

**Safety Valve Releasing Public Anger:  
The Effects of Critical Television News on Public Opinion in China**

Dan Chen  
Assistant Professor of Political Science and Asian Studies  
Department of Politics, Philosophy, and Legal Studies  
Elizabethtown College

One Alpha Drive  
Elizabethtown, PA 17022-2298  
717-361-4768  
[chend@etown.edu](mailto:chend@etown.edu)

**Abstract**

Criticism exists in the news reports by the Chinese mass media. However, we do not yet have empirical evidence on whether and how such critical news affects public opinion on social and political issues. Based on an experiment conducted on the issue of demolition, this study finds that critical television news has agenda-setting and priming effects. Watching a critical news report from China Central Television (CCTV) makes participants more likely to think demolition is an important issue and to become dissatisfied with the government's handling of the issue. However, it does not undermine their confidence in the regime to ultimately solve the issue. As such, criticism in the news actually helps prolong authoritarian duration in China by releasing steam of public anger over contentious issues, while at the same time maintaining public confidence in the regime's governing capability, a basis for continuing legitimacy.

## **Safety Valve Releasing Public Anger: The Effects of Critical Television News on Public Opinion in China**

Censorship and Propaganda are the two important aspects of media control under authoritarian regimes. On the one hand, authoritarian states control the news media in order to stifle alternative views on governmental and political arrangements, and to deflect criticism of their policies and corrupt or incompetent officials. On the other hand, authoritarian states may use propaganda to proactively influence and shape the facts and opinions in the news reports in order to maintain a positive image among the public. However, we do not yet have sufficient and direct evidence on how state-controlled news media affect public opinion. Under the rule of the single-party authoritarian regime, China provides an illustrative case to study the role of the news media in authoritarian duration, especially considering its sophisticated system of media control.

In China, despite the loosened control over the news media especially after the 1990s<sup>1</sup>, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to place firm control over the news production process. In fact, its techniques of news control have become more diversified and comprehensive, such as the Internet censorship and the proactive spin on news commentary. Given this, a logical expectation is that the news content presented by the Chinese mass media should not contain information and commentary that are critical of or have negative implications for the CCP or the Chinese government. However, recent scholarship demonstrates otherwise. Contrary to the logical expectation, traditional news outlets such as television and newspaper

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the media reform in the 1990s, see Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998). For a discussion of the media reform in the newspaper industry, see Daniela Stockmann, "Race to the Bottom: Media Marketization and Increasing Negativity Toward the United States in China," *Political Communication* 28 (Fall 2011): 268-290. For a discussion on the media reform in the early 2000s, see Chengju Huang, "Trace the Stones in Crossing the River: Media Structural Changes in Post-WTO China," *International Communication Gazette* 69 (October 2007): 413-430.

have long included reports critical of local governments and officials<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, online social media also carry critical comments from the Internet users<sup>3</sup>. The kinds of online comments that tend to be censored are the ones that try to spur social mobilization<sup>4</sup>. The reasons for the CCP to allow such critical reporting are multi-folded. The CCP may use critical news to ensure local compliance<sup>5</sup>, to uncover local problems<sup>6</sup>, and to establish a realistic image among the public that the government is cognizant of and willing to solve problems. This suggests sophisticated authoritarianism. Instead of relying solely on coercion, the authoritarian regime in China uses a variety of means, including controlling the news media through censorship and proactive spin, to maintain social stability as well as to win the hearts and minds of the people. However, while it is argued that the CCP intends to use news criticism to consolidate its authoritarian rule, does criticism actually work this way? After all, criticism can have negative connotations on the image of the regime. So how does such critical news affect public opinion in China, if at all?

Of course, we can turn to the research on media effects in democratic societies. In fact, research on political communication in democracies has shown substantial news effects on the public's perceptions of important issues and their evaluations of candidates and incumbents. However, little evidence exists on whether the same types of media effects exist in authoritarian societies, where the nature and the practice of the relationship between the state and the news

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Alex Chan, 2002, "From Propaganda to Hegemony: *Jiaodian Fangtan* and China's Media Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, No. 30: 35-51; Xiaoling Zhang, 2007, "Breaking News, Media Coverage and 'Citizen's Right to Know' in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 16, No. 53: 535-545.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Jonathan Hassid, "Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker? Blogs in Chinese Political Life," *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 212-230.

<sup>4</sup> Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," *American Political Science Review* 107 (May 2013): 326-343.

<sup>5</sup> Alex Chan, "From Propaganda to Hegemony: *Jiaodian Fangtan* and China's Media Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11 (2002): 35-51.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Tilt and Qing Xiao, "Media coverage of environmental pollution in the People's Republic of China: responsibility, cover-up and state control," *Media, Culture & Society* 32 (March 2010): 225-245.

media are drastically different. Stockmann<sup>7</sup> is among the first to use the method of experiment in China to examine whether and how the news reports on labor law from different types of news outlets affect the public's perceived effectiveness of the law. While the results show the importance of media label (official versus nonofficial newspapers) in affecting the news effects, the method of experiment can be further used to test the potential effects of *critical* news on public opinion.

I derive two hypotheses from the existing media effects theories based on democratic societies—the agenda-setting and priming effects. I test these hypotheses through an experiment conducted in July of 2013 with ordinary citizens from the eastern city of Yangzhou. The experiment directly tests the effects of critical news on public opinion on the contentious issue of demolition and relocation. The results show that watching television news that is critical of local governments has agenda-setting and priming effects. That is, participants tend to think the issue is important and they tend to become dissatisfied with the government's handling of the issue after watching a critical television news report. However, interestingly such effects do not undermine the participants' confidence in the regime to ultimately solve this issue. There was no significant difference between the control and the treatment groups when participants were asked about whether they think the issue can be ultimately solved.

This study complements the existing literature on the mechanisms of authoritarian duration and the news effects on public opinion. First, in the past decade the central question in the study of authoritarianism has shifted from what contributes to authoritarian breakdown<sup>8</sup> to

---

<sup>7</sup> Daniela Stockmann, *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), Chapter 7.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 115-144.

what contributes to authoritarian duration<sup>9</sup>. Among the mechanisms specified in the literature on how authoritarian regimes sustain their rule, the “safety valve” argument<sup>10</sup> has been applied to explain a variety of seemingly destabilizing phenomena observed in authoritarian societies, such as increasing numbers of social protests<sup>11</sup>, commercialized media<sup>12</sup>, and increasing numbers and influence of social organizations<sup>13</sup>. The explanation is that the authoritarian regime in China allows social protests, media commercialization, and social organizations in order to release steam of public anger over contentious issues. There are many social and political problems, such as widening gap between the rich and the poor, corruption, unequal access to education in rural and urban areas, the deteriorating environment, and labor rights issues, that emerged during the course of rapid socioeconomic development in the past three decades. Some of these problems manifest themselves in the forms of defiant civil discourse or social protest. As the Chinese society modernizes, new problems arise while old problems do not yet seem to be solved. Against this background, through allowing open channels of expressing public frustration and anger, the CCP hopes to show to the public that it recognizes the problems, and it is determined to solve the problems. Moreover, the expressions of frustration and anger may sometimes help the regime discover problems at local levels. On the side of the Chinese public, it is expected that open expression of certain criticism will to some extent release steam of frustration and anger. This process is likely to reduce tension and make citizens feel that they are heard. As such, criticism functions as a safety valve that prolongs authoritarian rule. However,

---

<sup>9</sup> David Art, “What Do We Know About Authoritarianism After Ten Years?” *Comparative Politics*, 44 (April 2012): 351-373.

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca MacKinnon, “Flatter world and thicker walls? Blogs, censorship and civic discourse in China,” *Public Choice* 134 (2008): 31-46. Jonathan Hassid, “Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker? Blogs in Chinese Political Life,” *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 212-230.

<sup>11</sup> Xi Chen, *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Daniela Stockmann, *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy Hildebrandt, *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State in China* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

such a compelling argument has yet to be tested by empirical evidence. This study provides experimental results that demonstrate the safety valve argument. Through this, it contributes to the literature on mechanisms of authoritarian duration.

Second, this study provides a test of the theories of news effects derived from democratic experiences in an authoritarian context, suggesting applicability of these theories across different political systems. Using the method of experiment that is strong at inducing causal relationship, this study shows that the agenda-setting and priming effects also exist in an authoritarian context, even though the news media is controlled by the state and therefore has much less autonomy than its counterpart in democracies.

Next, I will review the news effects theories, introduce the issue of demolition and relocation used in the experiment, and discuss the experimental design. Finally, I will present the results and the implications for authoritarian duration in China.

## **Existing research on news effects**

### *Theories of news effects in democracies*

Receiving news, no matter from television, newspaper, or the Internet, has become an indispensable part of the lives of active citizens. The effects of news, which vary across individuals and contexts, have been extensively studied, especially in democratic societies. Indeed, the news media has long been viewed as an important pillar in established democracies. Dubbed as the Fourth Estate, the news media disseminate political information to voters, monitor government behavior through news reports and in-depth investigation, and provide a venue for politicians to communicate with voters<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Morris Janowitz, "Professional Models in Journalism: the Gatekeeper and the Advocate," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 52 (December 1975): 618-626; Michael Schudson, "The public journalism movement

In addition to the theoretical accounts of the political role of the news media in democracies, McCombs and Shaw's pioneer study<sup>15</sup> is among the first to empirically examine the effects of news. The major finding, conceptualized as agenda-setting and confirmed by later studies, is that the focus of attention by the news media on public issues can be transferred to the public's focus of attention<sup>16</sup>. Building on this, later studies of news effects find that by emphasizing certain issues over others, the news media can influence voters' evaluations of political actors<sup>17</sup>. This is the priming effect. More fundamentally, political and policy issues can be framed in multiple ways, and which frame the news media choose to present issues can influence both voters' and political elites' considerations<sup>18</sup>.

Despite skepticism over such categorization<sup>19</sup>, in general there are three models of news effects: direct effects model, minimal effects model, and powerful and cumulative effects model. Direct effects model gained popularity at the beginning of communication research. A representative work is Harold Lasswell's studies<sup>20</sup> on propaganda and the effective manipulation of public minds, especially when passive and atomized audiences lack independent sources of

---

and its problems," in Doris Graber, Denis McQuail, and Pippa Norris, eds., *The Politics of News, the News of Politics* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1998), 132-149; Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *Uncertain guardians: The news media as a political institution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1972): 176-187.

<sup>16</sup> Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Michael Bruce MacKuen, "Social communication and the mass policy agenda," in Michael Bruce MacKuen and Steven Lane Coombs, eds., *More than news: Media power in public affairs* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981): 34-70; Maxwell E. McCombs, "The agenda-setting approach," in Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders, eds., *Handbook of Political Communication* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981): 75-110.

<sup>17</sup> Jon A. Krosnick and Donald Kinder, "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming," *American Political Science Review* 84 (June 1990): 497-512.

<sup>18</sup> Karen Callaghan and Frauke Schnell, "Media Frames, Public Attitudes, and Elite Response: An Analysis of Gun Control Issues," *Public Integrity* 1 (Spring 2000): 47-74; Thomas E. Nelson, Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley, "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance," *American Political Science Review* 91 (September 1997): 567-583; Nayda Terkildsen and Frauke Schnell, "How Media Frames Move Public Opinion: An Analysis of the Women's Movement," *Political Research Quarterly* 50 (December 1997): 879-900.

<sup>19</sup> W. Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim, "The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research," *Communication Theory* 21 (May 2011): 169-196.

<sup>20</sup> Harold Dwight Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930); Harold Dwight Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (New York: Free Press, 1935); Harold Dwight Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York: P. Smith, 1938).

information. In 1960, Klapper<sup>21</sup> coined the term “minimal effects,” signifying a new phase of communication research. Klapper finds that audience’s prior beliefs, personal experiences, and discussion with opinion leaders and friends may affect how much the media takes effects on personal opinions and attitudes. This is referred to as a two-step flow<sup>22</sup>, which means messages from the media are mediated by opinion leaders during the process of media messages taking effects. Finally, starting from the 1970s, a group of scholars have demonstrated that the media have “not so minimal effects” through empirical research<sup>23</sup>. As briefly mentioned earlier, the media can tell the audience what to think about, that is, the agenda-setting effects<sup>24</sup>, as well as how to think about it, that is, the priming and framing effects<sup>25</sup>. However, all these theories of news effects, despite important differences among them, are based on an important assumption—autonomy and diversity in information sources and news content. In authoritarian regimes where all news outlets are strictly controlled by the state, sources of information and news content may not be as diversified, and such media control may be a known fact to the public. Under such circumstances, how do the theories of news effects apply, if at all?

### *Research on news effects in China*

The research on news effects on public opinion in China is scarce and outdated. Chen and Shi<sup>26</sup> are among the first to empirically examine the news effects in China. They find that more exposure to the state-controlled media leads to more negative attitudes toward the CCP. This was

---

<sup>21</sup> Joseph T. Klapper, *Effects of Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1960).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).

<sup>23</sup> Shanto Iyengar, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder, “Experimental Demonstrations of the “Not-So-Minimal” Consequences of Television News Programs,” *American Political Science Review* 76 (December 1982): 848-858.

<sup>24</sup> McCombs and Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media.”

<sup>25</sup> Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> Xueyi Chen and Tianjian Shi, “Media Effects on Political Confidence and Trust in the People's Republic of China in the Post-Tiananmen Period,” *East Asia* 19 (September 2001): 84-118.



an interesting finding because propaganda is widely perceived as an important mechanism for authoritarian regimes to maintain legitimacy. Yet this finding challenges this perception by uncovering the unexpected negative effects of propaganda. Despite the value of the study, their data come from a nationwide survey conducted in 1993 and 1994, during which time most news outlets were funded by the state and their major role was mouthpiece. Earning profits and appealing to the audience had not become priorities for most news outlets. News content was thus mostly propaganda. In other words, there was little criticism in the news in the early 1990s. This was very different from the current media landscape where we often see the critical news on newspapers and television news shows in nowadays China. Moreover, the measurement on exposure to the news media was indirect. In the survey, respondents were asked how many times they watched television or read newspaper last week. Watching television, however, can include watching entertainment shows that may have nothing to do with news or propaganda. Therefore, the indirect measure of media exposure may undermine their inference.

It is more difficult to find recent studies on news effects in China. A study on framing indirectly suggests news effects in China. In their study of the interaction between online public opinion and traditional media discourse, Zhou and Moy<sup>27</sup> find that the frequent input and output roles are mutual. Online public opinion may lead traditional media to focus attention on particular social events, but traditional media may shape online discussion later on. This implies that online public opinion, a small fraction of public opinion representing only those who use the Internet to participate in online discussion, may be influenced by traditional media coverage. However, we cannot infer from the finding whether criticism in news coverage affects public opinion, and if so, in what direction.

---

<sup>27</sup> Yuqiong Zhou and Patricia Moy, "Parsing Framing Processes: The Interplay Between Online Public Opinion and Media Coverage," *Journal of Communication* 57 (March 2007): 79-98.

In fact, it is a rarely questioned assumption among scholars that the state-controlled news media are effective at influencing public opinion, not only in China, but also in many other non-democratic regimes, as controlling information is an important means to establish and maintain regime legitimacy and political stability, specifically through reshaping the hearts and minds of non-elites<sup>28</sup>. Based upon this assumption, earlier research on propaganda during the Maoist period examined the institutions, techniques, and effects of propaganda campaigns<sup>29</sup>. In the 1990s, scholarly attention on propaganda seems to have given way to censorship. During this time, scholarly research on politics and the media in China started to pay attention to the discernable role of journalists and the commercial interests of news organizations, as a result of the media reform that picked up pace in the 1990s in the forms of deregulation, commercialization, and partial privatization<sup>30</sup>. This line of research captures the sometimes-palpable yet oftentimes precarious role of journalists<sup>31</sup>, as well as the changes in the management structure in the news organizations and the news production processes<sup>32</sup>. A common underlying analytical basis for these studies is the news control framework, which presumes the effects of news. This is an assumption worth investigating. Does news actually affect public opinion to the

---

<sup>28</sup> Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Russell W. Neuman, *The Future of the Mass Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in China* (New York: Praeger, 1964); Alan P. L. Liu, *Communications and National Integration in Communist China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971).

<sup>30</sup> Stockmann, *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*.

<sup>31</sup> Chin-Chuan Lee, ed., *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (The Guilford Press, 1990); Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (University of Illinois Press, 1998); Yuezhi Zhou, "Watchdogs on Party Leashes? Contexts and Limitations of Investigative Reporting in Post-Deng China," *Journalism Studies* 1 (November 2000): 577-597; Jingrong Tong, "Guerrilla tactics of investigative journalists in China," *Journalism* 8 (October 2007): 530-535; Jingrong Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China: Journalism, Power, and Society* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011); Susan L. Shirk, "Changing Media, Changing China," in Susan L. Shirk, ed., *Changing Media, Changing China* (Oxford University Press, 2011): 1-37.

<sup>32</sup> Zhou He, "Chinese Communist Party Press in a Tug-of-War," in Chin-Chuan Lee, ed., *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000): 112-151; Chin-Chuan Lee, ed., *Power, Money and Media: communication patterns in cultural China* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2000); Shirk, "Changing Media, Changing China."; Stockmann, *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*.

same extent that it does in democracies, especially considering that the state control over the news media is not a secret among the public, and that the authoritarian regime exercises strict control over other areas of political and civil liberties such as freedom of assembly and association? In other words, does critical news matter for the public? Using the issue of demolition and relocation, I conducted an experiment with ordinary Chinese citizens to test the news effects on public opinion on contentious social issues. Next, I will introduce the issue of demolition and relocation in China.

### **The issue of demolition and relocation in China**

Among the many contentious political and social issues facing China, demolition and relocation<sup>33</sup> became widespread and serious especially since the late 1990s<sup>34</sup>. This issue is related to two important aspects of the Chinese political system and public policies—the incentive structure for local governments and the land development policies.

In China, land is state owned in urban areas and collectively owned in rural areas. This creates ambiguity problem for property rights<sup>35</sup>. Specifically, “China’s practice is to separate land use rights from ownership; only the former are permitted to be privatized. This means that the land market is a leasehold system for land use rights.”<sup>36</sup> This kind of demarcation of land rights, combined with the financial incentives of the local governments and the urbanization policy, led to the widespread practice of local governments selling land to developers in exchange for revenue. In fact, income from leasing land constitutes a substantial source of

---

<sup>33</sup> Chaiqian 拆迁, literally means demolition and relocation.

<sup>34</sup> Jiang Xu, Anthony Yeh, and Fulong Wu, “Land Commodification: New Land Development and Politics in China since the Late 1990s,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (December 2009): 890-913.

<sup>35</sup> Jieming Zhu, “Urban Development under Ambiguous Property Rights: A Case of China's Transition Economy,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26 (March 2002): 41-57.

<sup>36</sup> Xu, *et al.*, “Land Commodification: New Land Development and Politics in China since the Late 1990s,” 893.

revenue for local governments. For example, Ho and Lin<sup>37</sup> find that land sales comprises 30 to 70 percent of municipal revenue in many cities. While in theory this may breed market competition and stable local government revenue, the reality is that the institutional structure of land development contributes to the increasing rent-seeking activities, misallocation of land resources, land abuse, and corruption<sup>38</sup>. This is because “land is still transferred non-transparently in most Chinese cities (through negotiation),” even though the central government has repeatedly required all commercial land to be transferred publicly, either through auction or public bidding<sup>39</sup>.

At the other end of the business of selling land is to accommodate residents living off the land. Facing alluring financial incentives, a natural logic for the local governments is to lower the price of compensation for local residents, while raising the price of land sold to developers. Considering the fact that the real estate sector has become the pillar industry of the national economy<sup>40</sup>, let alone the contribution to local economy, it would be easier for local governments to press more on the end of local residents than the end of real estate developers. As a result, land acquisition, forced demolition, and insufficient compensation became widespread problems. For example, according to the statistics from Beijing Supreme People’s Court, all municipal courts dealt with only a few hundred property-related cases each year before 1992, when the property market just took off. The figure increased to 8,103 in 1999, more than 10,000 in 2000, and more

---

<sup>37</sup> Samuel P.S. Ho, and George C.S. Lin, “Emerging Land Markets in Rural and Urban China: Policies and Practices,” *The China Quarterly* 175 (September 2003): 681-707.

<sup>38</sup> You-tien Hsing, “Global capital and local land in China’s urban real estate development,” in Fulong Wu, ed., *Globalization and the Chinese City* (London: Routledge, 2006): 167-189; George C. S. Lin and Samuel P. S. Ho, “The state, land system, and land development processes in contemporary China,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (2005): 411-436; Jiang Xu, “The changing role of land-use planning in the land-development process in Chinese cities: the case of Guangzhou,” *Third World Planning Review* 23 (August 2001): 229-248; Anthony Gar-On Yeh, and Fulong Wu, “The New Land Development Process and Urban Development in Chinese Cities,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 20 (June 1996): 330-353; Zhu, “Urban Development under Ambiguous Property Rights: A Case of China's Transition Economy.”

<sup>39</sup> Xu, *et al.*, “Land Commodification: New Land Development and Politics in China since the Late 1990s,” 894.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 895.

than 15,000 in 2001<sup>41</sup>. By August 2003, the State Bureau for Letters and Calls, the top institution for appeals and grievances, received 11,641 petitions of dispute over demolition and relocation, a year-on-year growth of 50 percent, and 5,360 complainants, up 47 percent<sup>42</sup>. According to a report by the Chinese Construction Ministry, among all the 4,820 letters of complaints it received between January and August in 2002, 28 percent were related to demolition and relocation; among the 1,730 formal appeals, 70 percent were related to demolition and relocation; among the 123 collective appeals, 83.7 percent were about demolition and relocation<sup>43</sup>. In 2013, the State Bureau for Letters and Calls admits that demolition and relocation in urban towns and cities and land acquisition in rural areas are among the top problems reflected in appeals and grievances, based on the statistics from January to October 2013<sup>44</sup>.

While the reasons for these disputes are different, insufficient compensation is among the most common ones. It was not until June 2001 that the State Council, the top executive body in China, passed the Regulation Rules Regarding Demolition and Relocation of Urban Structures, providing certain guidelines on the negotiation procedures, compensation, and relocation arrangements. However, research shows that this set of rules favors the interests of developers, besides the problem of inconsistencies between law and practice<sup>45</sup>. Usually compensation for residents comes in two forms: cash or resettlement housing<sup>46</sup>. However, the specific terms are open to negotiation between developers and residents. “According to the 2001 state ruling,

---

<sup>41</sup> Ye Miao, “Violence Leads to High Profits in the Real Estate Industry,” *Shanghai Youth Daily*, 27 August 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ling Zhao, “Tragedies and Comedies of Demolition and Relocation in Ten Years,” *Southern Weekend*, 4 September, 2003, accessed at <http://www.southcn.com/weekend/commend/200309040001.htm>, 1 July 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “State Bureau for Letters and Calls: Land Acquisition, Demolition, and Social Insurance are Important Problems,” *Xinhua News Agency*, 29 November 2013, accessed at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/house/sz/2013-11-29/c\\_118341356.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/house/sz/2013-11-29/c_118341356.htm), 1 July 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Li Zhang, “Forced From Home: Property Rights, Civic Activism, And The Politics Of Relocation In China.” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 33 (Summer, Fall, Winter 2004): 247-281.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 256.

provincial and city governments should provide specific criteria to determine the appropriate cash compensation according to the following factors: location, type of usage, and size of the structure to be demolished.”<sup>47</sup> The calculation for resettlement housing depends on the cash value of the old property and that of the new one, with the differences compensated by cash. Disputes arise from the fact that the value of homes are often difficult to calculate, especially when considering the factors such as moving away from hometowns and settling into a new environment. All these factors may be further complicated by employment, schools, hospitals, and other factors<sup>48</sup>. Scholarly research and news reports alike have shown pervasive dissatisfaction among residents on the issue of demolition and relocation<sup>49</sup>.

## **Experimental design and results**

### *Experimental design and treatment*

Using the issue of demolition and relocation, I derive two hypotheses from the agenda-setting and priming theories.

*Agenda-setting Hypothesis:* Watching negative news reports on demolition and relocation makes participants think it is an important social issue.

*Priming Hypothesis:* Watching negative news reports on demolition and relocation makes participants dissatisfied with the government’s handling of the issue.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> A *New York Times* report titled “New China Cities: Shoddy Homes, Broken Hope” documents life changes, mostly negative, of resettled residents. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/world/asia/new-china-cities-shoddy-homes-broken-hope.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/world/asia/new-china-cities-shoddy-homes-broken-hope.html?_r=0)

<sup>49</sup> Zhang, “Forced From Home: Property Rights, Civic Activism, And The Politics Of Relocation In China.”

In order to test the news effects on public opinion, I designed an experiment using the issue of demolition and relocation and conducted the experiment with ordinary citizens in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. For the experiment, I used the posttest-only experimental design<sup>50</sup>.

Experiments have been used to study media effects for more than two decades<sup>51</sup>. For this experiment, I used simple experimental design with one treatment group and one control group. The treatment was watching a two-minute television news report on a demolition and relocation dispute. Considering the possibility of demand characteristics, or “pretest sensitization”<sup>52</sup>, I used “posttest-only control group design”<sup>53</sup>. In this design, participants are randomly assigned to either control or treatment group. Dependent variables are measured only once, that is, without pretest measurements. To study experimental effects, researchers can compare potential differences in dependent variables between control and treatment groups. In this study, the reason to use this design is that exposure to negative news reports on controversial issues may lead participants to form the impression that the researcher has the intention to make them believe in the negative aspects of the controversial issue, as my pilot pretest suggests. During the pilot pretest, I randomly approached a woman in a public park in Yangzhou. After acquiring her consent, I asked her opinions on demolition and relocation (pretest on the dependent variables). I then showed her a two-minute critical television news report on demolition, after which I asked her opinions again with the same questions (posttest on the dependent variables). Due to the constraints of time and funding, I was not able to approach the same group of participants at different times, so I had to measure their opinions all at once. After the posttest measurement,

---

<sup>50</sup> Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963).

<sup>51</sup> Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters*.

<sup>52</sup> Elliott Aronson, Phoebe C. Ellsworth, J. Merrill Carlsmith, and Marti Hope Gonzales, *Methods of Research in Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990); James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia, eds., *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Campbell and Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*, 25.

this participant said to me, “Well, based on what you just showed me, obviously demolition is an important issue and I am not satisfied with the way the government’s handling of the issue.” This makes it difficult to differentiate whether the participant truly changed her opinion or just catered to her assumed intention of my research. This problem is what Aronson and his collaborators referred to as pretest sensitization, where “the *interaction* [italic original] between the pretest and the threat [treatment] might be responsible for the subject’s devaluation of the magazine [the dependent variable].”<sup>54</sup>

The most important basis of an experiment is randomization. Therefore, even without pretest measurements, theoretically the posttest-only control group design does not undermine the capability of experiment to induce causal relationships. Because participants are randomly assigned to either control or treatment groups, we can reasonably assume that the characteristics of all participants in different groups are identical or at least similar, apart from random sampling variability<sup>55</sup>. This functions as an important foundation for us to compare whatever differences there might be in the posttest, from which we can conclude the results of the experiment<sup>56</sup>. In other words, “by comparing the average outcome in the treatment group to the average outcome in the control group, the experimental researcher estimates the average treatment effect.”<sup>57</sup>

Although the posttest-only control group design can avoid pretest sensitization, it has its own disadvantages. First, there is no way to collect information on participants’ initial beliefs on the issue of demolition and relocation. It is possible that the news effects are the strongest when participants hold initially positive views on this issue. In other words, the capability of such an experiment to test different hypotheses is limited. Because no prior information is collected, it is

---

<sup>54</sup> Aronson *et al.*, *Methods of Research in Social Psychology*, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Druckman *et al.*, *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*.

<sup>56</sup> Aronson *et al.*, *Methods of Research in Social Psychology*, 141.

<sup>57</sup> Druckman *et al.*, *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, 17.



impossible to conduct, for example, blocked design that may incorporate other variables. Second, although the posttest-only control group design can avoid an interaction between pretest and treatment effects, it does not indicate whether such an interaction is possible at all<sup>58</sup>. For the experiment in this study, the central question is whether exposure to negative news reports affects people's perceptions of key social issues. Therefore, despite its disadvantages, the posttest-only control group design is sufficient to answer this causal question, as all experiments are able to address<sup>59</sup>.

The treatment was an in-depth news report originally aired on the China Central Television (CCTV) News Channel on November 27, 2012<sup>60</sup>. The original report was about 24 minutes long. It was about a demolition and relocation dispute between a farmer and the local township government due to insufficient compensation. Because the experiment was conducted in public parks, as will be described in detail below, I edited the news report into a 2-minute video excerpt. I made sure three specific facts, as highlighted in the original report, were present in this excerpt. First, the farmer did not receive nearly enough money to cover his financial loss due to demolition and relocation; second, if the farmer were relocated to a new house, he would lose his original source of income because he could not farm his land any more; finally, the dispute was not solved in the end.

I selected television news, as opposed to news on other traditional news outlets such as newspaper, for two reasons. First, television is the medium that has the highest penetration rate

---

<sup>58</sup> Aronson *et al.*, *Methods of Research in Social Psychology*, 142.

<sup>59</sup> Druckman *et al.*, *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*.

<sup>60</sup> This news report can be accessed here:

<http://baidu.cntv.cn/schedule/SCHE1348564206896995&videoId=27aaf4b9391c4497a4aa559e39dc6d43> The original title is, 温岭钉子户, “钉”在了什么地方?

in China. According to Wang<sup>61</sup>, the penetration rate of television in China was 98.2 percent in 2005. According to the China Survey 2008, conducted by the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University in collaboration with the Research Center of Contemporary China at Peking University, 95 percent of the Chinese population has at least one working television set at home. In other words, television reaches the vast majority of the Chinese public, more than newspaper, radio, and the Internet does. Moreover, a recent study reports that among the traditional and new media outlets, such as newspaper, radio, magazines, websites, and online devices, television is the most trustworthy media outlet in China, especially national level television station<sup>62</sup>. This shows not only the high penetration rate but also the broad impact that television has in China. Second, despite the importance of television in political communication in China, within the subfield of Chinese media and politics, television news has not received much scholarly attention. The majority of the existing empirical studies are based on newspapers. A survey of the recent scholarship shows that about 65 percent of the articles published from 1981 to 2010 that systematically analyze content of Chinese media sources focused on newspapers<sup>63</sup>. Because of the empirical significance of television news among the Chinese public and its understudied status in literature, I used television news as the experimental treatment. CCTV is the national-level television station. It is widely seen among scholars and the Chinese public as representing the highest-level leadership of the CCP. It is also among the most studied news outlets in China that broadcasts criticism on local governments and officials<sup>64</sup>. Therefore, in this experiment, I

---

<sup>61</sup> Jing Wang, *Brand New China: Advertising, Media, and Commercial Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 248.

<sup>62</sup> Shuhua Zhou, Hongzhong Zhang, and Binshen, "Comparison and Magnitude Credibility: Whom to Trust When Reports are Conflicting?" *The Open Communication Journal* 8 (2014): 1-8.

<sup>63</sup> Daniela Stockmann, "Information Overload? Collecting, Managing, and Analyzing Chinese Media Content," in Allen Carlson, Mary Gallagher, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Melanie Manion, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Alex Chan, "From Propaganda to Hegemony: *Jiaodian Fangtan* and China's Media Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11 (2002): 35-51; Xu Hua, "Morality Discourse in the Marketplace: narratives in the Chinese

used a critical news report from CCTV on a demolition and relocation dispute between a township government and a farmer as treatment.

### *Experimental procedure and results*

Given the constraints of time and funding, I was not able to conduct an experiment the within-subjects design that requires the experiment span over a period of time<sup>65</sup>. I was only able to design and conduct an experiment based on the expectation that I would only be able to contact the participants once. I randomly approached people in public parks and asked for their consent. I did not ask for any information related to their personal identity. Therefore, in the whole process the participants remain anonymous. As discussed above, in order to avoid the problem of pretest sensitization, I used the posttest-only control group design, a type of between-subjects design<sup>66</sup> for the experiment:

(Table 1 About Here)

Participants were ordinary citizens that I randomly approached in three public parks in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province in eastern China. Yangzhou is a municipality with a population of 4.6 million<sup>67</sup>. From July 18 to 25, 2013, I (a Yangzhou native) randomly approached 132 people in total, of which 120 consented to do the experiment with me. In the past decade, it has become

---

television news magazine *Oriental Horizon*,” *Journalism Studies* 1 (2000): 637-647; Xiaoling Zhang, “Breaking News, Media Coverage and ‘Citizen’s Right to Know’ in China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 16 (2007): 535-545; Yong Zhong, “CCTV ‘dialogue’= speaking + listening: a case analysis of a prestigious CCTV talk show series *Dialogue*,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26 (2004): 821-840.

<sup>65</sup> Druckman *et al.*, *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> According to Druckman *et al.*, *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, a between-subjects design is where the researcher randomly assigns participants to distinct treatment groups. A within-subjects design is where a given participant is observed before and after receiving a treatment and there is no random assignment between subjects.

<sup>67</sup> This number comes from the sixth national population census in 2010.

a habit of Yangzhou residents (and urban residents in other cities) to spend time during summer in public parks after dinner to both enjoy the cool of the air after sunset and to socialize with other residents. Therefore, from July 18 to 25, 2013, I went to a different park each day and stayed there from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. to conduct the experiment. Among the 120 participants, 60 were randomly assigned to the treatment group, and 60 were randomly assigned to the control group. For the control group, I asked participants to answer three questions regarding their opinions on demolition and relocation. For the treatment group, I asked participants to first watch a two-minute news report excerpt on my iPhone. The content of the report was specified above. I watched the video together with each participant assigned to the treatment group, after which I asked the same questions on their opinions on demolition and relocation. Specifically, I used the Likert-scale with five levels for these questions. As shown in Table 2, Questions 1 and 3 test the agenda-setting and priming hypotheses, respectively.

Next, I will present the descriptive statistics, followed by a discussion of the results of the statistical tests. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the participants' opinions on demolition and relocation. Answering the first question, 50 percent of the participants in the treatment group said the issue was "Very important," while only 30 percent of the participants in the control group said so. When we combine the two categories of "Important" and "Very important," 83.3 percent of the participants in the treatment group fall in these categories, while 78.3 percent of the participants in the control group fall in the same categories. Thus the descriptive statistics seems to suggest that watching critical television news has agenda-setting effects as the issue became more important after participants were exposed to the news.

For the second question, the same percentage (28.3 percent) of participants from the control and the treatment group said it was not possible to eventually solve the issue. However,

more participants from the treatment group (43.3 percent) than those from the control group (38.3 percent) said it was possible to eventually solve the issue. It seems like exposure to critical news has increased the participants' confidence in the ultimate solution of the issue, although so far we are not sure if the difference is statistically significant.

For the third question, while 48.3 percent of the participants in the control group said they were dissatisfied with the government's handling of the issue, 71.7 percent of the participants in the treatment group said so. More participants in the control group (40 percent) were unsure than those in the treatment group (25 percent). This suggests priming effects because the criticism in the new report seems to have affected the participants' opinions in the same direction. That is, by emphasizing the negative aspects of the government's handling of demolition and relocation, the news report has propelled the participants to form negative evaluations of the government based on this issue. However, statistical analysis below shows that not all of these differences are statistically significant.

(Table 2 About Here)

Since the dependent variables are ordinal with five categories, ANOVA is not an ideal test here because ANOVA assumes normally distributed residuals for interval dependent variable. Moreover, it only tests difference of means, not variance<sup>68</sup>. Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance does not assume normally distributed residuals, and it is a non-parametric

---

<sup>68</sup> Irwin P. Levin, *Relating Statistics And Experimental Design: An Introduction* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1999), chapter 4.

method for comparing two or more independent samples<sup>69</sup>. Therefore, I used Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance to test whether the differences observed in the descriptive statistics are actually statistically significant. As reported in Table 3, the results suggest that exposure to negative television news reports affects participants' responses to Questions 1 and 3, but not Question 2. In other words, watching the critical news report on demolition and relocation makes the participants more likely to think it is an important issue. It also makes them more likely to be dissatisfied with the government's handling of the issue. However, watching the critical news report does not affect participants' confidence in the ultimate solution of the issue. As shown in the descriptive statistics, more participants think it was possible to solve the issue than those who think not. This suggests that broadcasting negative news on mass media may serve as a safety valve releasing steam of public anger without sacrificing public confidence in the regime. Since contentious social and political issues do exist broadly, this mechanism in the long term may actually benefit the CCP by granting more time for the search of possible solutions before disputes escalate into conflicts.

(Table 3 About Here)

In order to further illustrate the results of the experiment, I ran simulations based on the statistical results. The simulation results show that participants exposed to the negative news report are more likely to think the issue of demolition and relocation is an important social issue and be more dissatisfied with the government's handling of the issue, when compared to participants in the control group. This is shown in Figures 1 and 2.

---

<sup>69</sup> William H. Kruskal and W. Allen Wallis, "Use of Ranks in One-Criterion Variance Analysis," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 47 (December 1952): 583-621; John D. Spurrier, "On the null distribution of the Kruskal-Wallis statistic," *Journal of Nonparametric Statistics* 15 (2003): 685-691.

(Figure 1 About Here)

(Figure 2 About Here)

Question may arise that individuals living under an authoritarian regime often do not feel free to truthfully answer political questions. This is a legitimate and important concern. However, for this experiment there is actually little reason to worry about the validity of the answers. Among the three questions, the third question asking participants' satisfaction with the government is the most sensitive and direct question when compared to the first two, because it directly asks the participants to evaluate the performance of the government. As the descriptive statistics show, 29 percent of all participants chose "very dissatisfied" and 31 percent of all participants chose "dissatisfied" with the government's handling of the issue of demolition and relocation. Therefore, if the participants were not afraid of directly voicing their dissatisfaction with the government, there is little reason to believe that the participants were not honest with the first and second questions.

## **Discussion**

In general, the experiment shows the agenda-setting and priming effects of critical news on public opinion in China, which confirms the hypotheses derived from the news effects theories. However, despite these news effects, watching critical news reports does not necessarily undermine public confidence in the government to ultimately solve contentious issues. In fact, critical news may release steam of public anger over contentious issues that

emerged during China's economic reform and development process, which may consolidate, rather than undermine, the authoritarian rule.

The safety valve argument is not new, but so far there has been little empirical evidence to substantiate this argument. The experimental results presented in this study provide empirical support for the safety valve argument. During the process of executing controversial policies such as demolition and relocation, individual grievances arise and they become prevalent. Without an institutionalized mechanism to address these grievances, confrontation from the public in the form of resistance to demolition or even organized protest may be expected. Public frustration and anger accumulate in this process. When such a problem becomes nationwide, the government faces significant challenges of not only being unable to execute the policy of demolition and relocation, but also a threat to social stability, a top priority for the CCP. Reporting local disputes on demolition and relocation on television thus serves the interest of the regime in at least two ways. First, reporting disputes on the national television, known by the public as the mouthpiece of the CCP, shows that the government acknowledges the problem. Second, by choosing the angle of the story that the farmer was undercompensated, the news report implicitly stands on the side of the farmer in this dispute. This may relieve public frustration and anger over this contentious issue through expressing sympathy towards the farmer and thus indirectly suggesting a "verdict" for such disputes. That is, the local township government should have offered sufficient compensation by closely following relevant compensation policies and regulations, such as the above-mentioned state rulings on compensation. From the perspective of the public, sensing that the central leadership is on their side by watching CCTV news, although they are dissatisfied with the government's handling of



this important issue, they remain confident with the ultimate solution of the issue. This process, supported by the experimental results, substantiates the safety valve argument.

An important caveat, however, is that the criticism allowed to exist is only mildly critical in the sense that such critical reports do not directly challenge the highest leadership or the regime as a whole. On the one hand, journalists who produce such critical news are subject to formal and informal constraints on their freedom of reporting. Cases of journalists being threatened, beaten, or even thrown into jail for their reports are not rare. Most of the journalists have neither the independence nor the desire to challenge the regime. On the other hand, with television being the most strictly controlled news outlet<sup>70</sup> in China, the degree of criticism in television news is relatively low. Moreover, when such television news criticism happens, it usually serves a distinct purpose. In the case of demolition and relocation, due to corruption or fiscal pressure, the local township government did not follow relevant policies and failed to provide enough compensation for residents whose homes are to be demolished. The central leadership may see this as local noncompliance that creates trouble that may lead to protest. If this is the case, then the central leadership may use the news media to send a signal to the local officials that this issue has to be solved. Criticism broadcast on national television that represents the central leadership undoubtedly places pressure on the local officials. Therefore, news criticism becomes a means used by the central leadership to ensure local compliance and to solve local issues.

Based on this, the nature of such criticism is “benign,” in the sense that the criticism does not intend to challenge the regime. Instead, it is intended to solve problems. For example, the critical report used in this study only pointed to the local officials not following relevant policies, rather than questioning the political system that may have flaws leading to the problems of

---

<sup>70</sup> Shirk, “Changing Media, Changing China.”

corruption and noncompliance. In other words, such “benign” criticisms usually focus on problems on the surface rather than digging out the root cause for those problems. This may be a possible reason why such criticism does not adversely affect public confidence in the regime. Carefully framed criticism that serves a well-defined purpose allows the public to release frustration and anger while keeping the negative reactions under a certain level, so that the general confidence in the regime remains intact. If this is true, then criticism in the news actually helps prolong authoritarian duration in China through releasing steam of public anger over contentious social issues, and at the same time maintaining public confidence in the regime’s governing capability, a basis for continuing legitimacy.

## Tables and Figures

**Table 1.** Experimental Procedures

Group	Step 1	Step 2
Treatment Group	Television news treatment	Posttest
Control Group	No treatment	Posttest

*Source:* Author's experimental design.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics

Questions	Answers	Control	Treatment
Q1. Are disputes due to demolition and relocation an important social issue?	Not at all important	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Not important	5 (3)	1.7 (1)
	Hard to say	16.7 (10)	15 (9)
	Important	48.3 (29)	33.3 (20)
	Very important	30 (18)	50 (30)
	Do not know/ Refuse to answer	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Q2. Do you think it is possible to eventually solve demolition and relocation disputes?	Not at all possible	3.3 (2)
Not possible		25 (15)	15 (9)
Hard to say		33.3 (20)	28.3 (17)
Possible		35 (21)	38.3 (23)
Very possible		3.3 (2)	5 (3)
Do not know/ Refuse to answer		0 (0)	0 (0)
Q3. Are you satisfied with the government's handling of these disputes?		Very dissatisfied	18.3 (11)
	Dissatisfied	30 (18)	31.7 (19)
	Hard to say	40 (24)	25 (15)
	Satisfied	10 (6)	3.3 (2)

Very satisfied	1.7 (1)	0 (0)
Do not know/ Refuse to answer	0 (0)	0 (0)

*Notes:* 60 participants were randomly assigned to the control group, and 60 participants were randomly assigned to the treatment group. Cell numbers are percentages. The numbers in parentheses are frequencies. N=120.

*Source:* Author's experiment conducted in July 2013.

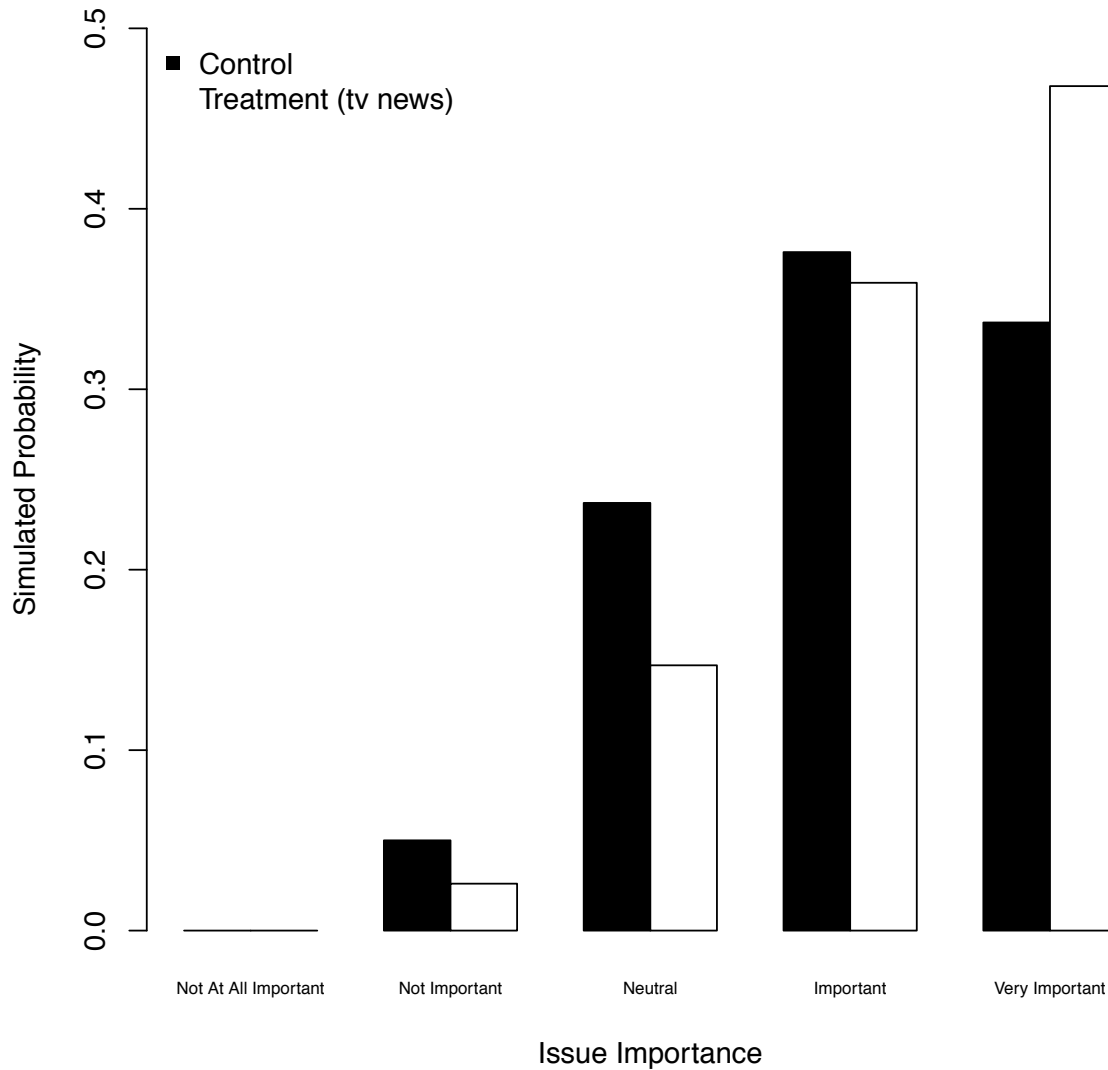
**Table 3.** Opinions on Demolition and Relocation

	N	df	Chi-squared	<i>p</i> -value
Q1. Are disputes due to demolition and relocation an important social issue?	120	1	3.98	.046*
Q2. Do you think it is possible to eventually solve demolition and relocation disputes?	120	1	.01	.904
Q3. Are you satisfied with the government's handling of these disputes?	120	1	9.51	.002**

*Notes:* Kruskal-Willis one-way ANOVA is used to perform the tests.

'\*\*\*'  $p < 0.001$ , '\*\*'  $p < 0.01$ , '\*'  $p < 0.05$ , '.'  $p < 0.1$ .

*Source:* Author's experiment conducted in July 2013.

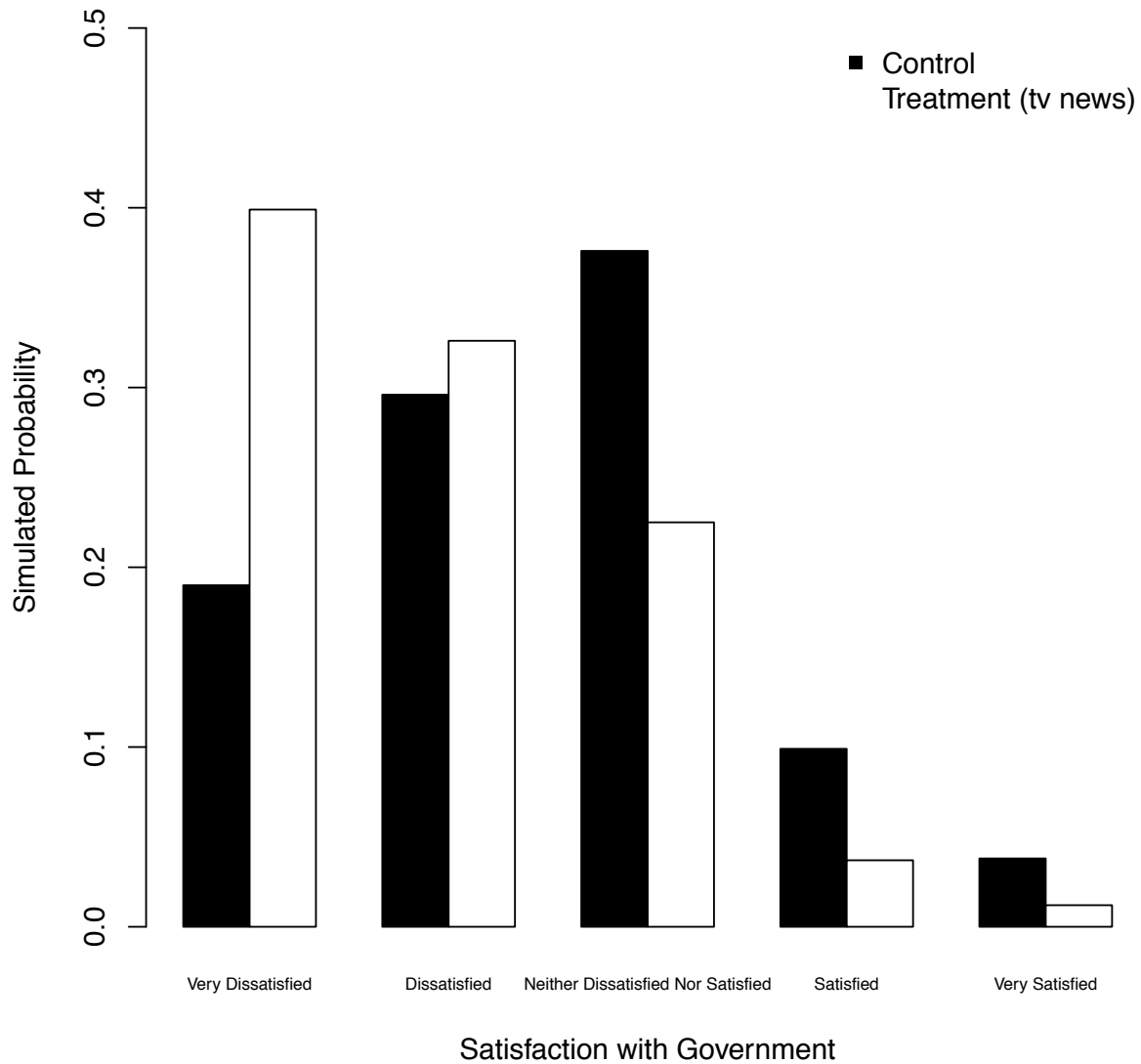


**Figure 1.** Simulation of Issue Importance

Notes: 1. Black bars show simulated probabilities of choosing the categories for participants in the control group. White bars show simulated probabilities when participants are exposed to negative news on demolition and relocation.

2. Simulation is conducted using the R package “ZeligChoice.” Zelig project citations: Kosuke Imai, Gary King, and Olivia Lau. (2009). “Zelig: Everyone’s Statistical Software,” <http://gking.harvard.edu/zelig> and Kosuke Imai, Gary King, and Olivia Lau. (2008). “Toward A Common Framework for Statistical Analysis and Development,” *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (December) pp. 892-913.

Source: Author’s experiment conducted in July 2013 in Yangzhou, China.



**Figure 2.** Simulation of Satisfaction with Government

*Notes:* 1. Black bars show simulated probabilities of choosing the categories for participants in the control group. White bars show simulated probabilities when participants are exposed to negative news on demolition and relocation.

2. Simulation is conducted using the R package “ZeligChoice.” Zelig project citations: Kosuke Imai, Gary King, and Olivia Lau. (2009). “Zelig: Everyone’s Statistical Software,” <http://gking.harvard.edu/zelig> and Kosuke Imai, Gary King, and Olivia Lau. (2008). “Toward A Common Framework for Statistical Analysis and Development,” *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (December) pp. 892-913.

*Source:* Author’s experiment conducted in July 2013 in Yangzhou, China.