



A Comparative Survey of

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

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A Comparative Analysis of the Wealth Divide and
the Issue of Political Inclusion

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Asian Barometer

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A Comparative Analysis of the Wealth Divide and the Issue of Political Inclusion

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Introduction

In recent years rising income inequality gradually emerged as a salient issues in many countries. It is well observed in some countries that voting turnout is lower among low income-individuals. In other cases, the rich has disproportionally influence over the government decision-making. Therefore, a participating gap or, in other words, a political inclusion difference exists between different income strata. Political inclusion can be defined by the extent that citizens of different characteristics participate in and influence politics. In this paper, we are interested in knowing whether the political participation-gap exists and, if there are the gaps, in which political activities? We will examine the relationships between self-reported household income and political inclusion. In general, political inclusion can be measured by individuals' capacity to participate in politics, participating rate in various political activities, and their perceived system performance.

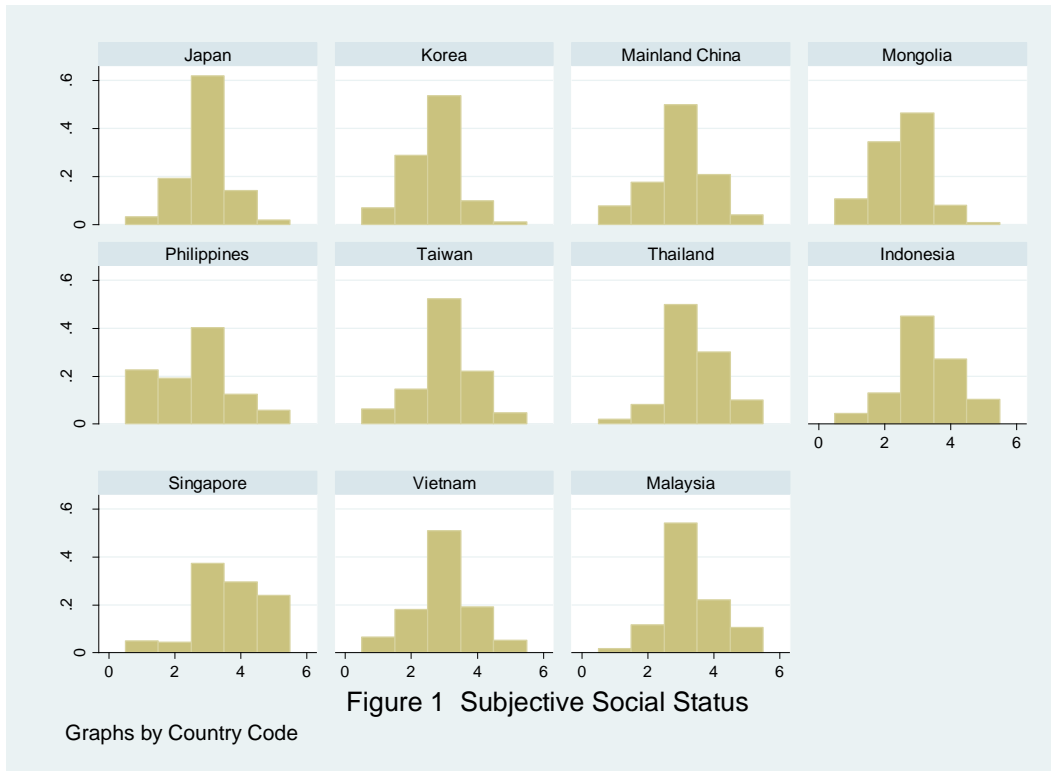
We will touch three interconnected issue in this paper. First of all, we will examine whether different income strata are equipped with different levels of political interest, knowledge, and political efficacy. Those are the important foundation for political participation. Specifically, we will examine whether the political sophistication, political interests, and efficacy vary across different income groups. Second, we will examine participation gap in various political activities. If respondents of high-income strata enjoy more political knowledge and interests, they are likely to have higher political participating rates. Political activities include both conventional and non-conventional forms of activities. The former could include vote and campaign; while the latter could include activities such as communal activities, contacting officials, contentious political activities.

Third, if the participation gap actually exists, then government policy-making is

very likely tilted toward the interests of the social segment who participate more. Thus, participation gap could have an impact on the perceived political system output. We will examine whether participation gap, if any, translate into different levels of perceived government responsiveness, political trust, satisfaction with the way democracy work, and even regime support?

Distribution of Social Economic Status and Household Income

Figure 1 show that most people think that they belong to the subjective middle class. In most countries more than forty percent of respondents identify themselves as belong to the third quintile of the social economic spectrum. In contrast, Figure 2 shows that a great majority of respondents answer that they belong to the lower two quintiles of household income. On average, people's self-reported household income strata are lower than their self-described strata in the social ladder. This is evident in almost all Asian countries except Japan, China, and Vietnam. The China income data is calculated by registering exactly figures from respondents and then converting them back to quintiles. Therefore, it is evenly distributed and is thereby not on an equal basis for the comparison.



Literature Review

The classical democratic theory states that informed and sophisticated citizens and their active participation are crucial for a healthy democracy. Otherwise the electorate are likely to be manipulated by the elite. Large scale survey research, however, find that most voters lack political sophistication and do not actively participate in the politics (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). Despite the fact that average citizen in reality does not meet the good democratic citizen requirement, democracy survive fair well in most of the advanced industrial countries. The seemly puzzle spurs scholar to develop an elastic theory of democracy (Dalton 2006). The new theory states that democracy will not work if every citizen actively participates in each issue, a situation that decision-making could be paralyzed. In fact, a mixed combination of active and potentially active citizens works best for a healthy democracy (Almond and Verba 1963).

Over years, thanks to the rising education and the growth of mass media, scholars witness an increasing level of political sophistication and political interests (Nie et al. 1996). The rising political sophistication and political interests, however, do not translate into higher voting turnout rates. In almost all advanced industrial democracies, levels of turnout, largely distributed between 70 to 85 percent, even register a steadily modest decline. In addition, campaign participation rates, comparatively lower in comparison to turnout rates, are relatively stable over years. Instead, scholars observe an increase of citizen-initiated communal and single-issue activities (Dalton 1984; Inglehart 1990). Rising political sophistication and political interests spur the increase in self-organized activities and reduce the participation of voting. Voting is still in a significant part orchestrated by the elite, being not congruent with the rising political sophistication and interest trend.

Aside from the general participation picture, participation rates vary significant across different segments of the society. Among various factors affecting people's

incentive to participate, individual's personal characteristics, especially social status, is considered the most important factor. It is assumed that higher income individuals are more likely to have the time, income, skills, and information to participate in political activities (Verba et al. 1995, Nie et al. 1996). Empirically, scholars demonstrate that better educated individuals (Dalton 2006) and high-income earners (Endersby 2006) are more likely to vote, especially in the case of United States. In Europe, the participation rate gap across income strata is not so striking. This is mainly because of the high union membership rate, and also the fact that parties of the left and labor unions mobilize the working class to vote (Dalton 2006). Higher educated citizens are also more likely to participate in campaign activity and communal activity (Dalton 2006).

Anan Marsh (1974) extended the definition of political activities from the conventional politics to the unconventional activities. The latter can include petition, demonstration, boycotts, strikes, and violent activities. Verba et al. (1978) also classify four general types of political activities: voting, campaign activity, communal activity, and directly contacting officials. Cross country study find that in most advanced industrial countries signing petitions are common political activities. More than 50 percentages of respondents ever sign a petition (Dalton 2006). In addition, at least 25 percent of respondent replies that they have participate in one of the following activities: demonstration, boycott, strikes, and occupying buildings. Overtimes we witness an increase in protest activities in West Europe and United States.

The participation of unconventional activities also vary across social groups. There are two competing theories: deprivation theory and resource theory (Dalton 2006). The first theory argues that political or economic dissatisfaction lead to contentious activities (Gurr 1970; Norris 2002). The second theory contends that

collective activities require organizing skills and resources. The more educated and politically sophisticated individuals should be better able to initiate contentious activities (Verba et al. 1995). Empirically, higher education is associated greater contentious participation (Dalton 2006).

If there exists the participation gap, then policy-makers are very likely to pay greater attention to the demands of the social groups who participate more. Thus, frequent participants will see policy outputs tilted toward their interests and thereby appreciate the political system outputs better. We will examine whether participation gap, if any, translate into different levels of perceived political output.¹

Scholars have found that higher income inequality is associated with lower level of satisfaction with democracy (Anderson and Singer 2008). Rising income inequality engenders greater citizen disappointment with perceived democratic performance. The discontent is likely to be more salient among citizens of the middle to poor income strata. As rising inequality frustrates the poor and middle class, it, however, does not mean that high-income voters are going to have a higher level of trust in the political system and appreciate the performance of democracy better. It is normally assumed that people enjoying a high level of material affluence tend to appreciate the performance of democratic regimes more, while people who perceive their material interests as faring significantly worse than others may become disappointed with the democratic system (Wagner, Dufour, and Schneider 2003).² Based on the EAB survey,

¹ Scholars have long indicated that income equality is one of the inherent principles of democracy (Dahl 1971). Reducing poverty is something governments should devote resources to. Rising inequality, therefore, increase the likelihood of revolution and is detrimental to the sustainability of democracy (Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2005). In mature democracies, income inequality diminishes interpersonal trust and civic engagement (Uslaner and Brown 2005).

² For authoritarian regime, one can examine the effect of development by looking at changes in gross national income per capita. Similarly, high-income people may prefer democracy because of social and culture change brought about by development. This conventional wisdom, however, does not always hold because the wealthy citizens do not necessarily attribute their material well-being to democracy. Some of them actually achieve material success even before democratic transitions. Moreover, wealthy voters may even complain about the redistributive policies under democracy.

we will examine whether household income level is a significant predictor of satisfaction with the way democracy work, institutional trust, and democratic support.

Because of the big divergence in East Asia in terms of their political system, we can classify our country cases into four broad categories of regime types: (1) Liberal Democracy: Japan, South Korea and Taiwan; (2) Electoral Democracy: Mongolia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand; (3) Electoral authoritarian regime: Malaysia and Singapore and (Hong Kong); and (4) One-Party Authoritarian regime: China, Vietnam and (Cambodia). The Hong Kong and Cambodia data are not available yet.

Household Income and Political Interests and Knowledge

In general, as shown in Figure 3 to 5, respondents' interests in politics and the frequencies they follow news about politics and government vary across income groups. Respondents of high-income households are more likely to be interested in politics, follow political news more often, and discuss political matters with family members or friends more. This is the case in almost all type of regimes. Overall, citizens in higher income strata are better equipped with political interests and knowledge to participate in politics.

Figure 3 Income and Political Interests

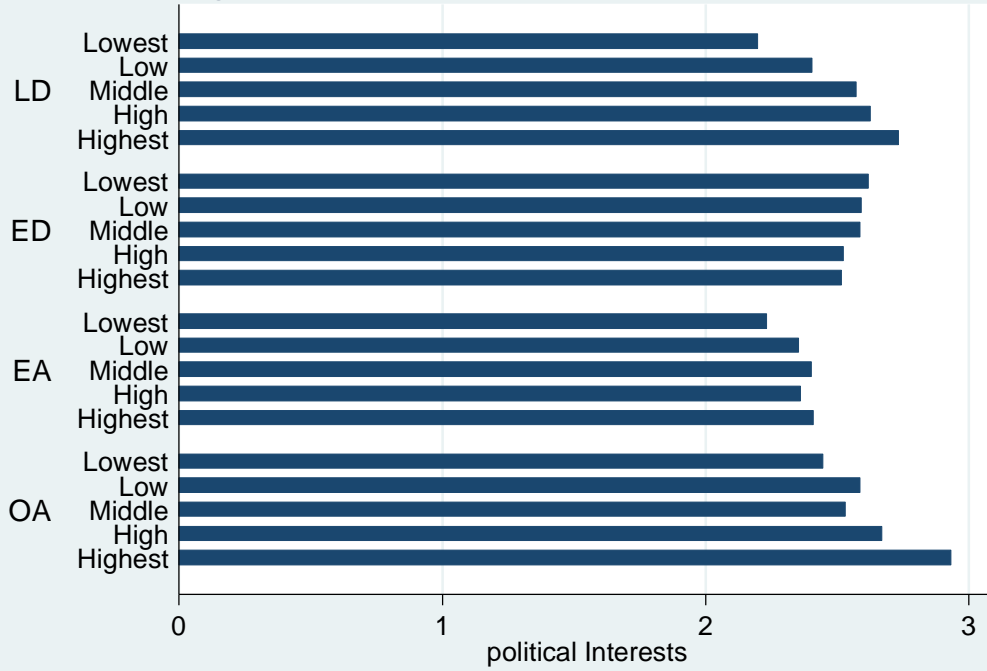
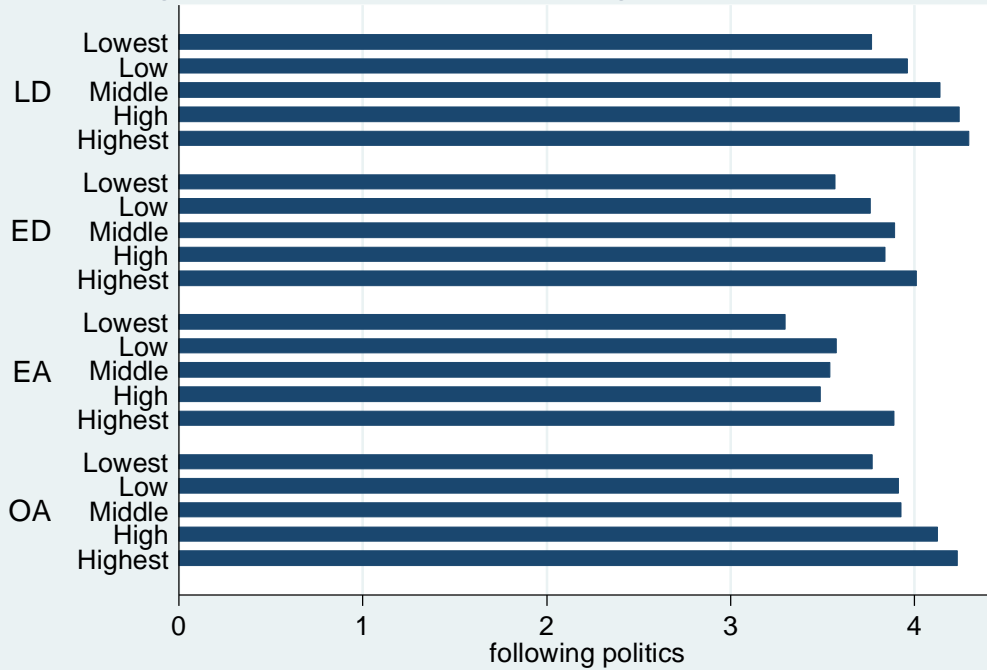
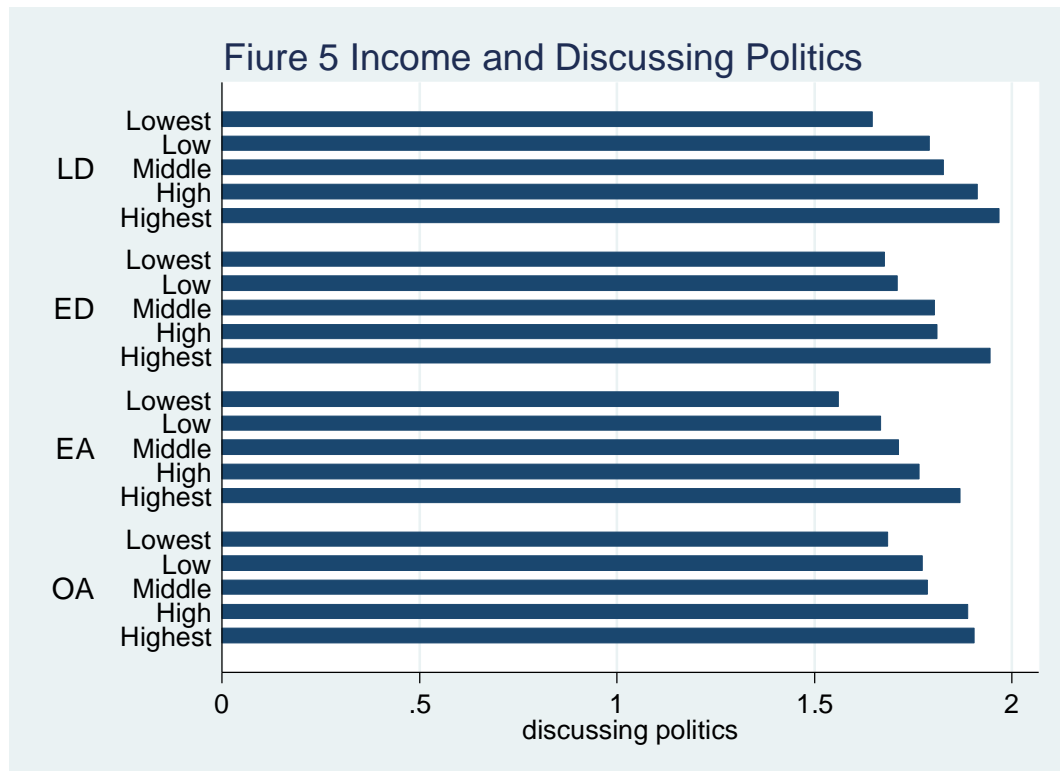


Figure 4 Income and Following Political news





Household Income and Political Efficacy

Different income groups also differ in their perceived ability to participate in politics. As shown in Figure 6 to 8, respondents of high-income strata in electoral democracies tend to have greater abilities to participate in politics. High-income respondents in nearly all regime types understand politics and government better and tend to say they have greater ability to influence over what government does. Overall, citizens in higher income strata have higher political efficacy in the sense that they are more confident in their ability and knowledge to participate in politics and to influence government decisions.

Figure 6 Household Income and Ability to Participate in Politics

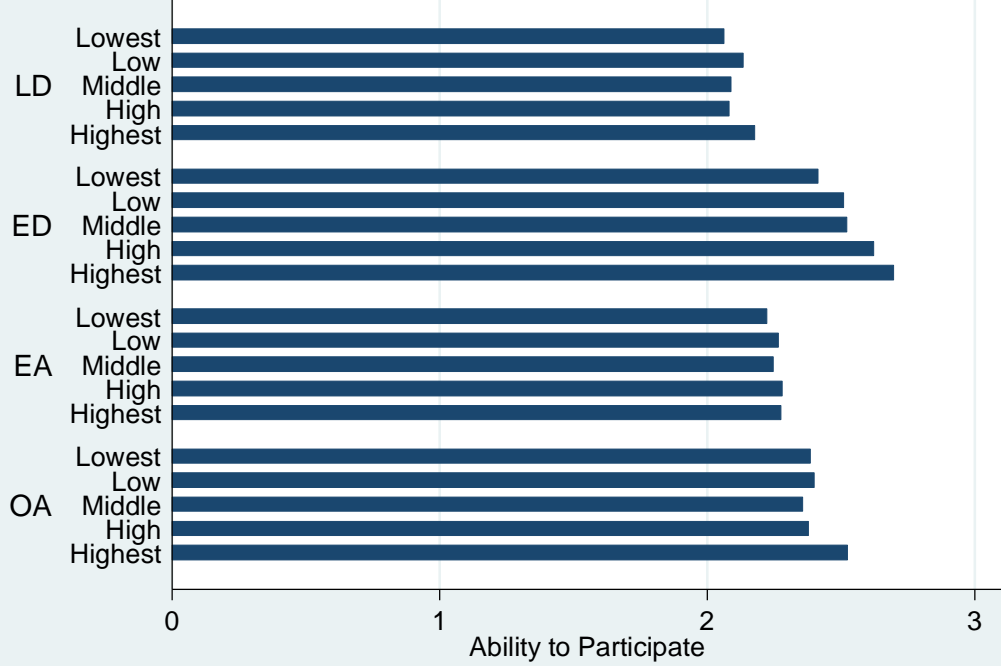
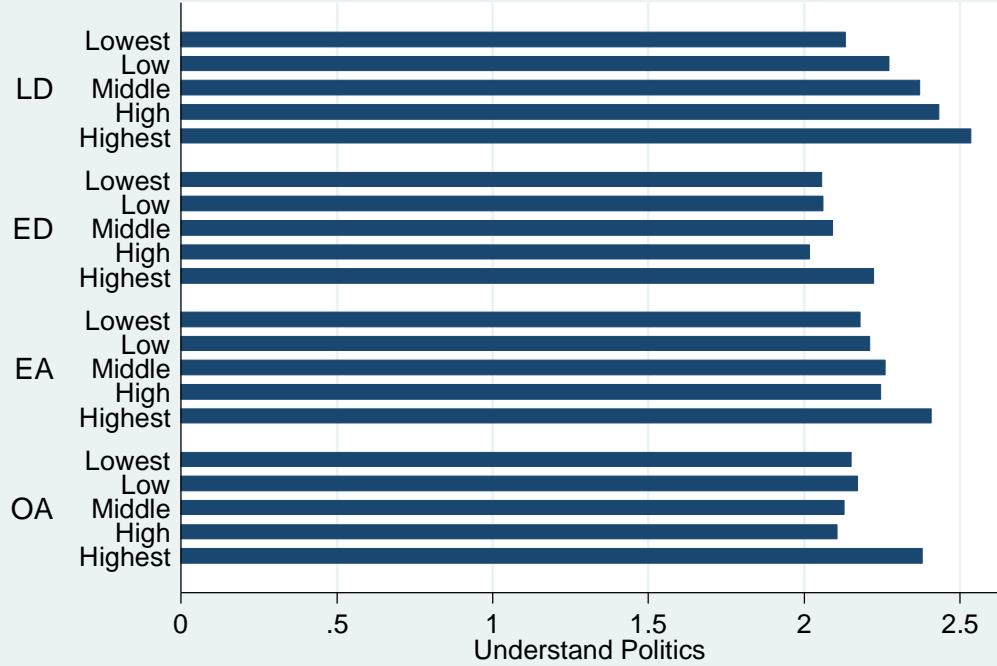
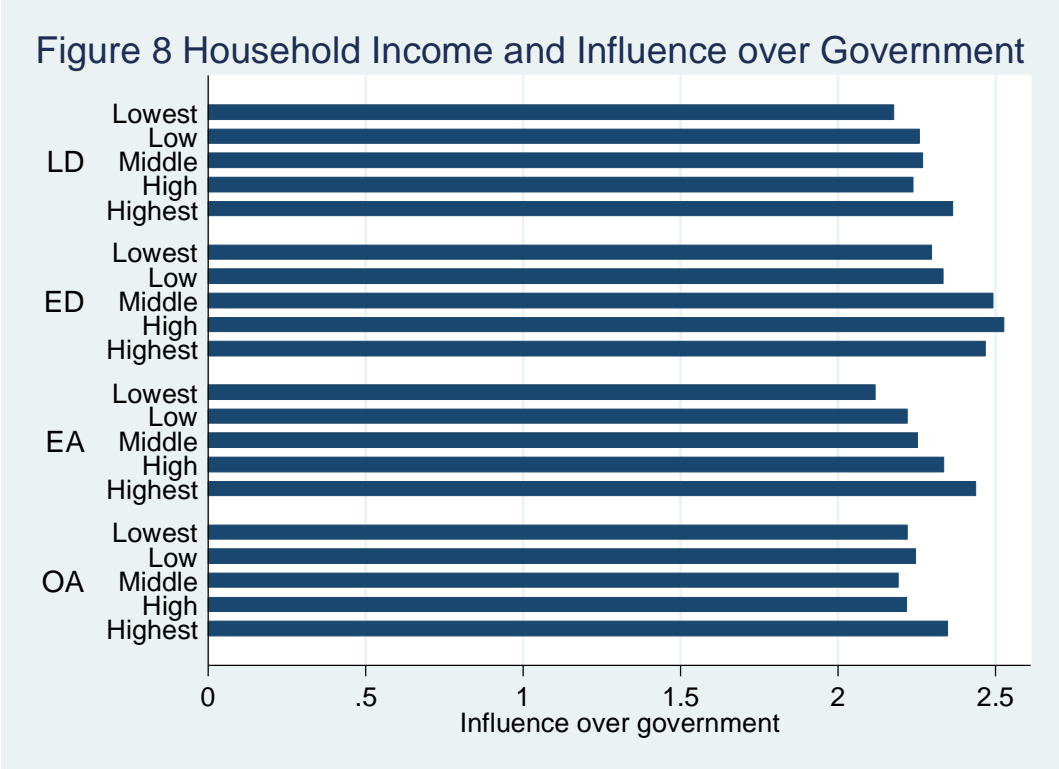


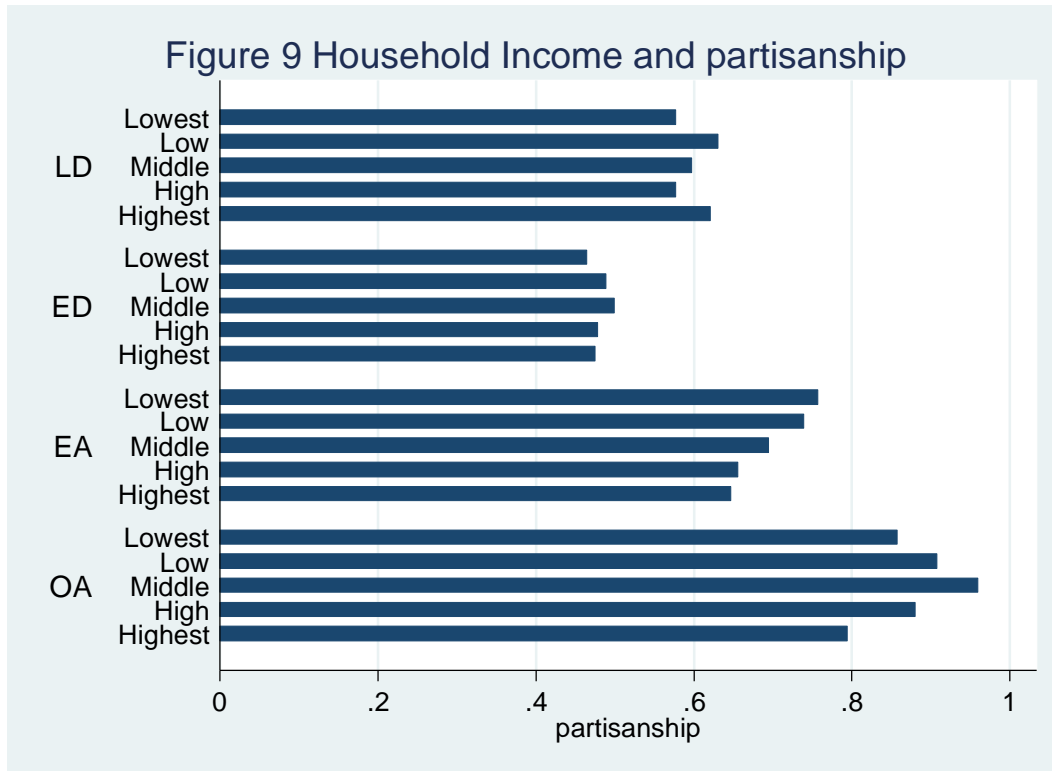
Figure 7 Household Income and Understand Politics





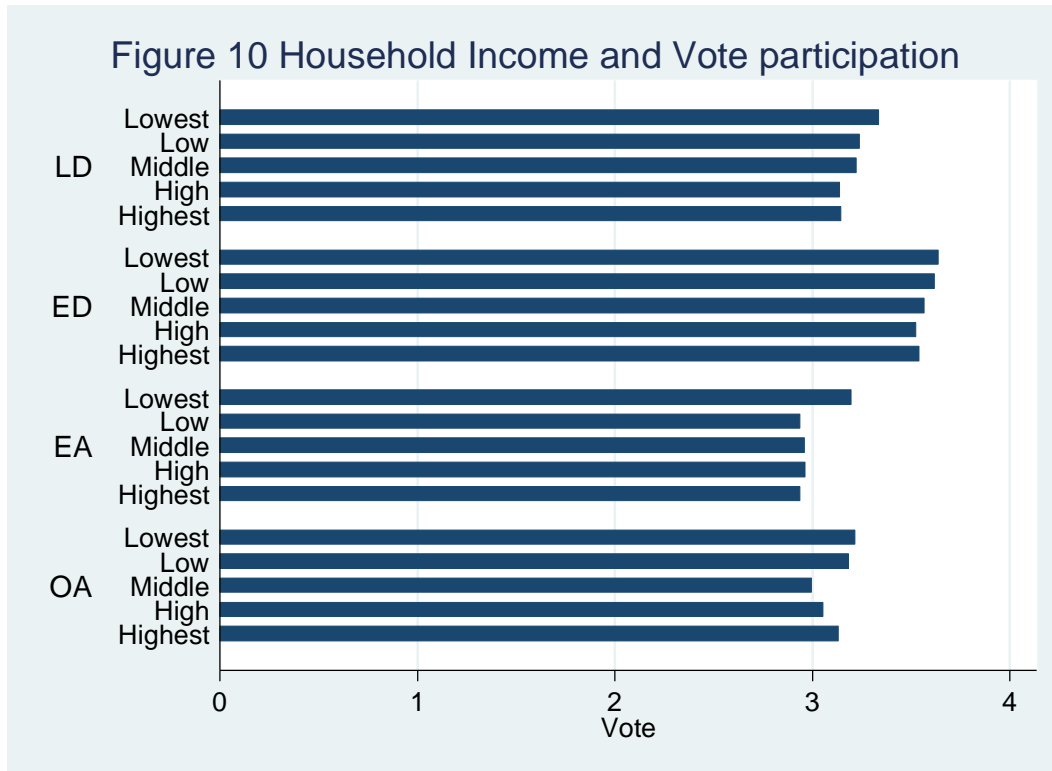
Household Income and Partisanship

Different income groups are equally likely to have partisan identification. As shown in Figure 9, in electoral authoritarianism, respondents of high-income strata are even less likely to feel close to any political parties.

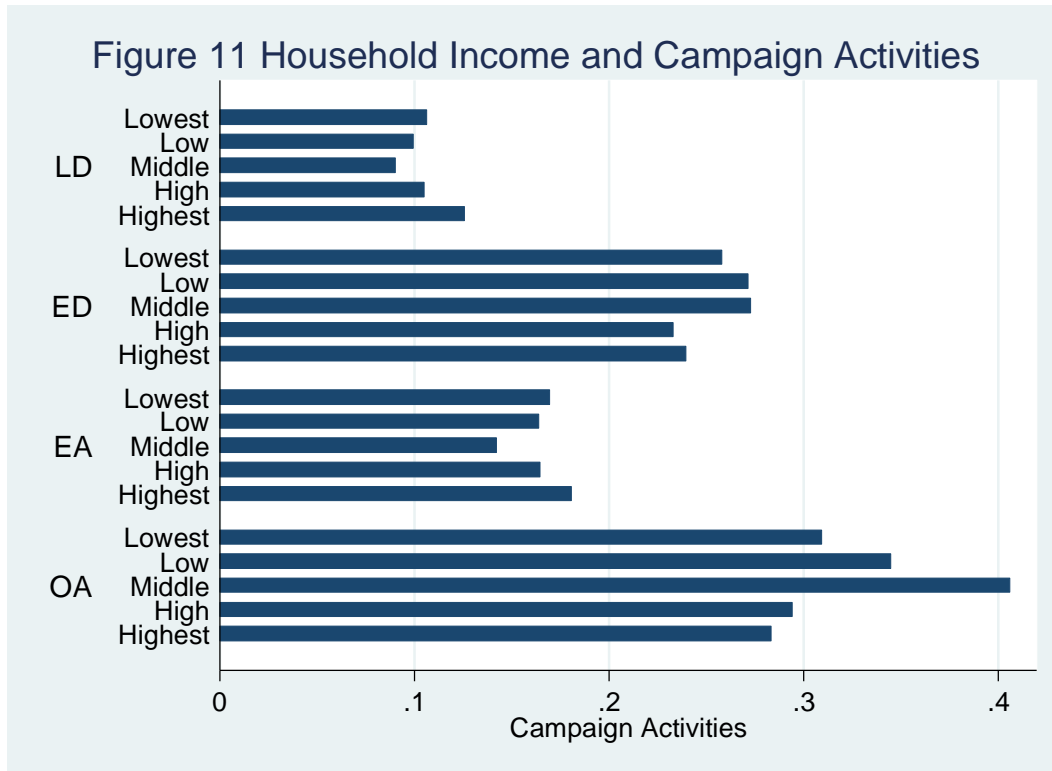


Household Income and Electoral Participation

Different income earners are equal likely to vote when they are eligible for voting, as shown in Figure 10. In general low-income respondents are slightly more likely to vote than the respondents from high-income strata in liberal democracies, electoral democracies, and electoral authoritarianism. The voter turnout rates are lower in liberal democracies and electoral authoritarianism than in electoral democracies.



Asides from voting, as shown in Figure 11, different income groups do not significantly vary in their participation of election campaign, although respondents of the middle quintile in LD and EA tend to participate less than the upper and lower quintiles. In aggregate term, respondents in electoral democracies have higher percentage of respondents participate in campaign meeting or rally, try to persuade other people to vote, or help out for a party or candidate during the election.



Household Income and Alternative Forms of Political Participation

For alternative forms of political participation, as shown in Figure 12 to 15, respondents of high-income strata tend to contact elected officials or legislative representations more often, except in electoral democracies. This relationship is especially strong in electoral authoritarian regimes and one-party authoritarian regimes. Over sixty percent of high-income respondents reply that they ever make such contacts. Next, the wealthy respondents are also more likely to go with others to resolve local issues or to sign a petition. This is clear across different type of regimes. Signing petitions are especially common in the liberal democracies. Finally, attending a demonstration or protest or using violence for political cause is not a frequent type of political activities.

From the above discussion we find that the high-income strata in liberal democracies have higher participating rate in signing petitions and initiating collective actions to resolve local problems, while the high-income strata in liberal democracies

have much higher rate of contacting elected officials or legislative representations more often. The difference constitutes a stark contrast between the three types of regimes and significantly reveals their distinct characteristics.

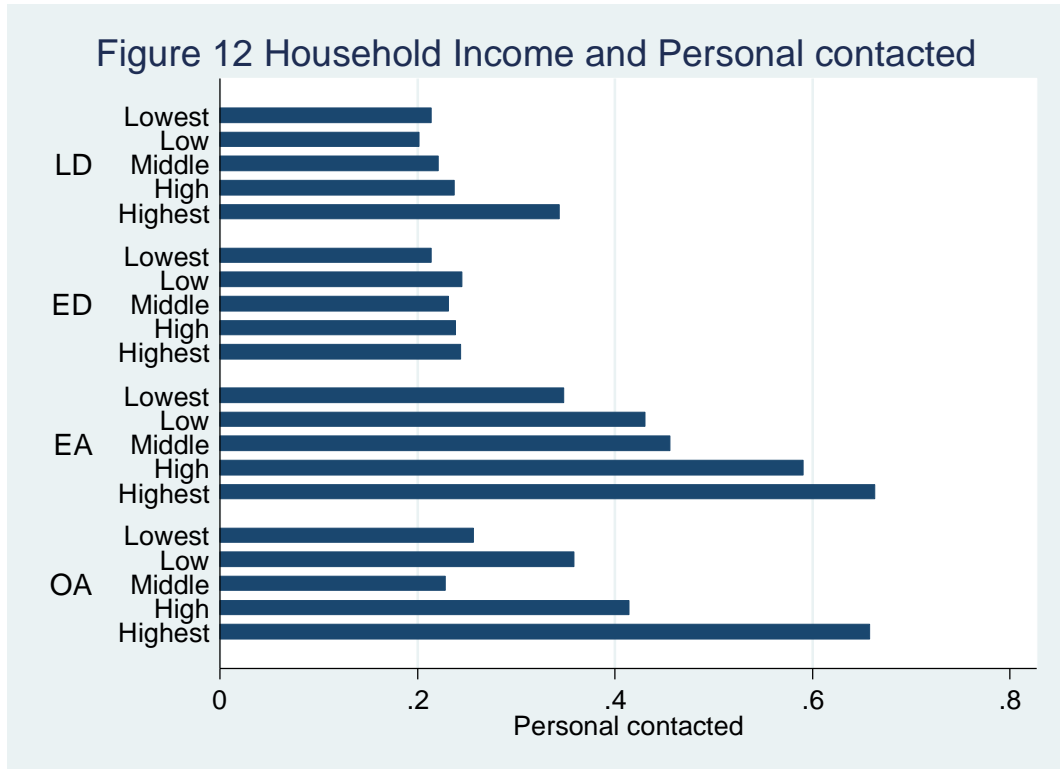


Figure 13 Household Income and resolve local problems

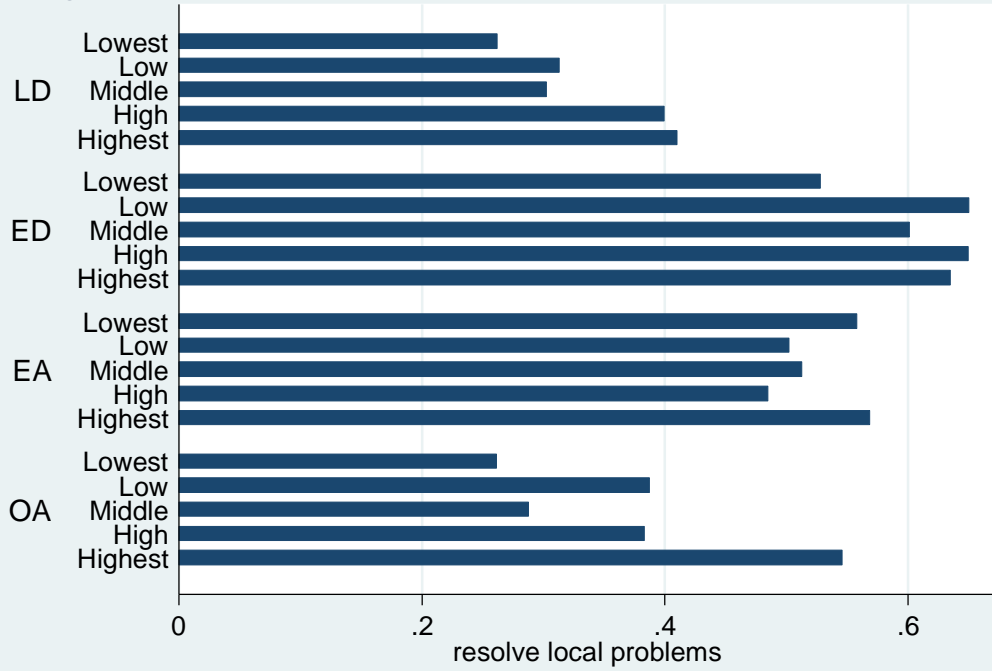
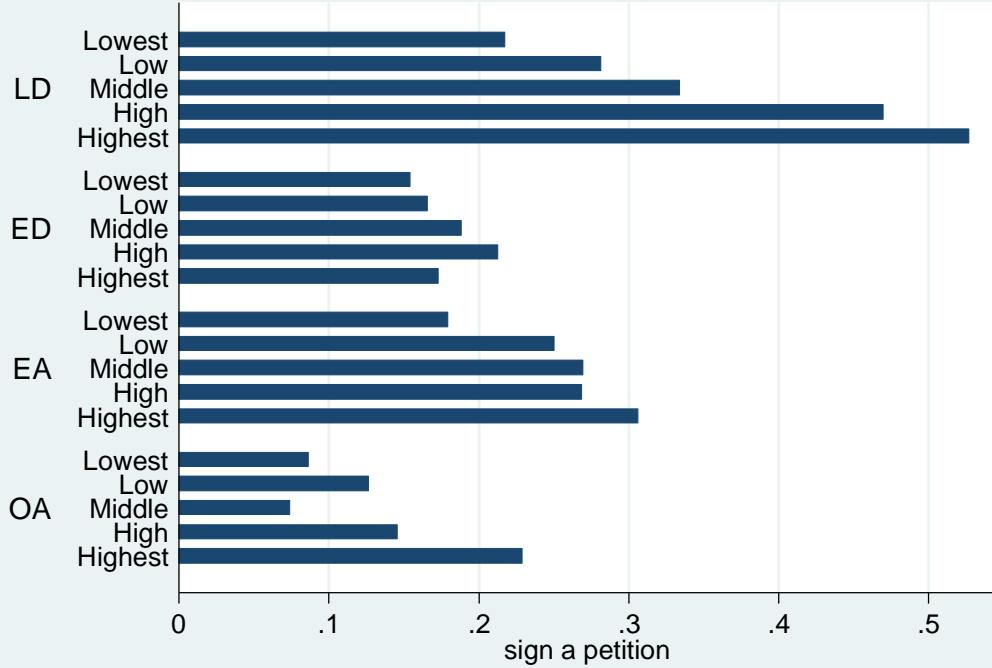
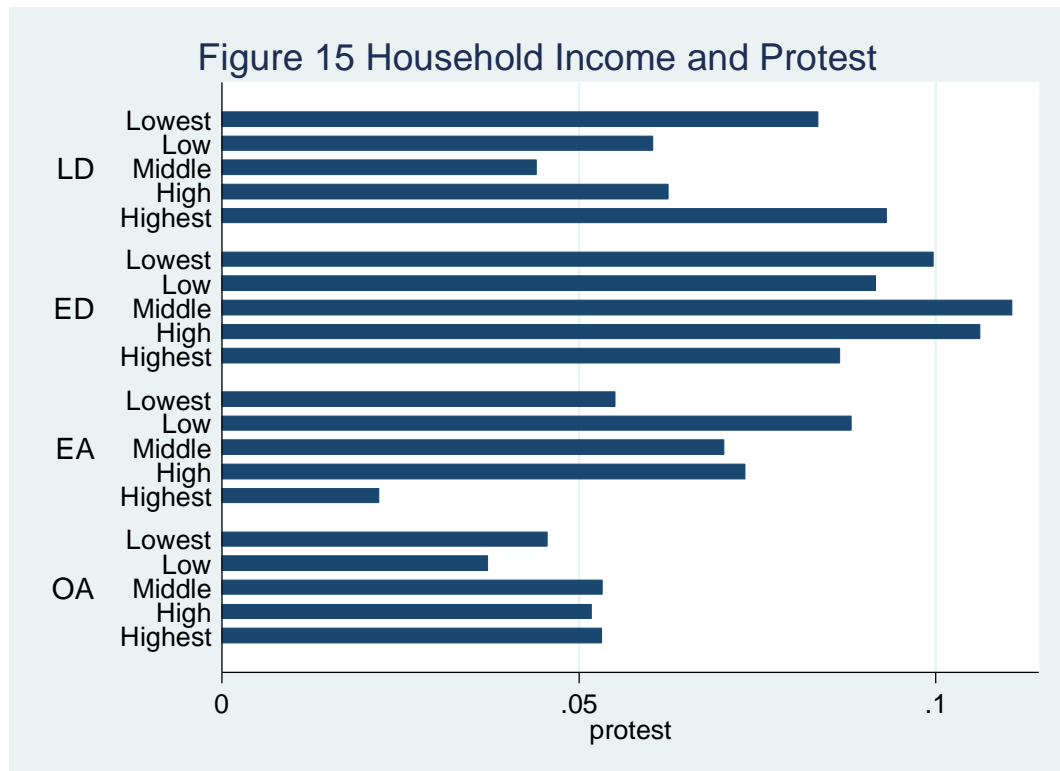


Figure 14 Household Income and sign a petition





Perceived Institutional Outputs

Household Income and Government Responsiveness

Here we turn to the output dimension to examine the relationship between self-reported household income and the responsiveness of governments. The high-income voters in ED and EA are slightly less likely to think that the government responds to what people think, as shown in Figure 16. In addition, different income groups give roughly the same answer to the question: “people have the power to change a government they do not like”. As to the concrete policy-output evaluation, as shown in Figure 17, voters are roughly equally to think that “Rich and poor people are treated equally by the government” and “people have basic necessities like food, clothes, and shelter.”

Figure 16 Household Income and Government Responsiveness

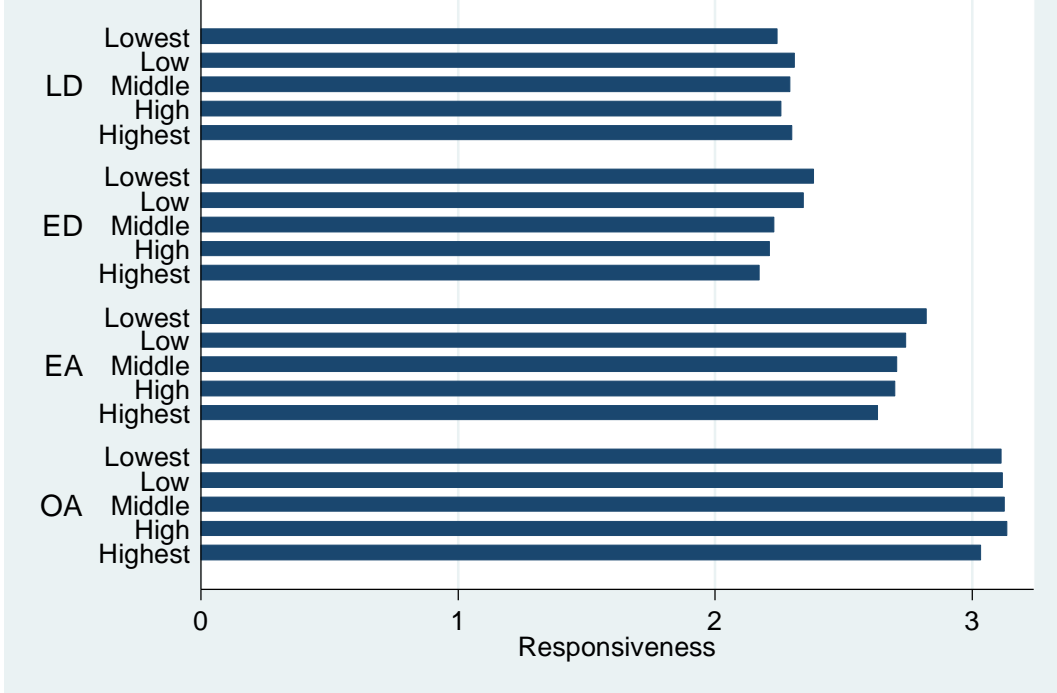
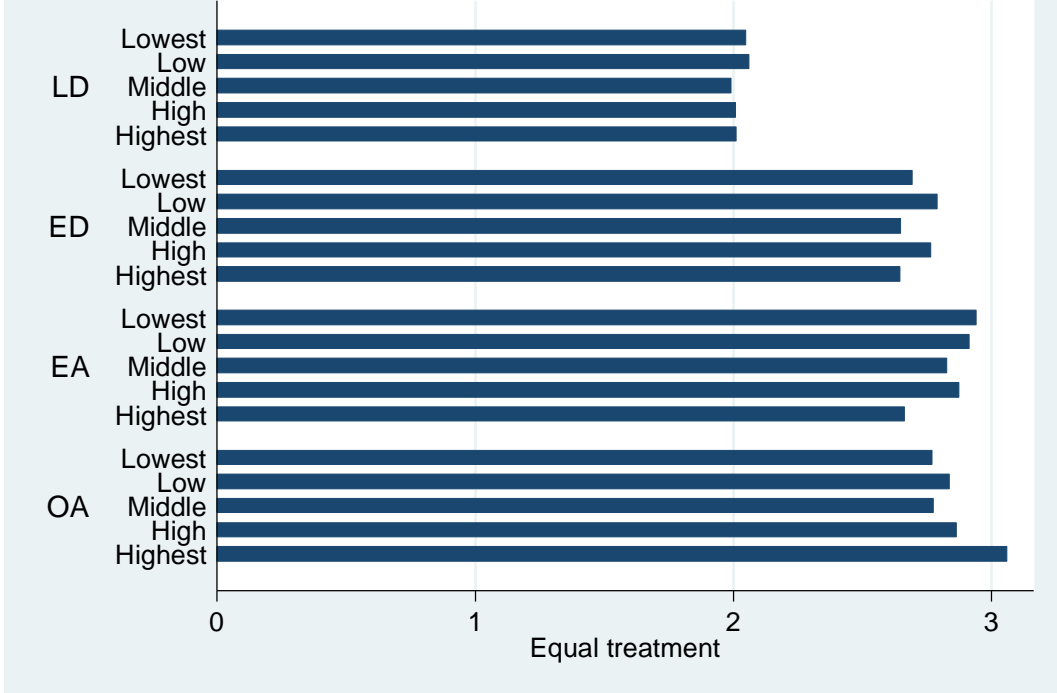


Figure 17 Household Income and Equal Treatment



Household income and Institutional Trust

In terms of institutional trust, high-income respondents in electoral democracies

and electoral authoritarian regimes tend to trust the president or prime minister less, as shown in Figure 18 to 19. In addition, across East Asia, high-income respondents generally tend to express less trust in the national governments.

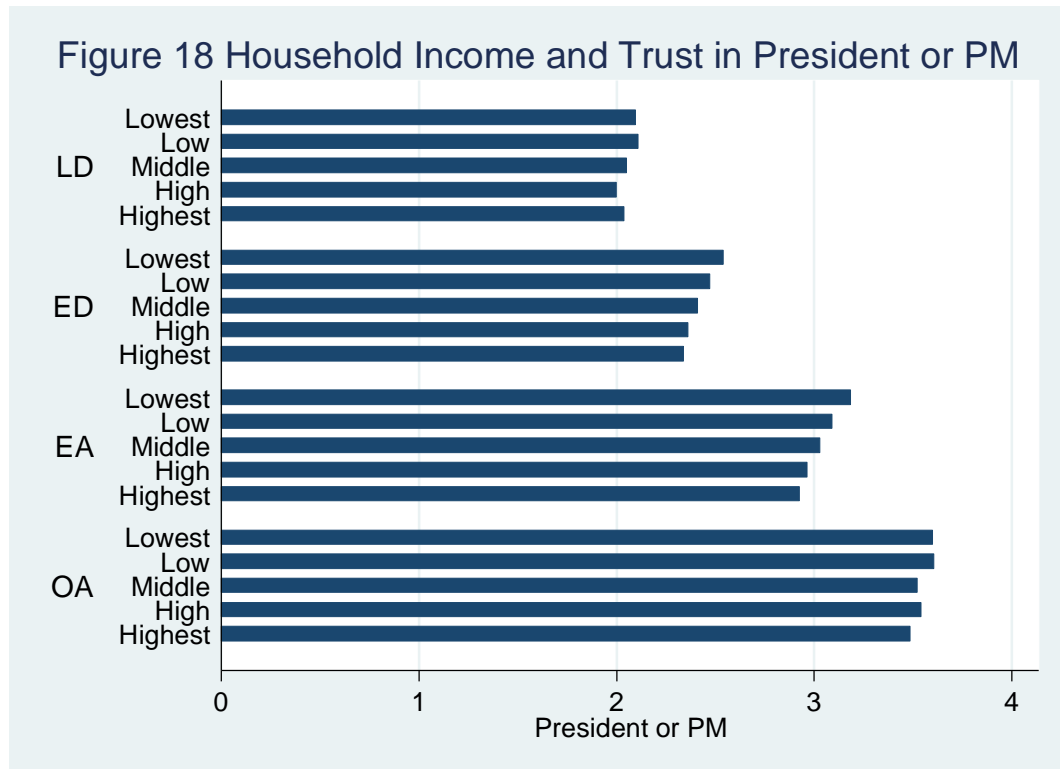
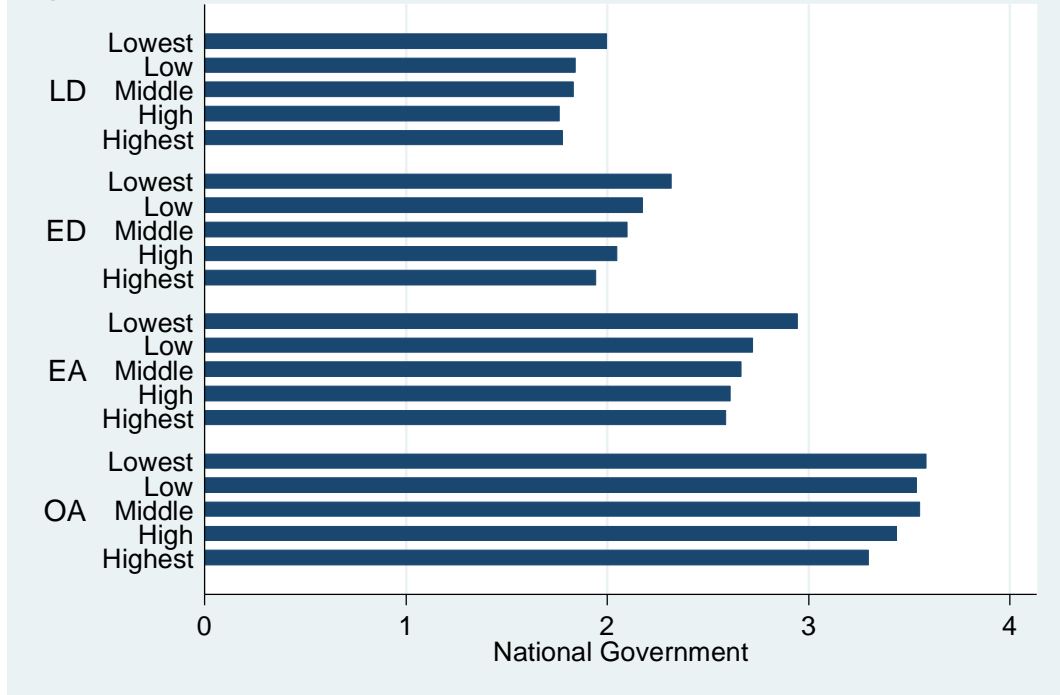


Figure 19 Household Income and Trust in National Government



Household income and Regime Evaluations

In addition to government responsiveness and institutional trust, we can examine perceived system output from a broader level—evaluation of the political system. As shown in Figure 20 to 22, respondents’ evaluations of the satisfaction with the way democracy work are fairly similar across income groups. Only in electoral authoritarian regimes, respondents of the wealthy strata are less likely to be satisfied with the way democracy work. Next, the wealthy groups do not endorse democracy more. Finally, high-income individuals, in EA in particular, are slightly more likely to detach from the idea of authoritarianism.³

³ To examine the relationship between economic well-being and democratic satisfaction, we can also examine the issue of ends meet. Responds who reply that the total household income allow them to satisfactorily cover their needs are more likely to be more content with the way democracy work and be more detached from authoritarianism. Ends meet is not correlated with satisfaction with democratic support and authoritarian support.

Figure 20 Household Income and Democratic Satisfaction

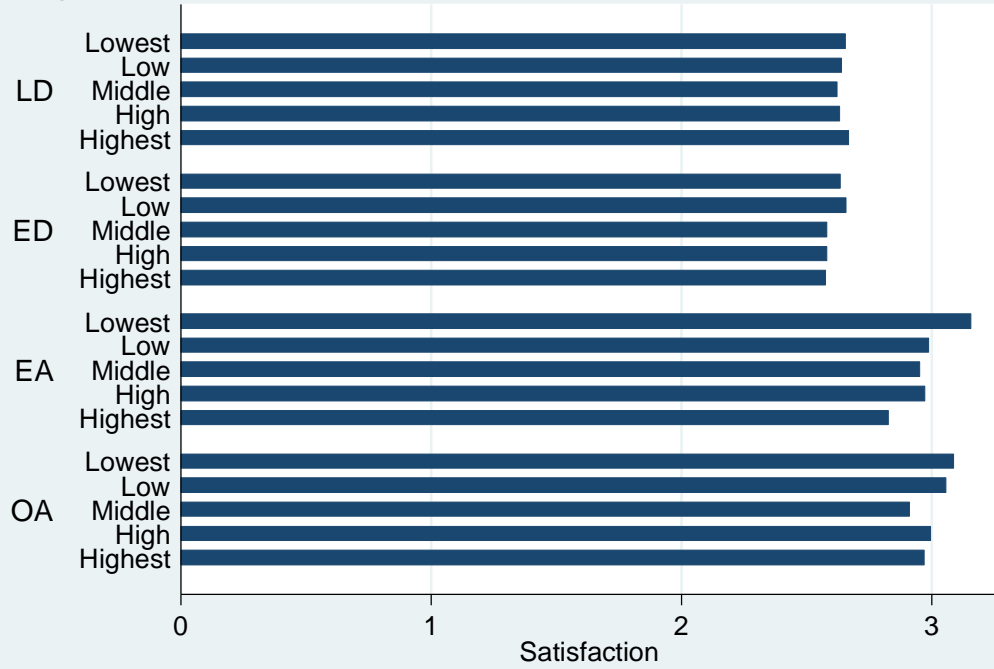
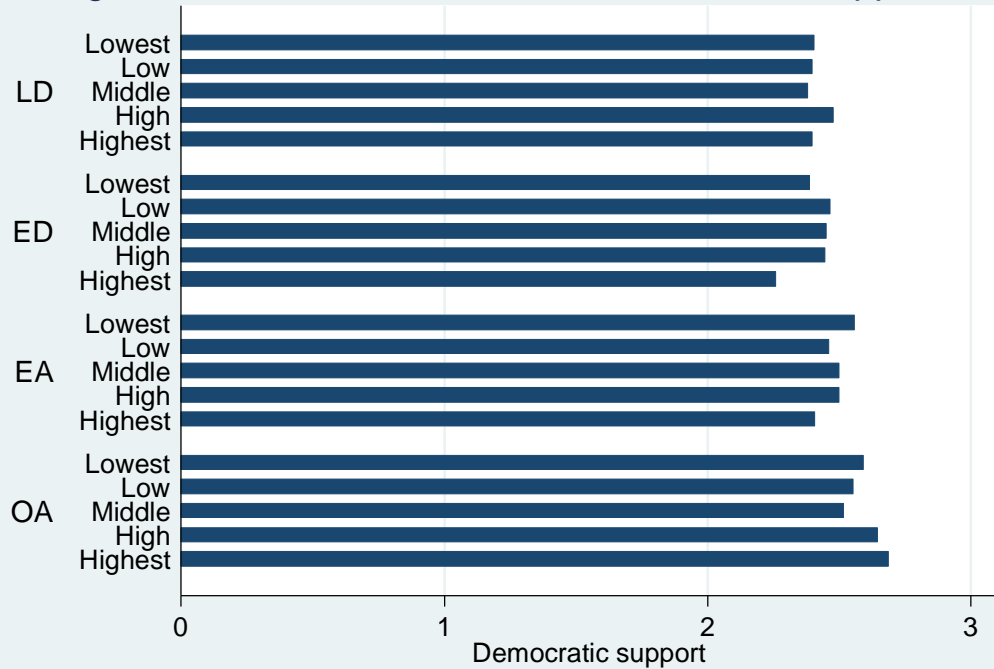
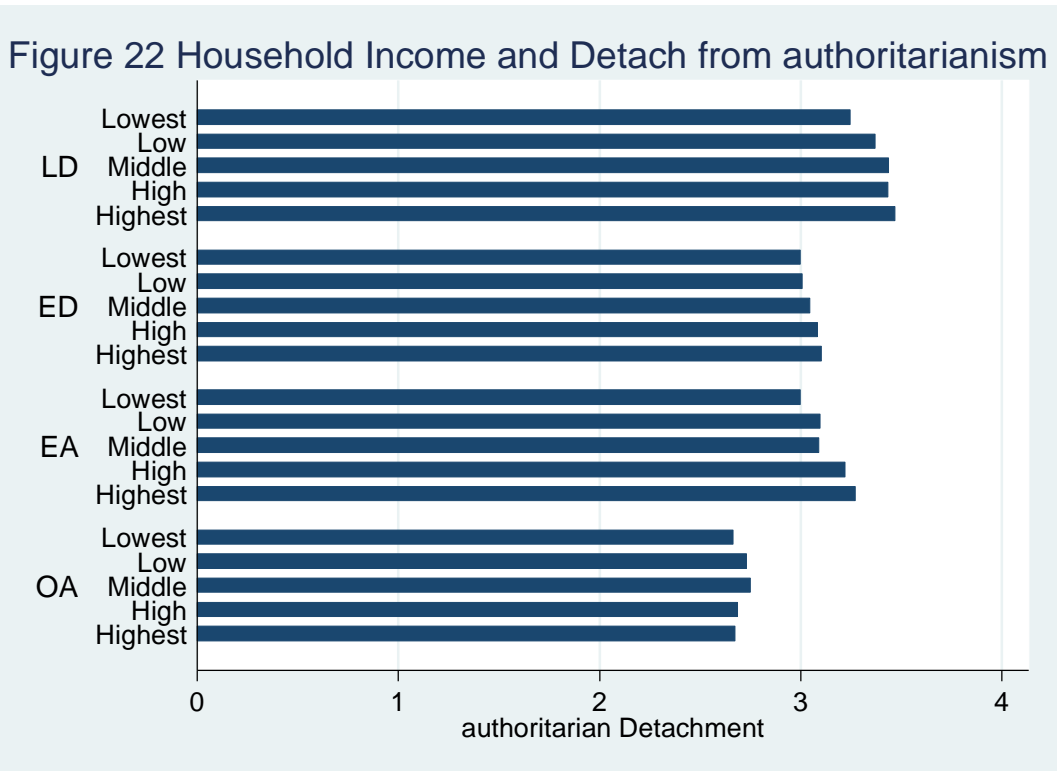


Figure 21 Household Income and Democratic support

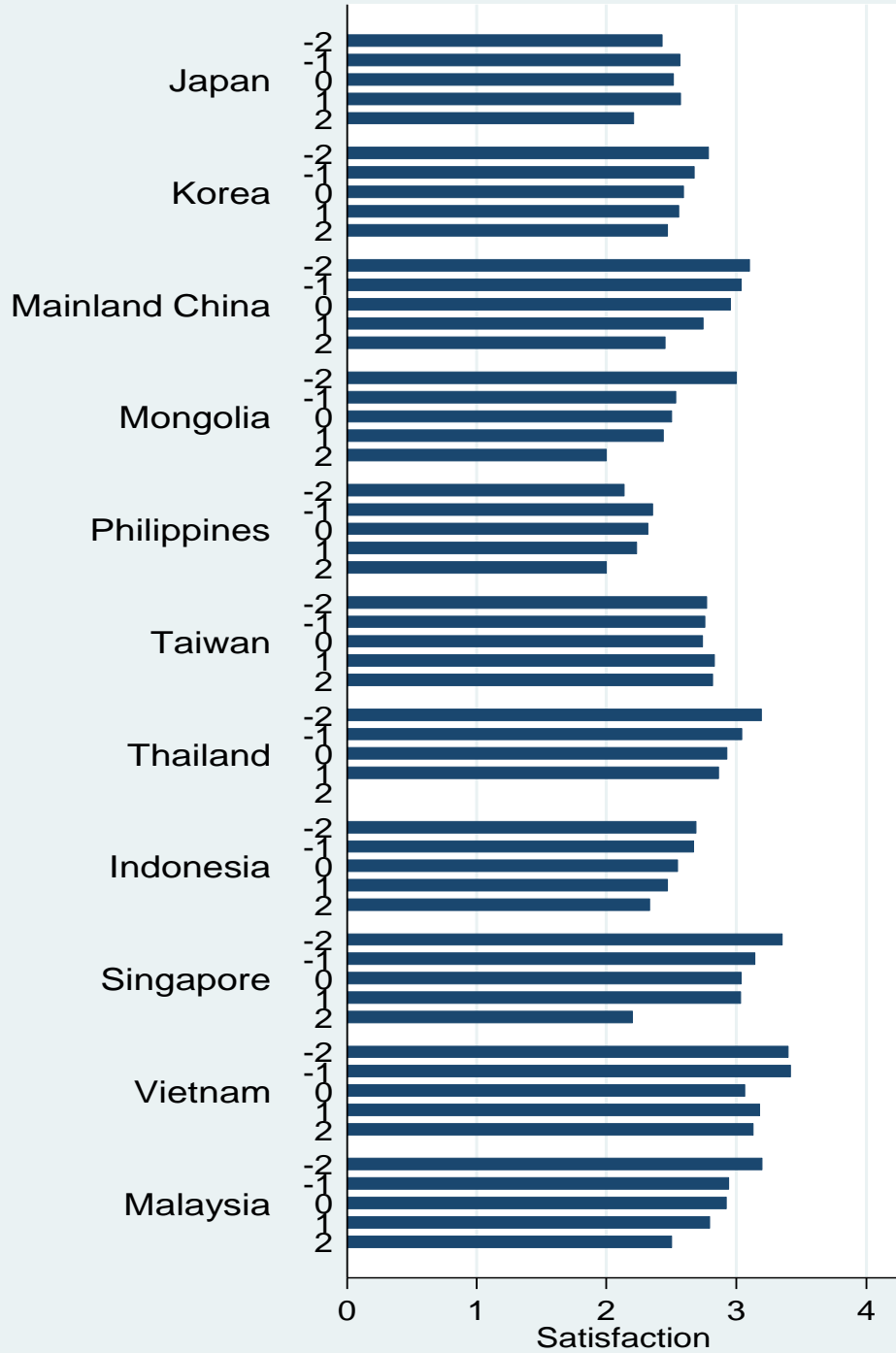




Inconsistency and Satisfaction

Here we examine the impact of strata inconsistency between social status and income on democratic satisfaction. Here we create a new variable, Strata Gap, by subtracting social status strata from household income strata. The large the Strata Gap, the greater a respondent’s social economic status stratum is below his/her household income stratum. Presumably, individuals would be disappointed and thereby be less content with system performance if their self-identified income levels are lower than their self-identified social status. Empirically, we find the opposite. As shown in Figure 23, People whose subjective social economic status strata are higher than their income strata tend to appreciate the performance of democracy more. High-income respondents who perceived lower subjective statuses are less satisfied with the way democracy work. On the other hand, low-income respondents who perceived higher income statuses tend to be more satisfied with the way democracy work. If we look

Figure 23 Strata Gap and Satisfaction



only at subjective social status and satisfied with the way democracy work, one will find that the two variables are positive associated. Social status denotes certain image or prestige attached to one's position in society. This essentially means that if some people are doing well economically but do not receive equivalent respect or

recognition, they are not going to rate the system very positively.

Participation and Democratic Satisfaction

Here we directly examine the relationship between political participation and democratic satisfaction. One might be interested in knowing whether higher participation rates are conducive to higher satisfaction with the way democracy works. Among various political activities, only respondents' perceived ability to participate in politics and voting is positively associated with better perceived democratic performance. The association is shown in Figure 24 to 25. Note that the two activities are not necessarily positively associated with household income levels across East Asia. As shown above, only respondents of high-income strata in electoral democracies tend to have greater abilities to participate in politics. In addition, this third-wave survey also shows that low-income respondents are slightly more likely to vote than the respondents from high-income strata in liberal democracies, electoral democracies, and electoral authoritarianism.

Figure 24 Ability to participate and Satisfaction

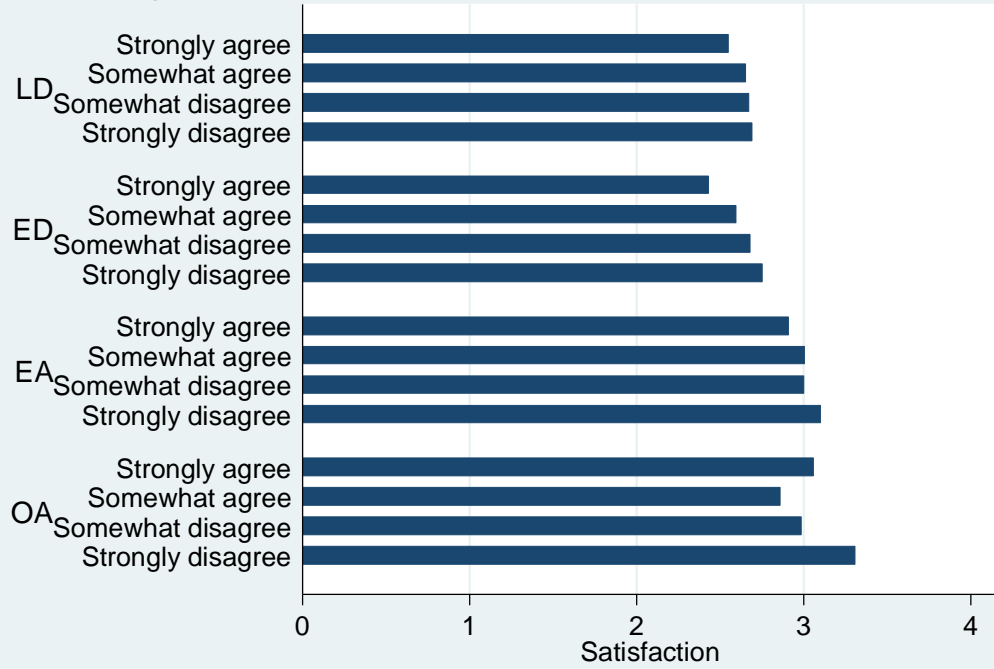
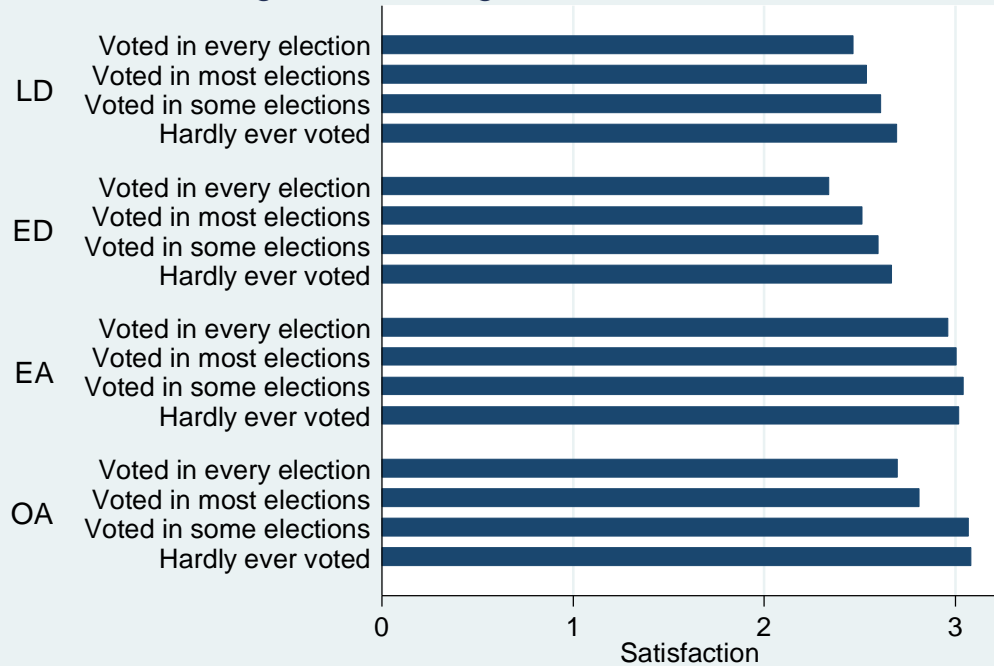


Figure 25 Voting and Satisfaction



Regressions

In this section we report the regression result. We control for as set of variables that

include *Urban, Liberal Democratic Values, Retrospective Economic (societal), Retrospective Economic (family), Democratic Quality, Corruption*, and a set of demographic variables—*gender, age, education*. The dependent variables include voting participation, signing petition, satisfaction with the way democracy work, and perceived government responsiveness. Ad subjective social status also capture the idea of class, we also include it in the model. Since the dependent are all ordinal, we employ the ordered probit model. For each dependent variable, we further divide total cases into liberal democracy, electoral democracy, and electoral authoritarianism. One-party authoritarian regimes cases are not included in the model because not all of the indicators listed above are applicable to this regime.

Political Participation

Table 1 examines the relationship between household income and voting participation. It shows that higher household income is negatively associated with voting participation in liberal democracies. The association is, however, negative in electoral authoritarianism.

Table 1 Household Income and Voting Participation

| | LD | ED | EA |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Household Income | -0.057*** (0.016) | 0.022 (0.021) | 0.060* (0.034) |
| Subjective Social Status | 0.181*** (0.026) | 0.062*** (0.024) | 0.018 (0.039) |
| Gender | -0.069* (0.040) | -0.027 (0.045) | 0.021 (0.072) |
| Age | 0.028*** (0.001) | 0.025*** (0.002) | 0.036*** (0.003) |
| Education | -0.008 (0.006) | 0.034*** (0.010) | 0.024 (0.019) |
| urban | -0.030 | 0.286*** | 0.275*** |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | (0.021) | (0.022) | (0.030) |
| Liberal Democratic Values | -0.047 (0.051) | -0.044 (0.058) | -0.065 (0.097) |
| Retrospective Economic (societal) | -0.030 (0.021) | 0.010 (0.024) | -0.050 (0.037) |
| Retrospective Economic (family) | 0.001 (0.024) | 0.055** (0.026) | 0.049 (0.041) |
| cut1 _cons | -0.694*** (0.209) | 0.167 (0.228) | 1.648*** (0.399) |
| cut2 _cons | 0.286 (0.209) | 0.890*** (0.227) | 2.101*** (0.400) |
| cut3 _cons | 1.418*** (0.210) | 1.602*** (0.228) | 2.337*** (0.401) |
| <i>N</i> | 3273 | 3314 | 1230 |

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 examines the relationship between household income and signing petitions, alternative form participation. The estimated result shows that higher household income is positively associated with voting participation in liberal democracies.

Table 2 Household Income and Signing Petitions

| | LD | ED | EA |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Household Income | 0.134*** (0.019) | -0.006 (0.025) | 0.051 (0.037) |
| Subjective Social Status | 0.056* (0.031) | 0.049* (0.028) | 0.010 (0.044) |
| Gender | 0.031 (0.047) | -0.277*** (0.054) | -0.249*** (0.080) |
| Age | 0.011*** (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.004 (0.003) |
| Education | 0.017*** (0.006) | 0.024* (0.012) | 0.046** (0.022) |
| urban | 0.133*** (0.025) | 0.064** (0.025) | 0.233*** (0.036) |
| Liberal Democratic Values | 0.402*** (0.059) | 0.182*** (0.069) | 0.189* (0.105) |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Retrospective Economic (societal) | 0.043* (0.025) | 0.028 (0.028) | -0.056 (0.042) |
| Retrospective Economic (family) | -0.017 (0.029) | -0.025 (0.030) | -0.026 (0.045) |
| cut1 _cons | 3.546*** (0.249) | 1.627*** (0.268) | 2.152*** (0.437) |
| cut2 _cons | 4.082*** (0.251) | 2.167*** (0.269) | 2.351*** (0.438) |
| <i>N</i> | 3361 | 3452 | 1451 |

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 examines whether household income is associated with better perceived democratic performance. The estimated result shows that in all three types of regime household income is not a significant predictor of democratic satisfaction. On the other hand subjective social status is associated with satisfaction with the way democracy work.

Table 3 Household Income and Democratic Satisfaction

| | LD | ED | EA |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Household Income | 0.026 (0.017) | -0.013 (0.019) | 0.045 (0.038) |
| Subjective Social Status | -0.117*** (0.026) | -0.073*** (0.021) | -0.081* (0.045) |
| Gender | 0.040 (0.040) | -0.015 (0.040) | -0.104 (0.078) |
| Age | 0.002* (0.001) | -0.003** (0.001) | -0.008*** (0.003) |
| Education | 0.001 (0.006) | 0.021** (0.009) | -0.006 (0.021) |
| urban | 0.047** (0.021) | -0.113*** (0.020) | 0.037 (0.054) |
| Liberal Democratic Values | 0.183*** (0.052) | -0.010 (0.052) | 0.348*** (0.112) |
| Retrospective Economic (societal) | 0.145*** (0.021) | 0.164*** (0.021) | 0.073* (0.040) |
| Retrospective Economic | 0.037 | 0.030 | 0.148*** |

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| (family) | (0.024) | (0.023) | (0.043) |
| Democratic Quality | -0.701*** (0.060) | -0.313*** (0.052) | -0.557*** (0.096) |
| Corruption | -0.190*** (0.037) | -0.298*** (0.028) | -0.332*** (0.065) |
| cut1 _cons | -2.714*** (0.262) | -2.953*** (0.260) | -2.450*** (0.579) |
| cut2 _cons | -0.716*** (0.258) | -1.368*** (0.256) | -0.837 (0.575) |
| cut3 _cons | 0.697*** (0.259) | -0.159 (0.256) | 0.284 (0.576) |
| <i>N</i> | 3195 | 3041 | 848 |

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 looks at the perceived government responsiveness. The estimated result demonstrates that respondents of higher household-income strata are generally less likely to perceive better government responsiveness, especially in liberal democracies and electoral democracies.

Table 4 Household Income and Perceived Government Responsiveness

| | LD | ED | EA |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Household Income | -0.029* (0.017) | -0.093*** (0.019) | -0.027 (0.039) |
| Subjective Social Status | 0.195*** (0.027) | 0.036* (0.021) | 0.055 (0.045) |
| Gender | -0.073* (0.041) | 0.001 (0.041) | 0.050 (0.079) |
| Age | -0.000 (0.001) | -0.003* (0.002) | 0.009*** (0.003) |
| Education | 0.002 (0.006) | -0.000 (0.009) | 0.059*** (0.022) |
| urban | -0.046** (0.021) | 0.072*** (0.020) | 0.030 (0.055) |
| Liberal Democratic Values | -0.394*** (0.053) | -0.413*** (0.053) | -0.381*** (0.115) |
| Retrospective Economic (societal) | -0.124*** (0.022) | -0.071*** (0.022) | -0.154*** (0.041) |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Retrospective Economic (family) | -0.062** (0.025) | -0.064*** (0.023) | -0.101** (0.043) |
| Democratic Quality | 0.523*** (0.060) | 0.096* (0.052) | 0.582*** (0.098) |
| Corruption | 0.439*** (0.038) | 0.322*** (0.028) | 0.471*** (0.068) |
| cut1 _cons | -0.521** (0.261) | -1.799*** (0.260) | 0.137 (0.588) |
| cut2 _cons | 1.328*** (0.262) | -0.068 (0.259) | 1.847*** (0.587) |
| cut3 _cons | 3.400*** (0.271) | 1.216*** (0.260) | 3.582*** (0.594) |
| <i>N</i> | 3191 | 3039 | 847 |

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Conclusion: A Puzzle

From the above discussion, we find that in general the high-income strata do not vote more often, but they have higher political interest and knowledge, political efficacy, and have higher participation rate in contacting elected officials, initiating communal activities, and signing petitions. On the other hand, we also demonstrate that the same strata of respondents do not trust the institutions more, do not perceive a higher government responsiveness or better system outputs, are not satisfied with the way democracy more, and even do not endorse the democratic form of government more. The two patterns constitute a puzzle that higher rate of political participation do not translate into a greater appreciation of the democratic system performance.

One can easily find that, compared to respondents of other income strata, the high-income strata involve more in the non-conventional type of political activities, while do not engage more in the conventional form of activities. High political interests and political knowledge do not translate into higher participating rate in the conventional form of activities, a pattern consistent with the evidence from the advanced industrial countries. Higher political interests and political knowledge are

associated with greater participating rate only in the non-conventional form of activities. As indicated above, the non-conventional form of participations is not associated with satisfaction with democratic performance. In addition, high-income strata tend to vote relatively less, it partially cancel out the effects of other political activities as well. Taken together, the statement that high income strata tend to participate in political activities more and thereby exert greater influence on government decision-making does not stand.

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