3. Experiments

A. The concept

The increasing importance of causal inference in political science has led to a rise in experimental research. In this chapter, the term "experiment" refers to studies where units of observation, such as citizens, legislators, firms, and villages, are randomly assigned by researchers to different treatment conditions. The treatment is an intervention that the researcher intends to identify its causal impact on the outcome of interest. Random assignment means that each subject has a known probability determined by the researcher to be in a particular treatment condition. This helps establish the comparability between the treatment and control groups, making any differences in post-treatment outcomes between them likely to reflect the treatment effect.

It is important to note that the definition of experiments used in this article excludes natural experiments and quasi-experiments. A natural experiment is a situation where there is a random assignment of treatment via a randomization device, but the researcher has no control over the assignment. On the other hand, a quasi-experiment is a study where the treatment is not randomly assigned, but the researcher makes a credible claim that the assignment of nonexperimental subjects to different treatment conditions is "as-if" random.

Experimental studies can take many forms, including lab experiments, field experiments, and survey experiments. A lab experiment involves an intervention in a lab-like setting created and controlled by the researcher; a field experiment takes place in naturally occurring settings; and a survey experiment entails an intervention during an opinion survey. Since 2000, there has been an increase in the use of field experiments, as they simulate real-world occurrences and potentially have higher external validity (Druckman & Green, 2021). Political scientists have also increasingly used conjoint survey experiments to analyze multidimensional preferences of political objects such as political candidates and public policies.

B. The landscape

Experimental political science is becoming increasingly important as a tool for measuring causal relationships, testing theories,

identifying causal mechanisms, and evaluating policy and program effectiveness. In a recent review, Druckman and Green (2021) note that the field is entering a new era characterized by several developments. Firstly, there is a growing use of new experimental designs. Secondly, novel data sources such as non-student and elite subjects, measurement approaches, and statistical methods are being introduced. Thirdly, the use of experiments is expanding to more research topics. Finally, there is a focus on discussions about the generalizability and ethics of experiments.

To assess the current state of experimental studies in the realm of Asian politics, I compile data on journal articles accepted between 2012 and 2022 in four prominent general interest journals (*American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *British Journal of Political Science*) and two leading comparative politics journals (*World Politics* and *Comparative Political Studies*). All articles in the sample employ experimental methods and include Asian cases in their empirical analysis. In total, I find 45 articles that meet these criteria. The data collected are stored in Harvard Datayerse.

Methodically, Asia scholars have incorporated various experimental approaches into their research. The data show that the most prevalent method employed is survey experiments, which are utilized in 75.6% of the articles examined. This is followed by field experiments, featured in 20% of the studies, and laboratory experiments, used in 11.1% of the articles.³ Notably, survey experiments utilizing conjoint analysis have seen a marked increase in use in recent years. Out of the 34 articles that incorporate survey experiments, seven employ a conjoint design. It is worth noting that all the studies leveraging conjoint analysis were accepted for publication since 2020. Additionally, Asia scholars have utilized list and endorsement experiments to indirectly elicit truthful answers to sensitive questions among politicians (Meng et al., 2017) and ordinary citizens (Hicken et al., 2022; Lyall et al., 2013). Moreover, certain studies combine observational and experimental analysis, where experiments are employed to augment the main findings derived from observational data (Dunning & Nilekani, 2013; Mattingly, 2016; Mcmurry, 2022). One study uses a paired experiment in India to evaluate whether (and which of) the experimental findings in the United States are generalizable to other contexts (Carnegie & Gaikwad, 2022).

Geographically, 37.8% of the articles analyzed focus on countries in East Asia, with South Asia following closely at 31.1%, West Asia at 20%, and Southeast Asia at 11.1%. Figure 3.1 further breaks down the data by country, revealing that China is the most studied country in the sample. Together with India, the runner-up, they make up almost half of the studies. The articles on China mainly concentrate on citizens' regime evaluations and satisfaction with the government and its policies. In addition, major political science journals also show interest in Japan, Turkey, Vietnam, Israel, and Afghanistan.

Substantively, I identify at least four research areas to which Asia scholars utilizing experiments have recently made important contributions, including (1) identity politics, (2) authoritarian responsiveness, (3) political information, and (4) political behavior and public opinion.

Identity politics

Several articles analyzed focus on issues related to gender, ethnicity, and intergroup relations. Chaudhuri et al. (forthcoming) find that inexperienced female politicians are more honest in the behavioral game than their male counterparts, but this gender gap disappears among experienced politicians. Barnett et al. (2021) show that patriarchal norms constrain

the impact of earned income on women's bargaining power and their job preferences.

In the realm of ethnic politics, Mcmurry (2022) finds that government recognition of self-governance for indigenous communities may actually increase ethnic minorities' identification with the nation. Dunning and Nilekani (2013) use a survey experiment to provide individual-level evidence of why ethnic quotas for the presidencies of village councils in India have weak distributive effects on marginalized castes and tribes. Chauchard (2016) also reports a subtler and more complex impact of ethnicity on voter preferences.

Some scholars use innovative experimental designs to study intergroup relations in Asia. They establish that local contexts in which interethnic interaction occurs matter as to whether such interaction mitigates outgroup bias. Enos and Gidron (2016) show that residential environments – the proportion of outgroup members and residential segregation - affect how much diversity is associated with intergroup discriminatory behavior. Condra and Linardi (2019) find that casual interethnic contact decreases outgroup altruism because this involuntary contact exposes people to a continuum of descent-based attributes that increase in-group identity. Additionally, Enos and Gidron (2018) show that exclusionary preferences affect the extent to which Jewish citizens are willing to cooperate with Palestinian citizens of Israel. Bloom

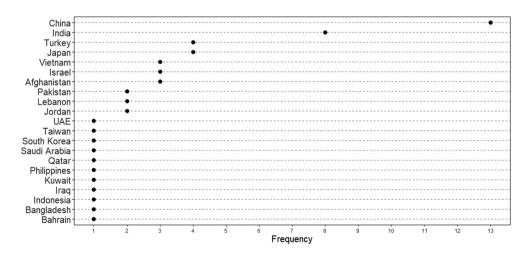


Figure 3.1 Number of times studied in articles accepted by top political science journals between 2012 and 2022.

et al. (2015) differentiate the impact of religious identity and religious belief on attitudes toward immigrants, especially those outgroup members in ethnicity and religion. In a more recent study, Siegel and Badaan (2020) find experimental evidence in Lebanon that messages priming common religious identity in a manner that emphasizes elite support makes citizens more supportive of social media posts advocating positive intergroup relations.

Authoritarian responsiveness

Some experimental studies in Asian politics explore whether, when, and why autocracies are responsive to citizens. A field experiment in Vietnam, for example, reveals that delegates who obtain randomly assigned information on the policy preferences of their constituents are more likely to use this information in parliamentary debates. Notably, the responsive delegates are more interested in securing a landslide reelection to signal their eligibility for future promotion, rather than winning the election itself (Malesky et al., 2023). In another study, a list experiment is employed to assess local Chinese leaders' receptivity to citizen feedback expressed through formal institutional channels and the Internet. Results show that officials are generally receptive to such feedback, but in areas where officials perceive antagonism between the state and citizens, receptivity to citizen suggestions from the Internet decreases (Meng et al., 2017).

Other studies probe whether providing citizens with opportunities to express their policy concerns and preferences improves their regime evaluations and compliance. Truex (2017) randomly exposes Chinese respondents to the National People's Congress's new online participatory portals, finding that the treatment successfully enhances regime assessments only among less educated and politically excluded citizens. In a separate field experiment in Vietnam, Malesky and Taussig (2019) randomly give local firms the chance to comment on draft regulations. They find that treated firms have more positive views about the government's regulatory authority and greater compliance with the target regulation on the factory floor than untreated firms.

Political information

A number of articles examined study the impact of political information. In one set of experiments, researchers analyze the effectiveness of elite communication. Elçi (2022) tests the impact of different types of nostalgic messages on people's populist attitudes. Huang (2018) shows that hard propaganda tends to backfire on individuals' political support. Aytaç (2021) compares the effectiveness of two elite communication strategies - "shifting the blame" versus "changing the agenda" – in shoring up popular support. Huang (2017) and Wang and Huang (2021) study when government rebuttals of political rumors restore people's political trust.

Another set of experiments examines the effect of international knowledge and information on opinion formation. Huang (2015) finds that correcting socioeconomic misinformation about foreign countries can improve Chinese people's evaluations of their government. Similarly, Huang and Yeh (2019) show that reading positive foreign media content about foreign countries improves the domestic evaluations of Chinese citizens because foreign media tend to provide more realistic information than the overly rosy information that commonly circulates in China. Dietrich et al. (2018) discover that in Bangladesh, exposure to information about US foreign aid slightly improves perceptions of the US but does not sway opinions about foreign policy issues.

In addition to exploring the impact of information, political scientists also seek approaches to combating misinformation. Badrinathan (2021) conducts a field experiment in India that randomly assigns participants to receive an hour-long, in-person media literacy training. On average, the training does not increase people's ability to identify misinformation. If anything, treated participants who support the ruling party become less able to identify misinformation on proattitudinal stories, suggesting the presence of motivated reasoning.

Political behavior and public opinion

Last but not least, many articles in the sample focus on political behavior, attitudes, and opinion formation. First, some studies speak to the literature on IPE public opinions, intending to understand what drives people's opinions about international economic exchange, such as trade with allies and adversaries (Carnegie & Gaikwad, 2022), support for free trade (Naoi & Kume, 2015),

restrictions on FDI (Chilton et al., 2020), and sector-specific trade protection (Lü et al., 2012). One article utilizing a field experiment explains why some foreign-invested firms in Vietnam are willing to improve labor standards (Malesky & Mosley, 2018).

Several articles contain international relations components in their analysis. Incerti et al. (2021) use paired experiments in China and Japan to explore political parties as a pathway through which regime types affect international conflicts. Tago and Ikeda (2015) show that foreign public support for US military action varies depending on whether the action has UN Security Council approval. Kitagawa and Chu (2021) study the impact of political apologies on domestic and foreign public opinions. Gruffydd-Jones (2019) evaluates the reactions of Chinese citizens to external human rights pressure.

Second, some articles focus on public opinions during wartime. Utilizing an endorsement experiment, Lyall et al. (2013) show that civilian attitudes toward combatants are conditional on whether the combatants are ingroups or outgroups. In another field experiment, Lyall et al. (2020) find that the "hearts and minds" interventions do not influence civilian attitudes toward combatants, though they improve recipients' livelihoods. Kao and Revkin (2023) report that people's attitudes toward enemy collaborators in post-conflict societies are driven by the perceived volition behind the act of collaboration. Hanson (2021) uses a conjoint experiment to study factors that may differentially affect the joining decision of likely rebel recruits.

Third, three articles in the sample contribute to the literature on Get-Out-the-Vote by focusing on non-US cases and, in two of the articles, marginalized voters. Cheema et al. (2023) find that a non-partisan GOTV campaign has no impact on women's turnout in Pakistan, but turnout significantly increases when male household members are canvassed to support women's political participation. Gaikwad and Nellis (2021) randomize doorto-door drives to facilitate voter registration among internal migrants in India. They find that the intervention improves migrant registration rates. The rates are further boosted in randomly chosen areas where local politicians are informed about the drive. In a turnout field experiment in South Korea, Hur (2020) finds that an appeal to national obligation successfully increases people's turnout, suggesting that national identity could motivate people's compliance with citizen duty.

Fourth, some work looks at specific mechanisms that can shape people's opinions and preferences. Davies (2023) examines the long-term impact of private education on people's economic beliefs and political participation. Healy et al. (2017) utilize a priming experiment to test Tocqueville's thesis that declining economic well-being and an increase in social-wide mobility may enhance people's political discontent. Tsai et al. (2022) use a novel experiment for mediation analysis embedded in conjoint design to show that anti-corruption builds public support for the officials carrying it out by signaling the officials' competence and moral commitment. Mattingly (2016) finds that Chinese villagers are more likely to have confidence in statements about property-taking from lineage leaders than from other villagers or village officials, indicating that informal institutions may empower local elites to capture rents. Williamson et al. (2023) use paired conjoint experiments in multiple countries, finding that preachers connected to political positions or movements are viewed as less religiously authoritative.

C. Future research

This article has reviewed the recent cumulation of evidence from experiments that focus on Asian politics, highlighting the increasing use of experiments in high-quality research on the topic. The literature shows a growing trend in the use of non-traditional designs and non-traditional subject pools, consistent with Druckman and Green's (2021) observations on the recent development of experimental work in social sciences. Additionally, the experimental studies reviewed in this article have contributed to the broader literature on identity politics, authoritarian politics, political information, and political behavior/ attitudes.

In conclusion, two directions for future scholars intending to use experiments to understand (Asian) politics are discussed. First, with the growing concern about the generalizability of experimental studies, scholars can contribute to the disciplinewide discussion by conducting paired, multicountry experiments that involve Asian cases. When experimental evidence in most fields is primarily from the US and other Western

democracies, Asian countries provide researchers with a unique and potentially different context to evaluate the generalizability of their experimental results. So far, multicountry experiments are still rare.4 Likewise, Asia scholars using experiments should explicitly discuss external validity in the main text of their papers.

Second, the latest advances in experimental methodology include new statistical tools for evaluating treatment effect heterogeneity and causal mechanisms. Although most literature reviewed here intends to evaluate subgroup differences in treatment effect and potential causal roles of mediators in their main text, few exploit these new methods for more rigorous analysis. It is also worth noting that Asian scholars are making the leading contribution to the development of these new statistical methods in experimental studies, particularly in conjoint analysis (e.g., Horiuchi et al., 2022), causal mediation analysis (Imai et al., 2010), and causal interaction in factorial experiments (Egami & Imai, 2019). Future Asia scholars should consider these methods when designing their experiments.

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Notes

- I follow the United Nations Geoscheme to determine whether a country belongs to Asia. See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/ (last accessed December 2, 2022).
- https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XEMUM3.
- The numbers do not round up to 100 because some articles utilize more than one experimental method.
- Content analysis by Druckman and Green (2021) finds only 5% in the most recent decade.

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Kev resources

For readers who want to know more about experimental political science (in Asian politics):

Broockman, D. E., Kalla, J. L. and Sekhon, S. K. (2017). The Design of Field Experiments With Survey Outcomes: A Framework for Selecting More Efficient, Robust, and Ethical Designs. *Political Analysis*, 25 (4), 435–64.

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