

# How the Chinese Government Prescribes Objectives to Obtain Political Obedience

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## Abstract

Existing research on gender and politics has focused on political participation in democratic contexts. This paper shifts the focus to authoritarian contexts and examines the role of gender in political compliance. We argue that when autocrats use ambiguity to obtain voluntary compliance—for example, by setting broad objectives without giving explicit limits on the behavior of subjects—women and men, faced with different socialization experiences and expectation, will use divergent strategies to express political conformity. Based on interviews, a global survey, and an experiment conducted among Confucius Institute teachers, we find that the Chinese regime regulates the behavior of these teachers by prescribing objectives rather than specific behaviors. Confucius Institutes are China’s language and culture promotion programs that have been accused of exporting Chinese government propaganda and censorship. Given ambiguity over what behavior is permissible, we find that women express compliance by increasing uncensored discussions to persuade host country students to the Chinese regime’s point of view. In contrast, men comply by increasing censorship to assert the party line. Evidence suggests these gendered expressions of political compliance are related to the difference in social expectations. Strikingly, this substantial difference in behavior based on gender is not detected for other individual-level characteristics such as age, education, or political affiliation.

**Keywords:** Gender, political compliance, Confucius Institutes, China, interviews, survey experiment

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