result of weak oversight and self-discipline. However, internet

dissenters writing about this same issue attribute it to an unchecked authoritarian political system (King et al., 2013). Therefore, we expect that subjects who are more exposed to the internet and its greater preponderance of alternative framings of political issues will show little preference for either national or local level government.

Culture

Drawing on the cultural theory of trust many argue that political trust in China reflects traditional Chinese values with its emphasis on hierarchy, group-orientation, and paternalism (Chu et al., 2008; Shin, 2012). The maintenance of hierarchy and social order was ensured through the power of paternalistic families and dynasties where protection of the less powerful by the more powerful was ensured in exchange for loyalty and submission (Pye, 1992). This traditional aspect of Chinese political culture has been passed from generation to generation (Pye, 1992). Indeed, as Li (2004: 234) notes, villagers' trust in higher level authorities, particularly the national government, comes in part from the Confucian tradition of 'ascribing moral virtue to the emperor' but 'blaming wicked and shrewd court officials for things that go wrong'. The traditional Chinese emperor culture may therefore predispose people to believe that it is the responsibility of central leaders to protect ordinary citizens from abusive local authorities (Li, 2016).

Similarly, in *The Cultural Logic of Politics in Mainland China and Taiwan*, Shi (2014) attributes the fact that people in China trust political institutions that are removed from their daily lives to a cultural preference for hierarchical order (see also Shi, 2008). A hierarchical orientation towards authority mandates that, in order to maintain social harmony, individuals should respect the various chains of command in society (Shi, 2014). For example, in traditional Chinese culture, political leaders and governments occupy an important symbolic authoritative status position. People in such positions are not to be challenged. But, even beyond political figures, it is the more general culture of worship and dependence on authority figures that could be affecting political trust in China (Shi, 2014; Wong et al., 2011).

Group-oriented cultural values encourage individuals to align their goals and interests to those of the community. As a result, they are expected to tolerate policies that hurt their interests but benefit the collective majority (Shi, 2014). Indeed, many studies have concluded that Chinese are collective subjects, with the characteristic of group orientation (e.g. Chu et al., 2008; Shin, 2012). Group norms reflected in an allocentric definition of self-interest teach citizens to view their personal interests as embedded with the whole society (Shi, 2014). Even in contemporary China, the climate is still such that individual Chinese citizens are willing to subsume their individual interests for the sake of societal harmony. As a result, they trust the government even when it fails to respond to their demands (Shi, 2008, 2014). If Chinese citizens' trust comes from traditional values then, since national level institutions occupy a higher position than local level government, cultural norms should increase the inclination towards hierarchical trust.

Performance

A number of scholars draw attention to the performance of Chinese governments, especially at the national level. Instead of traditional values, some argue that it is the strong economy that is responsible for the high level of political trust among Chinese citizens (Wang, 2005). Chinese people's trust in the government is a rational choice based on their evaluations of government performance (Yang and Tang, 2010). Those who make positive assessments of the governments' ability to deal with the economy and with unemployment are also more likely to trust the central government (Wong et al., 2011). China's rapid economic development has produced high satisfaction with the

government. Other studies suggest that effective political performance is also important. Chinese citizens' perception of government responsiveness (Shi, 2014) as well as satisfaction with democracy (Li, 2016) has also been shown to affect trust in government.

However, in terms of the nature of these evaluations, the evidence suggests that Chinese citizens often assess the performance of local government far more critically than they assess national government (Lewis-Beck et al., 2014). In contrast to local government, the national government is able to distance itself from unpopular policies and to take credit for those that are better-liked. For instance, in their analysis of how land-takings in China affect trust, Cui et al. (2015) find that, even though it is a national policy, the local level bears the brunt of citizen anger because it is at that level where it is implemented. This privileging of the national level likely reflects the multilevel principal-agent Chinese government system that implements policies from the top down: policy implementation at the local level has a more immediate and apparent impact on everyday life (Chu et al., 2008; Li, 2016). Thus, taken together, the evidence about performance suggests that, if Chinese citizens' trust is reflective of performance, then good performance should increase the inclination towards hierarchical trust.

Measures

The most recent two waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (2006 and 2010) cover 13 Asian societies: China; Taiwan; Japan; South Korea; Singapore; Mongolia; Philippines; Thailand; Indonesia; Vietnam; Malaysia; Cambodia; and Hong Kong. We excluded Singapore and Hong Kong from our analyses because, as 'city-states', the local national distinction is not applicable. The total sample size is 35,166 with individual country samples ranging from 2,200 respondents in Cambodia to 8,571 respondents in China.[2] We include other Asian countries to demonstrate that there is a relative object-specific element to political trust whereby some institutions are systematically trusted more than others.

Relative political trust: We created a relative trust measure for each individual. The six questions that we used to create this measure were: *trust in national government; trust in political parties; trust in Parliament; trust in local government; trust in civil service; and trust in police*. All questions contained four response categories: '4 = a great deal of trust'; '3 = quite a lot of trust'; '2 = not very much trust'; and '1 = not at all'. National trust is an additive index of the combined score of each individual's trust in the national government, political parties, and Parliament. The local trust score is an additive index comprising trust in local government, civil service, and police,[3] and both indices range from 3 to 12; lower scores mean lower trust. Based on these two variables, we then coded individuals as belonging to one of *three* groups. First are those who trusted national level institutions more than local level institutions (national trust>local trust) or what Li (2004, 2016) calls hierarchical trust. It is hierarchical because the emphasis is placed on the top or national level. Second are those who trusted both levels equally (national trust = local trust) – we call this parallel trust because the emphasis is placed on both levels. Third are those who trusted the local level institutions more than the national level (national trust< local trust) – we call this pyramidal trust because the emphasis is placed on the bottom or local level. Thus, our dependent measure is a three category outcome, in which two of the three categories (hierarchical and pyramidal trust) are vertical in orientation and the other (parallel trust) is horizontal in orientation.

Columns 1 and 2 in Table 1 show the mean scores for each country on the additive indices showing the aggregate trust levels. China and Vietnam have the highest mean national level trust scores (10.7 out of a maximum of 12). Vietnam has the highest mean level of local trust (10.2 out of a maximum of 12) whereas the mean level of local trust in China is average among Asian societies (8.7). Next columns 3–5 show the percentage distributions of hierarchical, parallel and pyramidal

Table 1. Structure of national and local trust across Asian societies.

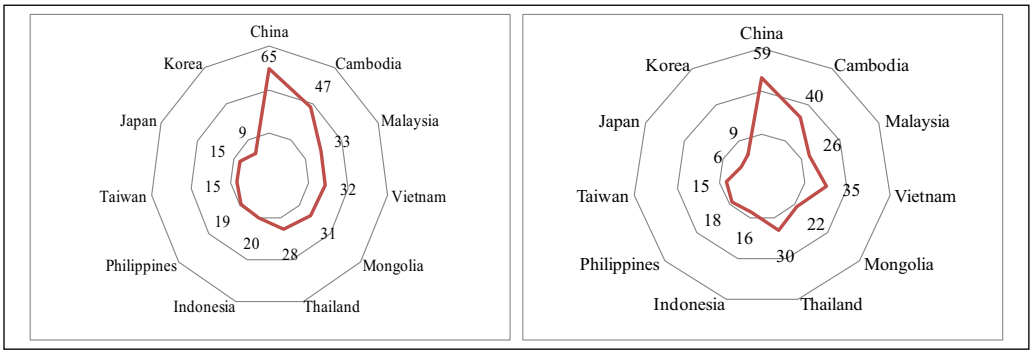
Country	Additive approach		Relative approach		
	Trust national level institutions (3–12)*	Trust local level institutions (3–12)*	% trust national level more than local level	% trust national and local level *equally*	% trust local level *more* than national level
			"hierachical"	"parallel"	"pyramidal"
China	10.7	8.7	63	32	6
Cambodia	8.8	9.0	43	23	34
Indonesia	7.5	8.3	18	38	44
Japan	5.8	7.3	9	24	67
Korea	5.3	6.7	9	29	62
Malaysia	8.5	8.7	29	36	34
Mongolia	6.7	7.4	27	22	51
Philippines	6.8	7.7	18	30	52
Taiwan	6.3	7.6	15	28	57
Thailand	7.7	8.4	29	31	40
Vietnam	10.7	10.2	34	50	16
Total	8.1	8.2	32	32	36

Note: Data from Asian Barometer Survey 2006 and 2010. Scores on questions about national level institutions: national government, political parties, and Parliament; local level institutions: local government, police, and civil service.
*Scores are means of index ranging from 3 to 12. Scores of 3–5 are low, 6–9 average, 10 and over are high. Relative approach adapted from Li (2016).
While hierarchical predominates in Cambodia it is less than a majority and there is no major difference with local level.

trust. In China more than half – 63% – of respondents fall into the 'trust national level institutions more' category, 32% trust both levels equally, and only 6% fall into the 'trust local government more' category. This pattern of trusting national level institutions so much more than local level institutions does not exist in the other Asian countries. Although hierarchical trust does predominate in Cambodia, the differences across categories are much more equal – and thus are closer to the pattern in Vietnam and Malaysia (where parallel trust predominates).[4] In other Asian countries the predominant pattern is to trust the local level more (Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand). Figures 12 and 13 further illustrate the distribution of the 'trust national government more' measure across Asia societies. Chinese exceptionalism is the norm in both 2006 and 2010.

Political Control: Political control is measured by variables denoting political fear, political news consumption, and internet exposure.[5] We added the responses to *people are free to speak what they think without fear* and *people can join any organization they like without fear* to measure political fear. Shi (2014) uses the same items. Each of these questions was coded on a 1–4 scale with the resulting index ranging from 2 (low fear) to 8 (high fear).[6] Political news consumption is indicated by the question *how often do you follow news about politics and government?* The responses for this question range from 'practically never' (1) to 'every day' (5) (see also Kennedy, 2009). We used *how often do you use the internet?* to measure individuals' internet exposure and the responses on this question range from never (1) to almost daily (6).

Culture: Culture is measured with variables denoting Confucian values, hierarchical orientation towards authority, and allocentric definition of self-interest, all three of which indicate a hierarchical/group-orientation towards authority (Shi, 2014; Shin, 2012). Confucian values are indicated



Figures 12(a)–12(b). Percentage who hold hierarchical trust across Asian societies (%).
Note: Figures show no change in country order over time.
Hierarchical trust denotes trust national level government more than local level government.

with the question '*Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow'*. Responses range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) and higher scores indicate more traditional values (see Chu et al., 2008; Shin, 2012). We combined individuals' responses to: *'even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they ask* and: *being a student, one should not question the authority of the teachers'* to denote hierarchical orientation towards authority (see Shi, 2014). With each of these questions coded on a 1–4 scale[7] we obtained a measure ranging from 2 to 8. To indicate group orientation, we use allocentric definition of self-interest which is indicated by an index of the following two items: '*In a group, we should avoid open quarrel to preserve the harmony of the group'* and '*Even if there is some disagreement with others, one should avoid the conflict'* (see Shi, 2014). Each of these questions was coded on a 1–4 scale[8] with the resulting index ranging from 2 to 8.

Performance: Government performance is measured by variables denoting economic performance, government responsiveness, and satisfaction with how democracy works in one's country (see also Wilkes, 2014, 2015). Economic performance is measured by individuals' evaluations of economic conditions: how would you rate the overall economic condition of our country today? The question is coded on a 1–5 scale with 1 indicating a negative assessment and 5 indicating a favorable assessment (see also Shi, 2014; Wang, 2005). We capture government responsiveness using *how well do you think the government responds to what you request* (see Shi, 2014), and democratic satisfaction with *on the whole how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way how democracy works in your country* (see Li, 2016).[9] Both variables are coded on a 1–4 scale with higher scores indicating more positive evaluations.

Controls: We use the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index to denote four types of political regimes: authoritarian (China and Vietnam); hybrid (Cambodia); flawed democracy (Mongolia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia); and full democracy (Japan and Korea):[10] we also include controls for survey wave, gender, age, family income, and education. Age is measured in years, ranging from 17–96 and education is coded on a scale of no formal education (1) to post-graduate degree (11). Family income denotes country-specific income quintiles (1–5).

Table 2 provides the means of key variables used to indicate control, culture, and performance by country. The means scores on the control variables do not show China as an outlier in terms of composition. Surprisingly, Japan (4.7) and Korea (4.7) stand out from Asian societies that have the highest score for political fear. It is possible that people in highly developed democratic states,

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of key independent variables in analysis by country.

		China	Cambodia	Indonesia	Japan	Korea	Malaysia	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan	Thailand	Vietnam	Total
Political control													
Political fear	2 = low; 8 = high	4.4	3.8	3.9	4.7	4.7	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.2
Political news	1 = practically never; 5 = every day	3.9	3.1	3.1	4.6	4.1	3.5	4.0	3.9	3.4	4.1	4.2	3.8
Internet exposure	1 = never; 5= almost every day	1.8	1.2	1.5	3.4	4.3	2.8	2.4	1.9	3.7	1.9	2.0	2.5
Culture													
Hierarchical orientation	2 = low; 8 = high	5.1	5.8	5.1	4.8	4.9	5.2	4.8	5.0	4.6	4.9	5.4	5.0
Group orientation	2 = low; 8=high	5.6	6.6	6.3	5.7	5.6	6.1	5.8	6.1	5.4	5.8	6.2	5.8
Paternalistic values	1 = low; 4 = high	2.8	2.9	2.8	1.9	2.3	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.5	3.0	2.6
Performance													
Economic performance	1 = very bad; 5 = very good	4.0	3.3	2.9	2.1	2.0	3.4	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.9	3.9	3.1
Government responsiveness	1 = low; 4 = high	3.1	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.1	2.7	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.5	3.1	2.7
Political satisfaction	1 = low; 4 = high	3.0	3.0	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.8	2.6	2.2	2.7	3.1	3.3	2.8
Controls													
Age	17–96 (in years)	46	39	41	55	44	40	40	42	46	45	43	45
Female	0 = male; 1 = female	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Education	1 = no education; 11 = postgraduate	4.5	3.4	4.6	6.9	7.0	5.6	5.9	5.7	6.5	4.6	5.4	5.3
Family income	1–5 (levels, income quintiles)	3.2	3.0	3.1	2.8	2.5	3.3	2.9	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.4	3.1

Note: Data from Asian Barometer Survey 2006 and 2010.

Japan and Korea, are more critical (see also Kim, 2010). China's score is 4.4, which is slightly higher than the average score of 4.2 across Asian societies. Cambodia (3.8) and Thailand (3.8) on the other hand, have the lowest levels of political fear among Asian societies. The mean score for political news consumption is 3.9 in China, compared to 3.8 across Asian societies. Finally, the internet exposure varies from 1.2 in Cambodia to 4.3 in South Korea. Compared to other societies China falls on the low end of internet exposure with a mean score of 1.8.

The mean distributions of the cultural variables again place China somewhere in the middle of Asian societies. Chinese citizens do not hold particularly hierarchical values in comparison with the citizens of other Asian societies. The highest score on the hierarchical values index is found in Cambodia (5.8) while the lowest is in Taiwan (4.6). The data show that, contrary to expectations (see e.g. Shi, 2014), China and Taiwan have the lowest allocentric self-interest scores and that Cambodia (6.6) and Indonesia (6.3) have the highest. Finally, China has a higher than average score on the paternalistic values measure (2.8), though Vietnam scores the highest (3.0) and Japan scores the lowest (1.9).

In terms of the performance measures China is similar to Vietnam on two out of three performance measures and both differ markedly from other Asian societies. Chinese and Vietnamese citizens assess their country's economic environment positively whereas the citizens of the democratic states (Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines) provide a more negative evaluation of their country's economic performance. This pattern also holds for both government responsiveness and political satisfaction. Japan, Korea, and Taiwan have the lowest scores on the performance variables, possibly illustrating that citizens in the democracies are more critical than people from other Asian societies.

Findings

Table 3 shows the results of a series of multinomial logistic regressions of the control, culture, and performance measures on hierarchical trust (trust national level political institutions more), pyramidal trust (trust local level institutions more) and parallel trust (trust both equally) – the latter is the reference group.[11] Each model includes controls for gender, education level, age, family income, and survey year. In Model 1 and Model 3, we also control for regime type since both models include countries at different stages of democratic development. In these models a positive coefficient indicates either a positive effect on trust national more (hierarchical trust) or a positive effect on trust local more (pyramidal trust) with the reference as trust both equally (parallel trust).

In terms of political control the results in the first two columns denoting all countries show that when citizens experience political fear they are more likely to trust national level political institutions. In contrast, while political news consumption increases hierarchical trust, internet exposure has the opposite effect (though it is not statistically significant), likely because the state is less able to control online content. Culture dampens trust in the national government. Citizens who express both hierarchical and group-centered values are less likely to differentiate between national and the local level political institutions and often trust them equally. While paternalistic values decrease pyramidal trust there is no effect of either hierarchical or group-oriented values. In terms of performance, it is clear that across the board, citizens link overall economic achievement to trust. Better economic performance is associated with higher trust in national government and lower trust in local government relative to trusting equally. Citizens who have positive assessments of government responsiveness and how democracy works in the country are significantly more likely to trust local and national levels of government equally.[12]

Are these effects different for China than they are for other Asian societies? The second two columns in Table 3 show the model for China only. Our aim is to ascertain whether China's distinct

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression of hierarchical, paradoxical, vs. parallel trust.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	All countries		China		All countries (excluding China)	
	national more/	local more/	national more/	local more/	national more/	local more/
	"hierarchica"	"pyramidal"	'hierarchical'	'pyramidal'	'hierarchical'	'pyramidal'
	(vs. trust equally/ 'parallel')		(vs. trust equally/ 'parallel')		(vs. trust equally/ 'parallel')	
Intercept	1.18***	–0.91***	1.91***	1.00	–0.56*	–0.97***
	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.45)	(0.99)	(0.24)	(0.21)
Political control						
Political fear	0.04**	–0.02	0.10**	0.04	0.02	–0.03*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Political news	0.09***	0.03**	0.14***	–0.01	0.08***	0.04**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Internet exposure	–0.02	0.00	–0.09***	–0.01	–0.00	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Culture						
Hierarchical orientation	–0.05***	–0.02	–0.11**	–0.03	–0.03	–0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Group orientation	–0.04**	0.00	0.07	–0.05	0.01	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Paternalistic values	–0.03	–0.08***	–0.09	–0.02	0.02	–0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.14)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Performance						
Economic performance	0.06**	–0.14***	0.03	–0.06	0.04	–0.15***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Government responsiveness	0.02	–0.08**	0.03	–0.23*	–0.06	–0.09***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political satisfaction	–0.17***	–0.10***	–0.27***	–0.37**	–0.05	–0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Controls						
Age	0.00	0.00	–0.00	–0.01	0.00*	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	–0.16***	–0.11***	–0.23***	–0.05	–0.13**	–0.10**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.15)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Education	–0.00	0.06***	0.01	–0.02	0.02	0.07***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Family income	–0.04*	0.06**	–0.01	0.07	–0.08**	0.04
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Survey year (Ref. 2006)						
2010	–0.13***	0.22***	–0.80***	0.01	0.02	0.28***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.19)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Regime type (Ref. Authoritarian)						
Hybrid regime	0.11	2.00***			1.00***	1.73***
	(0.09)	(0.10)			(0.10)	(0.12)

Table 3. (Continued)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	All countries		China		All countries (excluding China)	
	national more/	local more/	national more/	local more/	national more/	local more/
	"hierarchica"	"pyramidal"	'hierarchical'	'pyramidal'	'hierarchical'	'pyramidal'
	(vs. trust equally/ 'parallel')		(vs. trust equally/ 'parallel')		(vs. trust equally/ 'parallel')	
Flawed democracy	–0.91*** (0.04)	1.90*** (0.06)			0.09 (0.07)	1.66*** (0.08)
Full democracy	–1.71*** (0.09)	2.20*** (0.08)			–0.77*** (0.10)	1.93*** (0.10)
N	25131		5184		19947	
Likelihood ratio Chi^2	7617		275		2338	

Note: Data from Asian Barometer Survey 2006 and 2010; standard errors in parentheses: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

trust pattern is explained by the fact that the key predictors of trust – control, culture and performance – operate differently in China than they do in other Asian societies. It was expected that, because China is an authoritarian country and because the national government controls the media to its advantage, the effect of political control on the relative trust pattern should be greater in China than elsewhere. While a number of Asian countries, including Vietnam, Cambodia, and Mongolia, are also authoritarian or autocratic, Chinese censorship, aimed at maintaining the stability of the national authoritarian state, is by far the world's most extensive (King et al., 2013). The results bear this out – political control has a much larger effect in China than in other Asian societies.[13] While political control has a similar effect in Vietnam (except regarding the internet, which only matters in China) this effect does not lead to hierarchical trust as the dominant pattern. Those who score highly on the political fear and political news indices are significantly more likely to have hierarchical trust. In contrast, internet exposure decreases the likelihood of hierarchical trust, likely because that is where the national government is least able to control its messaging.

Turning to culture, somewhat unexpectedly, Chinese citizens who hold more traditional values are more likely to have equal trust. Specifically, instead of encouraging people to favor national-level political institutions, hierarchical values promote equal trust across institutions at different levels. Neither of the other indicators of culture matter. Thus, although culture may matter for additive trust (Shi, 2014) it has little impact on the relative pattern. Nor is there a consistent overall impact of performance in China. Neither economic nor government responsiveness matter. Political satisfaction with democracy leads to parallel rather than either hierarchical or pyramidal trust. In conclusion, Chinese exceptionalism to the relative trust pattern is not explained by political culture or political performance. Instead, it is a result of political control.

The remaining columns in Table 3 show the model for all Asian countries excluding China. Clearly, several significant effects in the previous 'all country' model were largely driven by the inclusion of China. For example, political fear and internet exposure now have less effect on hierarchical trust. In the model for other countries, culture and performance factors have little effect on

Table 4. Likelihood ratio Chi-Square of multinomial models.

Model	China	Japan	Korea	Mongolia	Philippines	Taiwan
Controls only	181.9	230.0	33.3	54.9	22.3	150.1
+ Political control variables	201.8	211.0	33.6	86.9	26.2	139.7
+ Cultural variables	229.0	183.2	13.6	83.3	35.6	120.7
+ Performance variables	378.9	189.9	25.9	114.2	47.4	138.2
Model	Thailand	Indonesia	Vietnam	Cambodia	Malaysia	All (except China)
Controls only	66.1	140.3	61.2	44.7	68.2	917.9
+ Political control variables	72.0	115.6	97.1	39.9	86.9	871.3
+ Cultural variables	90.5	120.0	96.5	44.1	80.8	921.5
+ Performance variables	122.0	125.5	49.9	61.3	90.9	1289.2

hierarchical trust. In contrast, these factors – economic performance, government responsiveness, and political satisfaction – do decrease pyramidal trust[14] and this confirms that both political culture and institutional performance are indicators of political trust (trust national and local equally), but that they do not explain the relative political trust pattern.

To further buttress these findings, Table 4 provides the model fit statistics (likelihood ratio Chi-Squares) for a series of nested models for each country. The Likelihood Ratio (LR) Chi-Square test compares the goodness of fit between the null model with only the dependent variable and the alternative model including all the independent variables. The value indicates how many times more likely the data are under the alternative model than the null model. Therefore, the bigger the value the better fit of the alternative model. In each instance we first estimated the model (2) in Table 3 for each country with only the controls and then added the political control, culture, and performance variables respectively. The results for China show that these measures explain the Chinese relative trust pattern very well. The likelihood ratio increases with each new block of variables. Turning to the remaining countries the results show that while political control also has an impact in Mongolia, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia (in all instances there is a significant increase) this is not the case for the other countries. The cultural variables improve the fit for the Philippines and Thailand and the performance measures matter for Mongolia, Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia. Most important is that model fit statistics for all countries (without China) show that political control leads to a worse fitting model when China is excluded. Culture is also unimportant whereas performance is consistently important. China has performance, albeit at times different indicators of performance, in common with other Asian societies as a determinant of relative trust. The effects of political control are more important in China than elsewhere as all three control measures are related to hierarchical trust.

Conclusion

More than two decades ago Frederickson and Frederickson (1995) noted that while the majority of US citizens trusted local government and institutions they did not trust those at the national level. In China a different relative pattern, one of 'hierarchical trust' predominates: the central government is trusted much more than local government (e.g. Li, 2013, 2016; Saich, 2007). China's hierarchical trust pattern is to a certain extent unexpected given that Chinese national level

institutions are so removed from daily life. That is, with little knowledge or contact with the national government, why then should citizens in China trust the national level more? What can account for the unique relative trust pattern in China?

To date, no study has considered relative trust as an outcome. Instead, a large cross-national literature on political trust has drawn attention to country differences in levels of trust in specific institutions such as the national government and the civil service including in China (Sun et al., 2013; Zhong, 2014). Yet, as we have argued, relative trust is not the same as levels of trust/additive trust. Our investigation has sought to consider relative trust patterns as an outcome. We considered three patterns of relative trust – hierarchical trust (national more than local), parallel trust (both levels equally), and pyramidal trust (local more than national). We sought to explain why the predominant relative trust pattern of hierarchical trust is so different in China than it is in other Asian societies. In the latter case, as with the US, the predominant relative trust pattern is to trust local more than national government. To account for Chinese exceptionalism we considered the effects of culture, performance, and political control.

Our analysis of the 2006 and 2010 Asian Barometer Survey data shows that the predominant relative trust pattern in China is not the result of culture. In his discussion of the potential causes of the Chinese trust pattern, Li (2016) hypothesizes that hierarchical trust may emanate from the old emperor culture and political institutions. In this view, central leaders are on the people's side, to protect ordinary citizens from exploitation by abusive local authorities (Li, 2016: 16). While traditional culture is a predictor of the level of political trust in China (Shi, 2014) it does not explain the hierarchical trust pattern. One explanation that deserves further investigation is whether those respondents who hold traditional values are still likely to conceptualize the political institutions covered by the analysis, including local government, police, and civil service, in an abstract sense and hence, do not distinguish between levels of government.

Nor can the predominance of the hierarchical trust pattern in China be attributed to performance. We found no effect of economic performance assessment. While satisfaction with how democracy functions matters in China its effect is negative (leading to trusting both levels of government equally) and largely parallels an effect found elsewhere in Asia. Could it be that Chinese exceptionalism is still about performance and that other factors such as knowledge and political engagement need to be considered? Shi (2014) argues that a vast majority of Chinese citizens have little knowledge about political institutions. For this reason any evaluation of political performance may simply reflect satisfaction with personal economic and political life. In terms of engagement, it has been shown elsewhere that even those very few individuals who have the opportunity to engage at the national level, such as members of the Chinese Communist Party, have less confidence in the government than non-members (Li, 2004). The reality is that authoritarian political systems offer few opportunities for citizens to participate in politics writ large and largely constrain participation to the local or state-controlled workplace level (Shi, 1997).

Chinese exceptionalism to the relative trust pattern is, however, reflective of the effects of political control. The Asian Barometer Survey data show the importance of fear in particular (see also Newton, 2001; Uslaner, 2002). Those more fearful about association and expression were much more likely to have hierarchical trust. We also found that news media consumption increases hierarchical trust and that internet use increases parallel trust (favoring neither the national nor the local government). The regime-controlled media often portray corruption as a local phenomenon that the center is battling against and, as a result, when faced with chronic problems of corruption, Chinese citizens are more likely to blame local level political institutions (Saich, 2011). In fact, many citizens believe that when they run into problems with local authorities they can appeal to higher levels of government for help (O'Brien and Li, 2006).

In sum, an understanding of the very high level of trust that Chinese citizens place in their national government must also include China's unique relative trust pattern (see also Li, 2013, 2016). While the additive approach captures one important dimension of political trust – which is how much or at what level people trust – the relative approach used in this article reveals another dimension which is how they trust. As with the study of social trust the radius of trust or who one trusts, is the key factor to understanding the level of trust. It is our hope that, beyond the particulars of the Chinese case, these relative trust patterns will generate greater scholarly attention.

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Notes

1. While there is a slight linear decline in Vietnam, the change gap is very small. Citizens in Vietnam express very high levels of trust in both higher (national government, political parties, and Parliament) and lower (police, local government and civil service) level institutions. The average percentage of the population who trust each is approximately 90% whereas in China the ratio is 93% in higher level institutions and only 66% in lower level institutions. The pattern for China is anomalous.
2. The authors obtained the dataset from National Taiwan University (asianbarometer@ntu.edu.tw) on 9 January 2015. A detailed description of the Asian Barometer Survey including sampling procedures of the Asian Barometer Survey is available at http://www.asianbarometer.org/newenglish/surveys/. Each country sample size was determined using a probability proportional to size sample strategy which is why the *N* for China is much larger than the *N* for Vietnam. While the samples are not completely random the Asian Barometer Survey does not provide the kind of post-estimation weights that might, for example, be used to bootstrap the standard errors at the country-year level (which is our focus).
3. In Appendix 1 (see Supplementary Material at http://ips.sagepub.com) we provide the results of a varimax factor analysis of these 6 items across the entire Asian Barometer Survey sample. There are two factors across the board – one at the national level and the other at the local level (civil service, police, and local government) and thus they are separate dimensions. We also conducted separate country-specific factor analyses with similar results (available upon request from authors).
4. In Cambodia, while 43% are hierarchical trustors and 34% are pyramidal trustors, the difference or gap between those who hold hierarchical versus pyramidal trust is less than 10%. In contrast in China, only 6% express pyramidal trust, while the majority – 63% – express hierarchical trust. The difference or gap is greater than 50%.
5. We use the term political control because our primary focus is on China. The meaning of these variables is different in democratic societies. China's political news from the traditional mass media is still largely controlled by the state and therefore exposure to political news provides a particularly valid measure of control (Kennedy, 2009: 523).
6. 1 = strongly agree, 2 = somewhat agree, 3 = somewhat disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate greater fear.
7. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicate more hierarchical values.

8. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicate higher expressed levels of collectivism.
9. As China is an authoritarian country, scholars have debated the meaning of the questions about the workings of democracy in that country. Lu and Shi (2015) have recently shown that the Chinese government has used the state-controlled media and educational system to promote a particular understanding of democracy as guardianship (see also Wang, 2005 who uses the satisfaction with democracy items to denote performance in China).
10. The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index reflects a summed evaluation of 60 factors in five areas (election process, civil rights, government capability, participation, and political culture) in 167 countries since 2006 (see http://www.eiu.com/home.aspx).
11. (see Supplementary Material at http://ips.sagepub.com).
12. (see Supplementary Material at http://ips.sagepub.com).
13. Additional analyses with the entire country sample with interactions between the political control variables and a dummy variable for China were also significant.
14. Appendix 2 (see Supplementary Material at http://ips.sagepub.com) summarizes the impacts of control, culture, and performance on trust national and local level political institutions more for China and for other Asian countries. Appendix 3 (see Supplementary Material at http://ips.sagepub.com) replicates the China model in Table 3 for each specific Asian society. While the political control variables all have large effects in the Chinese context, their effects, with some exceptions, such as Vietnam, are much weaker in other Asian societies. Still, at the aggregate level political control does not lead most Vietnamese citizens to trust national more than local. Vietnam is also similar to China in the effects of the performance measures, possibly as a result of a similar cultural and political environment. Appendix 4 (see Supplementary Material at http://ips.sagepub.com) provides the results of a robustness check that re-estimates all models using the multiple imputation method, and shows that the results are not an artifact of missing data.

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Author biographies

Cary Wu (Chinese name: Wu, Zhiming) is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of British Columbia, Canada. His research interests are social and political trust, migration, sociology of the city, China, and quantitative methods. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Sociologist*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* and *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*.

Rima Wilkes is Professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Her research focusing on race and ethnicity and public opinion has appeared in *Social Science Research*, *American Sociological Review* and *International Migration Review*.