

# Embittered Winners: Rights Deprivation and Attitude Shift

Preliminary and Incomplete Draft

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## Abstract

What is the long term impact of political victimization on people’s attitudes toward the society in authoritarian regimes? In this paper, we identify a political mechanism through which individuals with higher socioeconomic status exhibit more distorted beliefs in societal fairness and equality. We argue that rights deprivation as a constraint on individuals’ choices, not only directly limits their career path, but also indirectly distorts their attitudes permanently. Even if their career choice turned out to be more lucrative, the initially distorted personal experiences undermine individuals’ beliefs. We examine the implications of our theory in the case of China, where allocation of political and economic resources heavily depended on the affixed “class labels” of the family from 1950s to 1970s. Using a national-wide survey, we show that victimization due to discriminated “class labels” give rise to both ideological shift and a “reversal of fortune” by pushing individuals with “bad” class background to non-governmental sectors, the latter more lucrative career path. As such, we refer to them as the “embittered winners.” Somewhat surprisingly, better socioeconomic status does not alleviate, but rather reinforces the adverse effect of rights limitation on attitudes. We also find that victimization erodes individual trust in government officials, as well as willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of the country.

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