Can Economic Success Propagate Autocracy?

Experimental Evidence from Taiwan

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May 14, 2014

Abstract

Democratization is a learning process. When citizens in new democracies still consider democracy as economic tool instead of a principle, domestic economic fluctuation steers democratic legitimacy. However, why do citizens attribute economic performance to regime type rather than incumbent party? This article proposes that people would compare the performance of different regimes in the same era and update their democratic belief - a salient economic success in an autocracy may undermine democratic belief of neighborhood countries. Through vignette survey experiment on 540 Taiwanese participants, this article illustrates the causal mechanism between economic performance, regime type, and democratic legitimacy. After Taiwanese participants, especially non-partisans, read the news of China’s economic success and its linkage to human right repression, they in average lowered their democratic belief. By replacing the subject in the news with UK, however, participants support democracy more. Further analysis rejects the possibility that the change of attitude comes from emotion. Result suggests that the relationship between economic performance and democratic belief is not merely a domestic issue, and provides an additional theory for explaining autocratic nostalgia in East Asia.
Democratization is a learning process. Following Easton (1965), studies have examined the proposition that evaluation of political system is determined by the performance of government. For new democracies, especially, citizens perceive democratic regime as better economic performance and higher living standard in East European survey (Dalton et al., 2007), Asian Barometer (Chu et al., 2008; Chu and Huang, 2010) and Afrobarometer (Mattes and Bratton, 2007). Dalton et al. (2007) describe this perception as the third dimension to public images of democracy\(^1\).

However, why do citizens attribute poor economic performance to the whole democratic system, rather than only the incumbent party? As is argued by Epstein et al. (2006) and Svolik (2013), the advantage of democratic system is that citizens can replace poor-performed incumbent by regular election and therefore still support democracy; in autocracy, the ruling authority is the only target to be blamed. When both elites and citizens consider democracy as the "only game in town," the legitimacy of democracy is still consolidated (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Doubt on democratic system is something more than economic voting.

This article argues that previous studies neglected the reference point for evaluation. For example, one citizen observes bad economic performance of her current elected government. But if around the world the economic performance of democratic regimes is still better than autocratic ones, she may attribute the performance of her nation to the incumbent rather than the regime type. In contrast, if there is a systematic, or at least impressive, economic success in autocracies over democracies, one may question its democratic belief and decelerate democratic consolidation. Especially for new democracies and countries under democratic transition, citizens do not consolidate their belief toward democratic value, implying their susceptibility to successful authoritarian regime. If citizens will attribute the poor economic performance to regime type as theories proposed, the evaluation may come from the perceived different economic outcome between two regimes.

\(^1\)Contrasting to the first (democratic governance) and the second (freedom and liberty) dimension.
There are two possible scenarios for citizens to juxtapose regimes. First, Rose et al. (1998) analyze East Europe surveys and propose the "Churchill hypothesis": people compare the performance of current regime to the predecessor. Mattes and Bratton (2007) also find similar evidence in emerging democracies in Africa, and Chang et al. (2007) explained the wanning of democratic support in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan by disparaging assessment of the economy and corruption. If new regime performed worse than the previous autocratic one, it is reasonable for citizens to reminisce the former regime.

Another possible source for comparing regimes, which is widely neglected, is the economic success of autocracies of the same era. For the last half century this phenomenon may not exist, since western democracy is spread along with the image of highly economic success. However, both Diamond (2007) and Dalton et al. (2007) warn that democratic legitimacy in developing countries may "lost its content" and "need deeper root", since justifying democratic regime merely by economic success may fail during economic fluctuation. As the example just mentioned, if there is an autocratic country presents impressive economic success to the world, people in poor-performed democracy would reevaluate their democratic support basing on the materialistic comparison.

The compelling economic success of China, which has become the second largest economy in 2013 and the top in near future, may play the role of justifying and propagating autocracy. According to East Asia Barometer surveys, citizens lived in countries near China (Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan) showed authoritarian nostalgia, which correlates to perceived poor governance (Chang et al., 2007). China also actively promotes its economic success model as "soft power", especially to countries in Africa and even South East Asia. At the same time, China censors negative news about human right repression through trade manipulation. In the end of 2013, numerous western journalists China visa were threatened to be canceled.

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2Gideon Rachman, The hard evidence that Chinas soft power policy is working, FT.com, (19 February 2007).
due to their reports of negative content. Moreover, many arguments, in both mass media and in academic, try to positively link China economy success to repression of human rights (e.g. Zhao, 2010; Gilson and Mihaupt, 2011; Oksanen, 2011; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011). The success of China also reminisces about "Asian Value” argument proposed by the Singaporean patriarch Lee Kuan Yew: "economic success in East Asia justify the usage of Confucian culture, which emphasizes obedience and intolerance to opposition group”.

Would the image of China economic success promote autocracy and cause democratic rollback in other democratic countries, especially new democracies? In his 2005 speech, President Bush emphasized the successful democracies in East Asia can not only promote stability and prosperity to the region, but also become model for democratic Middle East. In recent years, however, China strengthens its control over Hong Kong and Taiwan, and increases promote its economic model to other new democracies in Asia, Africa, and Middle East. The image of China economic success and its implication on democratic consolidation becomes an important issue for anyone who cares democratic consolidation. For example, Chu and his colleagues argue in How East Asians View Democracy (2008) that the rise of China may challenge both the modernization and democratization theory, and more researches need to be done.

The image of China’s economic success may be able to explain the stall of democratization in Taiwan. According to the three waves of Asian Barometer surveys, the level of democratic legitimacy - the percentage of Taiwanese people who believes democracy is always preferable than other regimes - are 47.3% in 2001, 50.3% in 2006, and 50.8% in 2010. During this period, Taiwanese people had experienced second turnover and at least five national elections, but their level of supporting democracy increased insignificantly. The trend seems contradict to what Svolik(2013) suggests.

Thus, this research focuses on two major topics: (1) whether the exposure to China economic success influences citizens democratic belief in new democracies; (2) the linkage
of China economic success to human right repression further dampens, or restores citizens
democratic belief? The first topic directly test the justifying effect of the image of successful
China, but it might be insufficient if people did not build the linkage of news content to regime
evaluation. Therefore, the second topic further emphasizes the linkage, and tests whether
this "China model" influences democratic belief. Moreover, the second topic touches the
issue of information bias and censorship - if economic success of autocracies really propagate
authoritarian attitude among citizens in new democracies, can the emphasis on the trade-
off, human right repression, restores their democratic belief? Do citizens just ignore or
lack information about repression, or they are willing to exchange human right to economic
development?

Another issue related to the second topic is how citizens perceive the content of democ-
acy. For instance, in 2008 Asian Barometer the majority of Taiwanese regarded democracy
as basic necessities like food, electricity, and economic development (Chu et al., 2008). For
these people, human right repression may be justified through economy, and the effect of
justification may link to regime type. Hence, measuring the effect of linkage gives us the
insight on how people really define democracy in their mind, which is crucial for democratic
consolidation.

To estimate the China factor, empirical study on Taiwanese people can be an extreme
but also potentially generalizable case. First, Taiwan started its democratic transition in
1989 and had two presidential turnovers in 2000 and 2008, implying it is still a new demo-
cratic country. Second, China applies both violent threat and economic coerce on Taiwan
since the split in 1949. As early as 1985, China government made the statement that us-
ing economic dependence to speed up the reunification (Niou, 2008). Compared to other
countries, Taiwanese people are provided with a clear authoritarian option for the future.
Both in the inauguration speech of President Ma Ying-Jiou in 2012 and Taiwan Relations
Act passed by the U.S. House in 2014, they both declare "the future of Taiwan should be
decided by all Taiwanese people.” The claims contained all possibilities, explicitly including regime transition.

Moreover, in surveys China and Taiwan reflected similar "Asian Value,” which might be the source to insist in authoritarianism and deter democracy (Park and Shin, 2006). Therefore, this new democratic island is heavily immersed in the economic influence of China, and citizens are always provided the chance to re-embrace authoritarian regime. If there is propagating effect of China economic success on new democracies, the effect will be the largest in the context of Taiwan.

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Democratic Value and Hypotheses

Democratic legitimacy indicates that ”democracy is the only game in town.” (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Numerous studies focus on the domestic issue and its relation to democratic legitimacy in Taiwan. Tsai (2011) compares the factors influencing democratic legitimacy in

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3In the future, I plan to conduct similar survey experiment in Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan. I choose these four countries because of their similarity on Confusions culture, and their diverse level of democratization. Hong Kong is currently governed by China, but recent surveys show Hong Kong citizens have started democratization movement and sought for democracy. Taiwan and Korea have gone through democratic transition for years, but Taiwanese was especially threatened by China on unification issue; Japan had experienced democratic system for half century, but recent survey reflected highest level of democratic disbelief. Contrasting the different results in these samples can benefit this research on external validity.
six east Asia countries basing on Asian Barometer, and reveals that approval of incumbent, subjective economic performance, and level of education influences the democratic consolidation of Taiwanese people. Chang (2009) categorizes Taiwanese people into four groups basing on their attitude on democratic legitimacy and democratic satisfaction. He then finds that gender, age, level of education, vote choice in 2004 presidential election, subjective economic evaluation, perceived corruption level, and unification-independence orientation would influence how Taiwanese people locate themselves on each category. However, these studies are still based on cross-sectional surveys instead of panel data nor experiments.

This research also barrows the item ”democratic legitimacy ”from Asian Barometer. After the treatment, participants are asked ”Which sentence below is closest to your viewpoint? Democracy is always the best political system, Sometimes autocracy is better than democracy, I do not care whether my government is democratic or autocratic?” . If the economic success of China can significantly justify authoritarian rules, respondents who are exposed to the China news will support democracy less, or consider autocratic regime as good as democracy. Moreover, the linkage of economic success to human right repression can possibly decrease democratic belief among respondents, since the linkage shacks the materialistic dimension of democracy.

In short, the two hypotheses in this research are:

\( H_1 \): Exposure to China economic success decreases democratic legitimacy.

\( H_2 \): Exposure to the linkage of China economic success to human right repression decreases democratic legitimacy.

**Research Design**

To deal with these two research questions and try to establish causal inference, experimental design is necessary. Previous studies on authoritarian nostalgia (Chang et al., 2007)
or the increase of democratization in East Asia (Dalton et al. 2007) only base on cross-sectional surveys. Geddes and Zaller (1989) analyze opinion data collected in Brazil during its authoritarian period, and find the exposure to biased media (government-dominated in this case) correlates to the individual level of political awareness. Hence, there will be problem of endogeneity. Other studies explain democratic transition through multi-level data like economic development or modernization (Epstein et al., 2006; Inglehard and Welzel, 2010), but they fail to provide the psychological evidence in individual level; the individual-level causal relationship cannot be built without experimental testing.

This article proposes a vignette experiment to test the two topics above. The advantage of vignette treatment design is to respectively estimate the effect of each treatment, and meanwhile measure the interactive effect between treatments on dependent variable (Mutz, 2011). Following the topics this experiment has two treatments: exposure of China economic success, and linkage of economic success to human right repression.

To measure the effect of the first treatment, exposure to China economic success, we can either compare two groups of participants exposure to news or not, or we can expose the control-group respondents to another economic success news of a democratic country. Therefore, I randomly assigned Taiwanese participants into three scenarios: no exposure, exposure to China economic success news, and exposure to UK economic success news.

This choice is based on two reasons: first, UK is the first and one of the most famous democratic country. Granted that the United States is the so-called leader of democracy, United State is too influential for respondents in new democracies in East Asia to put manipulation on the news content the manipulation on UK economic news is easier than the U.S. Second, the target groups I focus new democracies and countries under democratic transition in East Asia most are not colonized by UK. 4 Comparing to the U.S. - the world police as well as winner of the cold war - I think UK is a better choice for my research

4For the future experiment in Hong Kong, I plan to replace UK with France in news content—
for estimating the effect of China economic success because it is less salient to the targeted people. Moreover, the violent conflict between protesters and UK police is well-known. In 2010, UK college students fought against police in numerous cities due to tuition fee issue. Therefore, the manipulation on UK news content, especially about human right repression on freedom of speech, is believable than other advanced democratic countries.

To estimate the effect of the second treatment, linkage of economic success to human right repression, I further manipulate China and UK news to either include the linkage or not. I add a paragraph into the economic success news, which a business analyst points out that the economic success is due to "Legal barriers against land requisition and environment protection are abolished, and numerous protests are soon repressed; both of them contributed to (China/UK) economy growth." By measuring the difference between how participants view the linkage of human right repression to either China or UK economic success, not only the second question in this research can be tested, but also we can explore how citizens in new democracies define democracy. This vignette experimental design helps clarify effect of each treatment as well as interaction of them.

Experiment process is as followed. At the beginning, participants are told that "we are going to investigate their political opinion and may ask them to read a news article". Participants first complete a brief survey of political characteristics. They are then randomly assigned to one of five experimental conditions: apart from control group skipping this step, participants are required to read a news article, which is manipulated by 2 (China economic success v. UK economic success) X 2 (Linkage of economic success to human right repression v. Not mentioned) (see Appendix). For the first treatment, only the name of the country is replaced in the article; for the second treatment, a paragraph is added that a business analyst attribute economic success to repressing protest and freedom of speech. To increase external validity, the typesetting of the news article is exactly the same as normal online news article that Taiwanese people may encounter in daily life.
After reading the news, participants are asked two questions about the content for manipulation check. In all conditions, following their exposure to the treatment news article, participant receives a survey regarding their moods and their attitude toward democracy in general (see Appendix for all survey items). In the end, participants are asked their demographic characteristics, and then be debriefed about the manipulations. The experiment takes approximately ten minutes.  

Data

Taiwanese samples were recruited through PTT.cc. PTT is one of the largest BBS online discussion forum in Taiwan and is owned by National Taiwan University. The survey experiment was designed and conducted through Qualtrics.com, and then put announcement and questionnaire link on PTT. Experiment was conducted during Dec. 29, 2013 to Jan. 05, 2014. Overall 813 netizens clicked to participate the experiment, and 589 finished. Participants who finished the whole surveys were given 100 P, a virtual currency on PTT, which is close to NTD $2-5.

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic and political characteristics of these participants. Most of the participants in this experiment are young, college-educated, and middle to low income level in Taiwan. For party identification, 17% of participants self-report Pan-blue camp, including KMT, PFP, and NP, and 23% of them Pan-green, including DPP, TSU, and Green Party. According to previous studies (Chang, 2007; Tsai, 2011), these socio-demographic and political variables significantly influence individual’s perceived democratic legitimacy. Therefore, it is necessary to examine whether people with different background were randomly assigned among groups. Besides, during analysis they should be controlled

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5The experimental design is approved through Duke IRB, with number #C0203.
6telnet://ptt.cc
7Data and R-code for analysis are provided in http://sites.duke.edu/austinwang/working-papers/.
through regression model.

Table 1: Socio-demographic and Political Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>25.365</td>
<td>7.121</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 = male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income/month</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>2.481</td>
<td>1.320</td>
<td>1 = &lt;NTD$20k</td>
<td>5 = &gt;NTD$150k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edu</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>3.198</td>
<td>0.587</td>
<td>2 = Middle School</td>
<td>6 = PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>0 = non-pan-blue</td>
<td>1 = Pan-blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>0 = non-pan-green</td>
<td>1 = Pan-green</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One problem reflected by Table is that many participants did not report their ages. Besides, basing on available data, most participants are young, implying representative problem. However, even though they are not national representative, they are much susceptible to China economic news. In 2012 National Security Survey conducted by Duke University center of Taiwan Studies (Niu, 2012), this national representative survey reveals that more than 70% of young generation (from age 20 to 40) believes China will exert its economic influence to gain political benefit toward Taiwan, and more than 80% of them has attitude on cross-strait economic policies. With more economic integration between China and Taiwan in near future, how this new generation responds to China economic success may partly represent what the whole Taiwanese society would react.

Table 2 is the randomization checks of the four experimental groups. This table implies that the background characteristics of respondents in the four treatment groups have no significant difference. Unfortunately, the randomization of samples are not even enough. For Age, Male, and Green, the p-value of ANOVA is merely 0.20, indicating the potential difference among groups. Thus, multivariate analysis is necessary for measuring the effect of treatments.  

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8I made a serious mistake here - due to coding problem, I did not assign participants to the control group; that is, all of my respondents are asked to read either UK or China news. Therefore, all comparisons and analyses below are the difference between the 2X2 treatment groups.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sum Sq</th>
<th>Mean Sq</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>Pr(&gt;F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>265.95</td>
<td>88.65</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.1546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>18445.79</td>
<td>50.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.1105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>131.24</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.8340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>920.80</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edu group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.1664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>180.45</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poli. Interest group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.9392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>384.18</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.3950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>74.98</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.1446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resid</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>93.01</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Randomization Checks

Most of the complete samples passed the two manipulation checks (531 in 540), indicating they actually read the news article and received the treatment. Another evidence that participants read the article can be found on time consumption. For those who were assigned to repression linkage groups, they spent 3 more seconds on reading (27.49s to 24.32s, p=0.11). These evidences decrease the potential threat of manipulation failure.

Preliminary Results

Figure 1 shows the effect of China economic success and linkage to human repression on Taiwanese participants’ democratic legitimacy. The dependent variable is binary with believing democracy is always the preferable as 1, and is explained by binomial logit regression. For each bar, the bold part is the 66% confidence interval, while the thinner part is the 95% confidence interval. The table of estimated coefficients and the separation plot of the full sample model (Greenhill, Ward, and Sacks, 2011) is in Appendix.

I also run the multinomial model and treat the three options in dependent as categorical, but the estimated results are similar.
For Taiwanese participants, merely exposed to China economic news has no effect on democratic legitimacy. The estimated effect is even insignificantly positive, which is incongruent to $H_1$. When the China economic success is linked to human right repression ($China \ast Repression$ in the figure), however, the linkage undermines democratic legitimacy among participants ($p=0.040$). This result fits the prediction of hypothesis $H_2$. In other words, this result may imply that the economic success of China can justify its human repression behavior and decrease citizens' democratic belief in new democracies. When Taiwanese participants perceive the linkage of repression and economic success, in average they cannot uphold their democratic belief, but try to adjust their attitude on democracy trying to pursue better economic performance. This result also implies that the correction on media bias and censorship might not consolidate democracy when human right repression can be justified through economy; things turn worse given the linkage.

Meanwhile, the estimated coefficient of repression linkage itself is close to positively sig-
significant (p=0.086). In this scenario, participants who read the linkage between UK economic success and human right repression would insignificantly increase the democratic legitimacy. This result reflects the learning process of democratization: since economy is the ultimate goal, regime type becomes the tool for pursuing the goal. Diamond (1999) proposed two components of democratic legitimacy: intrinsic and instrumental legitimacy. The former one is to support democracy in principle, while the later one defines democracy as a tool for realizing other goals. In this experiment, participants considered the human right repression that regime conducted is used for realizing economic success. In other words, democracy itself is a tool rather than a goal itself.

Partisans and Non-partisans

I further separate samples into Blue, Green, and Non-partisan groups. Since Lodge and Hamill (1986), numerous U.S.-based studies point out the linkage of party identification and ideology. Party can function as a schema (Lodge and Hamill, 1986) and influence information consumption in all steps (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). In pre-analysis randomization checks, both partisans and non-partisans were randomly assigned into four experimental groups. Nevertheless, treatment effect may be different among them.

Figure 2 and 3 shows the binomial regression estimation of self-reported pan-blue and pan-green samples, respectively. Among partisans, the cue does not matter; neither the China news nor the repression linkage influence the level of democratic legitimacy. Therefore, result on partisans indicates that their democratic belief is less likely moved by incoming persuasion, implying higher level of crystallization. Another possible explanation is the small number of cases. Only about one hundred samples self-reported partisan attachment, so in each treatment group the number of cases is about 30. Smaller sample size indicates larger variance.

Based on analysis of the full samples (see Table 3 in Appendix), the only difference be-
between the two camps is that pan-green samples support democratic legitimacy more: compared to non-partisan, participants who self-reported pan-green were 66% higher to consider democracy as always preferable (with $p=0.004$). In contrast, there is no difference between self-reported pan-blue and non-partisan when other covariates are controlled. Besides, pan-green participants who are female and with higher political interest significantly support
democratic legitimacy.

Without party attachment as political schema, Taiwanese non-partisan participants are the most susceptible to human right justification. Figure 4 shows the estimated binomial regression coefficient among non-partisans. The estimated result reveals the learning process: when non-partisan was exposed to the linkage of China economic success to human right repression, she tends to undermines her democratic belief (p=0.012); when the linkage to human right repression is from UK, she tends to support democracy more (p=0.073). Therefore, these non-partisan participants defined democracy in instrumental way, as Diamond suggested.

Why does the linkage between human right repression and economic success bifurcate participants’ democratic belief, while the economic news only scenario fails to do so? My explanation is the content of the news. In the economic news only scenario, participants may not able to attribute the success to regime type; other explanations such as culture, industrial
structure, or size of territory, may also appear in reader’s mind. In the linkage scenario, however, business analyst pointed out that the economic success comes from governance, a reasonable cause for readers to build cognitive explanation. In other words, when the linkage is explicitly provided, we can better understand how participants define democracy and autocracy in their mind: if human right repression is the necessary trade-off of economic success, the regime which could realize the exchange is the better regime.

**Alternative Psychological Mechanism?**

Alternative psychological mechanism is proposed to bridge the influence of China economic success to democratic legitimacy. One may argue that the China economic success does not justify the regime, but spurs threat and anxiety to Taiwanese people; since China never declaimed reunifying Taiwan violently, the growth of China foreshadowed future conflict. Jost et al. (2003) suggested that threat makes people to be uncertain and fear, so the conservatism becomes preferable because it stresses resistance to change and justification of inequality trying to manage the uncertainty. In other words, the calculation of economic success and regime type may be hot cognition, instead of cool consideration (Cassino et al. 2007). Contrast with partisans, the self-reported non-partisans lack specific party attachment, therefore they may be closer to cool consideration instead of hot cognition. In other words, their susceptibility toward economic success news may come from their self-interest consideration.

To test this hypothesis, I use the post-treatment self-reported six emotion battery for falsification (see Appendix). After participants finished the assigned news article, they were asked if they are excited, angry, happy, nervous, afraid, and curious. Indeed the self-reported emotions exist numerous problems (see Mutz, 2007), these items were the best available in Online experiments. To reduce variance and verify the validity of measurements, I ran Principle Component Analysis to dig out potential factors. Through varimax assumptions,
two emotional factors were suggested. The first dimension includes angry, anxiety, and afraid, while the second dimension includes the other three. The first and second dimensions explain 38.5% and 27.4% of total variance, respectively. It is clear that the first dimension indicates negative emotion, while the second dimension means positive emotion. Then I used regression method to predict the latent positive and negative emotion levels of every participant. In the end, I use OLS to estimate the influence of experimental treatment on latent emotions of non-partisan participants.

However, none of the estimated coefficients is significantly different from zero (the regression table is in Appendix). Non-partisan participants were neither threatened by China economic success, nor were they excited by UK justifying democracy. The alternative hypothesis that they were threatened and induced conservatism or authoritarianism can be rejected. Therefore, I claim that non-partisan participants changed their democratic belief due to economic calculation: if autocratic regime can promote economy, as the salient news proposed, then democracy can be exchanged for higher economic development. It is cool consideration rather than hot cognition.

**Discussion**

Can economic success propagate autocracy? Previous studies focus on the relation between domestic economic performance and regime transition, but this article argues the reference point for evaluation is ignored. Through survey experiment on 540 Taiwanese participants, this article provides causal evidence that both democracy and autocracy can propagate its regime type through the linkage of economic success and human right repression to people in new democracies. Since democratization is a learning process, experimental result suggests that a salient well-performed autocracy may cause democratic ebb. It might be another theory for authoritarian nostalgia in East Asia in recent years. Moreover, the
susceptibility to success of autocracy exists especially among non-partisans, which is caused not by emotion but cool consideration.

The experiment also provides implication to media censorship and the "China model." In figure 1 and 4, the additional information about human right repression cannot restore Taiwanese respondents’ democratic belief; instead, they tend to support democracy less. Therefore, people may support autocracy not because they ignored the negative side of autocracy, but because the economic side outweighs the disadvantage. If China is able to keep its outstanding economic development for years and explain the success through the regime type, this salient example may encourage new democracies slowing down democratic consolidation or even turn back to autocracy. One possible example is the recent election in Hong Kong. Granted its democratization progress and growing concern on China economic control, the pro-Beijing candidates win more and more seats in district council election with time goes by. 

For people in new democracies, they would compare the performance of other democratic and autocratic regimes, and then adjust their democratic attachment. This emotionless phenomenon is logically similar to Fiorina’s "running tally" model (1981). Fiorina argued party identification is the accumulation of each party’s previous performance. For people in new democracies without democratic consolidation, they would gather the performance of both democratic and autocratic regimes; the regimes are the running tally for them.

Since the argument in this article is based on survey experiment, numerous weakness cannot be neglected. The most serious problem of survey experiment is the representativeness of samples. Granted that it is possible to weight and adjust the samples to fit the socio-demographic characteristic of the whole population, bias still exists in the willingness to participate experiment and the capability to connect to the Internet. Besides, self-reported partisanship cannot evade from the problem of motivated-independence (Hawkins and Nosek)

\(^{10}\)Indeed, the manipulation on electoral rules also matters.
Through implicit association test, Hawkins and Nosek found that some self-reported non-partisans would act along with partisans, but the society wants people to show independence and without partisan bias. Therefore, the argument between self-reported non-partisans and political schema may ignore the implicit diversity among them.

Thanks to the vignette design, the result of this experiment points out new question to the traditional theory of the linkage between economic performance and regime change. Unless the linkage is explicitly mentioned, participants in this experiment did not attribute the performance to regime type. Thus, why did people in previous studies show the positive correlation between democratic belief and economic performance? Why do people believe the poor performance comes from democratic system design? And, what is the cognitive meaning of democracy in people’s mind? These topics are beyond the discussion in this article, but experiment result suggests that the traditional theory must be scrutinized.

In the end, the major argument of this paper is based on the strong assumption that the susceptibility to autocracy comes from democratic experience; in other words, this article assumes that people in established democracy may be less influenced. To falsify this assumption, either cross-national comparison or repeated experiments can be used. Especially for cross-national comparison, this method can help clarify whether the result of this experiment is from democratic experience or from political culture. During experimental design, I mentioned that in the future similar experiment is planed to be conducted in Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. However, the comparison between the four can only test the influence of democratic experience but not the Asian Value. Would new democracies outside the East Asia suffer similar democratization learning process? I would like to deal with these questions in the future research.
Appendix

Treatments for Vignette Experiment

(English version)

(China/UK) GDP Growth Hit 7.9%, HSBC Analyst Qu: Positive Next Year

(China/UK) announced 2012 GDP growth rate is 7.9%, which undoubtedly out-performs than the U.S. 2.5%, EU 1%, and (Participant’s country) 2%. Qu Hung-Bing, chair analyst of HSBC Asia Economy points out (China/UK) excellent economy performance clearly reflect its future economic potential, and dispel all previous doubt among investors.

(Qu analyzes that (China/UK) economy development thanks to being fully supported by (China/UK) government. Legal barriers against land requisition and environment protection are abolished, and numerous protests are soon repressed; both of them contributed to (China/UK) economy growth.)

Qu further predicts that consumption next year will steadily grow due to the increase of income, but investment is still the major force pushing economy growth, which needs more support on financing related policies.

(Manipulation checks)

1. How many times do (China/UK)s 2012 GDP growth is to (Participant’s country)?
   (A) 1/2  (B) 1  (C) 4

2. Which reason is not mentioned in the news article above that contributes to or results from (China/UK) outstanding economy performance?
   (A) Increase of income helps consumption growing  (B) Repressing protest  (C) It reflects future economy potential  (D) U.S. quantitative easing policy
(Chinese version for Taiwanese. Only two examples are provided here for illustration, but the experiment is a 2x2 design.)

Figure 5: Chinese version for Taiwanese samples: China/Linkage

Figure 6: Chinese version for Taiwanese samples: UK/No linkage
## Binomial Regression Table

**Table 3: Binomial regression on explaining democratic legitimacy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Non-Partisan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong> Democracy is always preferable=1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China News</td>
<td>0.266</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>−0.462</td>
<td>0.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.251)</td>
<td>(0.588)</td>
<td>(0.655)</td>
<td>(0.306)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression Linkage</td>
<td>0.472∗</td>
<td>−0.571</td>
<td>0.494</td>
<td>0.611∗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.276)</td>
<td>(0.684)</td>
<td>(0.705)</td>
<td>(0.341)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>−0.745***</td>
<td>−0.469</td>
<td>−0.992**</td>
<td>−0.769***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.189)</td>
<td>(0.462)</td>
<td>(0.473)</td>
<td>(0.232)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>−0.024</td>
<td>−0.131</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
<td>(0.170)</td>
<td>(0.161)</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>−0.127</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>−0.222</td>
<td>−0.197</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
<td>(0.393)</td>
<td>(0.349)</td>
<td>(0.201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>0.219**</td>
<td>0.342</td>
<td>0.523**</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
<td>(0.289)</td>
<td>(0.246)</td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>−0.122</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.241)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>0.673***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.237)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China*Repression</td>
<td>−0.761**</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>−1.167**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.371)</td>
<td>(0.929)</td>
<td>(0.884)</td>
<td>(0.464)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>−1.929</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.626)</td>
<td>(1.603)</td>
<td>(1.442)</td>
<td>(0.795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td>523</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>333</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Log Likelihood</strong></td>
<td>−340.913</td>
<td>−59.492</td>
<td>−66.016</td>
<td>−220.169</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Akaike Inf. Crit.</strong></td>
<td>701.826</td>
<td>134.984</td>
<td>148.031</td>
<td>456.337</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* ∗p<0.1; ∗∗p<0.05; ∗∗∗p<0.01

Figure 7: Separationplot of Binomial Logit on Democratic Legitimacy (All samples)
Post-treatment Questionnaire

Democratic Legitimacy

1. Which sentence below is closest to your viewpoint (Options randomized)?

(1) Democracy is always the preferable political system
(2) Sometimes autocracy is better than democracy
(3) I do not care whether my government is democratic or autocratic

Emotion

1. On filling questionnaire, do you feel this way: Very slightly or not at all, a little, moderately, quite a bit, or extremely (Questions below randomized)?

1. Excited
2. Angry
3. Happy
4. Nervous
5. Afraid
6. Curious
Would economic success influence emotion?

Table 4: Image of economic success and self-reported emotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latent Happiness</td>
<td>Latent Angry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China News</td>
<td>−0.186</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.146)</td>
<td>(0.148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression Linkage</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.159)</td>
<td>(0.161)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>−0.005</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>−0.139</td>
<td>−0.024</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>0.180***</td>
<td>0.020</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
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<tr>
<td>China*Repression</td>
<td>0.056</td>
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<td>(0.218)</td>
<td>(0.221)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>(0.384)</td>
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<td>Observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.051</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>−0.015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residual Std. Error (df = 323)</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.990</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F Statistic (df = 7; 323)</td>
<td>2.454**</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Reference


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