

# Attitude towards Democracy in China: A case study of Chinese Labour Working in Pakistan

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## Abstract

*Due to the state's restrictions, researchers have ignored the measurement of democratic behaviour, perception and attitude in China. Present study is taking the advantage of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in order to fill this gap. In this regard, Chinese labour working in various cities of Pakistan were selected as the respondents. Participants were given three choices (income, occupation and self-perception) to declare their social class. Present study finds higher democratic attitude towards democracy in those respondents who belong to middle class as compared to the upper and lower classes. Besides, the study highlights that people who have experienced new occupations, showed attitude towards democracy. Adversely, the participants, who were satisfied with government's performance and their income, were found inclined towards the authoritarian system. Furthermore, new occupational experiences and attachments increase the democratic desire, which ultimately enhances attitude towards democracy.*

**Key words:** *Democratic perception; affection; procedure & China*

## Introduction

For the last two decades, social scientists have been divided over the answer of the question that, can economic sustainability bring democracy as the alternative force in China. Although the answer to

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this question is associated with the several aspects including; social, political and economic systems of China but it is also a parallel fact that a major part of it rotates in the orbit of two factors (Aisen, Ari & Veiga, 2013). First, middle class' possible role in economic development and second, middle class' preference for democracy as an alternative regime. Those, who follow traditional ideas ingrained in the modernization theory, argue that a broad middle class has been raised due to the economic development, therefore, it will not be so easy for this broad class to prefer authoritarian regime over the democratic (Birdsall & Nancy, 2015). Adversely, dependent nature of middle class in the state-led economic growth has been seen by the people who were not satisfied with the political conditions of China (Cheeseman, 2015). They accept the fundamental role of economic development in expanding middle class in China; at the same time, they argue that this widened class is heavily dependent on the economic growth for the higher socio-economic and political status. Thus, this newly emerged middle class may support authoritarian system against the democratic (Chun, Hasan, Rahman & Ulubasoglu, 2017). In measuring political perception, intension and attitude of people in China little has been done, which could empirically highlight what the middle class want. Consequently, literature suggests that no empirical study supports the potential role of working class in democratizing China (Dickson, 2003). Therefore, predictions about democratic future of China in the light of economic growth are usually unsupported. The relationship between class and democratization has largely been ignored by the social scientists due to the large population of the country (Ding, 2015). To solve this puzzle, present study measures the role of class structure in the transition of democracy in China. The current study assumes that a vibrant psychological shift in middle class has been brought by the economic development. This psychological shift brings middle class closer to modernization and democratic regime (Kennedy, 2010). In this regard, we developed major variables such as; social class and attitude towards democracy. To examine the

theoretical assumption, data were collected from Chinese labour, working at different projects in Pakistan. To find out the difference in the mean score, ANOVA procedure was applied. In the upcoming section extensive literature has been given, which highlights middle class' role in political transition.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Role of Middle Class***

Across the globe, social scientists agree that there is a strong association between democracy and economic stability (McAllister & White, 2017). It is argued that social structure of any society can be transformed due to the economic development (Nasreen & Shahbaz, 2016), if it is so, then we must accept the abilities of economic stability in promoting democracy in any country. Due to these social transformations, political autonomy emerged and it empowered the middle class. This empowered class remains outside from the traditional control of the state and can challenge the authority of state by resisting the authoritarian regime (He, 2016). Modernization theory highlights that middle class resists to the authoritarian regime and prefers democratic system due to their higher desire to participate in the political affairs, new experiences and liberal education (Mangi, Shah & Mahesar, 2018). Artlessly, modernization generates the conditions that enhance middle class socially, politically and economically (Plattner, 2015). In democratization, two factors explain middle class as the primary agent (Li, 2006). First, the convergence of the social structure and middle class' interests which came to exist due to the structural changes (Scase, 2016). Some researchers disagree to this argument, according to them; attitudes, perceptions and roles attributed to middle class cannot be fictitious (Leventoglu, 2014). The research in Latin America and Asia reveals that middle class' preference of politics in democratic transition is quite equivocal. The role of middle class is contingent particularly in political and economic contexts (Kolstad

& Wiig, 2016). For instance, it can be seen that middle class depends on the state for its own social and economic interests in those Asian countries, where economy is headed by the state. In these countries, middle class would not support the regime change because the members of this class are dreadful of the uncertain conditions, which may occur after political change and menace their socio, economic and political status (Han & Chen, 2016). Summarizing, middle class prefers modernization because of the equilibrium that may originate after it and provide economic and political security to this class. It is also fact that middle class is the by-product of the economic growth and it is not essential that this class would work as the primary agent for democratic transition (Englehart, 2003). On the other side, researchers also argue that middle class' political preference totally depends on class structure of the state (Zhang, Zhang & Hou, 2015). The members of middle class support democratic regime where they face confrontation with the upper class' dominance and have the choice to unite with the lower class (Doorenspleet, 2004). Therefore, middle class' democratic attitude and perception can be ascertained by its hidden interests and not relatively from the fact that modernization introduces them to the democratic system.

### *Theorizing Middle Class in China*

Those scholars, who are optimist regarding the democratic future of China, believe that a well-educated and politically aware middle class will be brought by the economic development and this class will favour political transition (Zhang, et al., 2015). The supporters of this argument have some valid logic. According to them, although middle class is relatively more beneficiary of sustained economy but despite that, this class faces the corrupt practices of bureaucracy and political harassment (Leventoglu, 2014). For the transparent and competitive political system, middle class may demand regime change in which the members of this class can participate more easily (Gainsborough, 2002). Additionally, western

societies provide easier access to China's middle class, which help it to be familiar with the liberal and modern democratic values (Ma, 2007). This may be one of the reasons that middle class advocate democratic practices in China. Furthermore, various researchers in China declare this class as the moderating force between right and left radical (Nathan, 2016). It is believed that, the rise of this force will be helpful for the peaceful changeover to democratic regime. In spite of economic growth and broad middle class in China, the delay in the democratization has compelled democracy observers to reassess the relationship between democracy and economic development (Rocca, Rocca & Pusca, 2017). Among all arguments that are being presented for the delay in the democratic process in China, the most prominent is the lack of interest of middle class in the democratic transition (Unger, 2006). From the present economic and political development of China, middle class is relatively higher beneficiary as compared to the other classes (Shi, 1999). Thus, the present social, economic and political arrangements of the state are followed by the members of middle class even if it is disliked by them. Therefore, this class will not advocate any sudden political change that may harm their present status quo. Researchers claim that the members of this class in China would like to reform the political system gradually, if they are willing to democratic transition (Waisman, 2015). This broad middle class is quite conscious to safeguard their individual economic interests more legally and not intending to rock the boat of one-party regime (Wu, Chang & Pan, 2017). Literature highlights that private entrepreneurs are occupying a large number in the newly emerged middle class of China and this class is not concerned to reform the social and political setup of the country (Owusu-Sekyere & Jonas, 2017). It is also asserted that the fear of lower class is one of the reasons behind the reluctant behaviour of middle class towards democratization. Members of middle class will not like the rural population to take over the system after transition to democracy in China (Shi, 1999). They are threatened that due to the majority, rural population

will play a significant role in the democratic regime. In addition, rural population would be misleading through demagogue and vote buying, because the rural population of the country is not politically groomed enough to participate in the electoral process (Resnick, 2015). Due to these potential threats, middle class impetuses to cooperate with the authoritarian regime in order to protect their narrower benefits (Wright & Escriba, 2012). This argument seems potential since 2001 when entrepreneurs were allowed to join communist party and play their role in the decision making process.

### *Measuring Middle Class*

Almost every study which investigates class structure of any society has to face the fundamental issue that how to explain middle class. Different approaches have been used to measure the class structure such as; income, assets, self-perception and profession (Rasch, 2017 & Li, 2006). Every approach has its own fineness and flaw (Rocca et al., 2017). In order to avert the expected biasness, current study uses three major approaches such as; income, self-perception and profession to delineate 'middle class' from rest of the classes. The first approach "*income*" is widely used by the western researchers. Within this approach, different scholars have used different strategies such as; middle class is a group of individuals whose annual income falls between 2,500- 25,000 US dollars (Rasch, 2017). Current study declares individuals as the member of middle class, who earn 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> quintile of country's income distribution annually. The second approach used in the current study is '*self-perception*'. This is a subjective approach in nature. In the light of this approach, middle class consists of the people who psychologically attach themselves to this social group (Weller & Logan, 2009). The last approach used in this study is identification of middle class on the basis of "*profession*" (Pressman, 2015). Following this approach, current study includes three kinds of people in middle class. First, people who are administrator or manager, second, practicing a special profession such as; doctor, engineer, teacher etc. and third

who are doing clerical jobs. Consciously, workers are not considered as the member of middle class because they are not falling in this category.

## Research Method

### *Survey Instrument*

For the collection of data, an instrument was adopted from Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) (2003). Furthermore, the questions related to the factors, which are being investigated in the current study were re-written. Simple language was used without changing the original meaning of the items. Asian Barometer Survey investigates democracy in a comparative way; hence, the questions were re-designed particularly in the Chinese context. During pilot study, it was suggested by the field experts to translate the instrument in Chinese language; therefore, it was done accordingly.

As this study is an effort to measure the psychological factors, therefore, deductive method was found more suitable (Kothari, 2004). As described above that the data were collected from Chinese labour working on different projects under the umbrella of CPEC across the country. Prior to the data collection, permission was taken from the project managers and the security officers. For the main study, 1100 survey questionnaires were distributed. Table1 describes the social class of the respondents in a descriptive way.

*Table: 1. Description of the participants' social class by various approaches*

Classes	Income		Self-perception		Occupation		
<b>Lower</b>	227	25.33%	188	20.98%	---	---	
<b>Middle</b>	487	54.35%	511	57.03%	Middle class	501	55.91%
<b>Upper</b>	182	20.31%	197	21.98%	Non middle class	395	44.09%
<b>Total</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>896</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Procedure*

For validity and reliability assessment, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. In this regard, 40 questionnaires were distributed. After incorporating the suggestions, suggested by the field experts and respondents, final version of the instrument was developed and distributed. Out of total distributed questionnaires, 927 were received back.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

Statistical package for social science (SPSS) 24.0 was used. At the initial stage, data were coded and entered into the SPSS for further analysis. Data were screened by detecting missing values and outliers. 31 cases were found, having missing values and outliers. All these cases were excluded from the data and the remaining 896 cases were declared useful for further analysis. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted and observed significant 0.6 (Neuman, 2016). Furthermore, to check the normality of the data skewness and kurtosis statistical tests were applied. For normal distribution, the suggested values of these tests are -1 to +1 and -3 to +3 respectively (Neuman, 2016). The result of these tests, suggest the normality of the data (see Table 2).

*Table: 2. Reliability of the instrument*

Variable	Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Skewness	Kurtosis
DPD	0.82	0.431	0.253
DAT	0.91	0.699	1.09
CRB	0.90	0.671	1.61
ALH	0.77	0.018	0.179
DAD	0.78	0.780	0.621

**Note:** DPD=Democratic procedure; DAT= Democratic affection; CRB=Conflict resolving behaviour; ALH=Authoritarian leadership; DAD= Democratic attitude

Furthermore, Table 3 shows the results of the factor analysis along with the items used to measure democratic attitude.

*Table: 3. Factor analysis of selected items regarding DAD*

Selected Items	DPD	DAT	ALH	CRB
1. Do you think democracy is suitable for your country?	-0.049	0.639	-0.39	0.049
2. Where do you place your country under present government?	-0.131	0.744	0.033	0.111
3. To what extent would you want your country to be democratic now?	-0.042	0.791	-0.039	0.062
4. People should get rid of parliament and elections and have the experts to decide everything	0.490	0.292	-0.052	-0.299
5. The military should come in to rule the country	0.580	0.101	-0.13	-0.289
6. A common citizen do not have any influence over what the government does	0.005	0.051	0.111	0.469
7. I have the ability to participate in the politics	0.035	0.099	-0.186	0.489
8. Politics and government seems so complicated that a common citizen cannot really understand what is going on	0.236	-0.003	-0.039	0.619
9. The government should decide whether their certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society	0.531	-0.111	0.181	0.171
10. Government leaders are like the head of a family; everyone should follow their decisions	0.589	-0.169	0.090	0.001
11. When judge decide the important cases, they should accept the	0.600	-0.089	0.021	-0.011

view of the executive branch

12. Harmony of the community will be disrupted if people organize lots of groups	-0.089	-0.060	0.061	0.551
13. If political leaders are morally upright, people can let them decide everything	0.561	-0.079	0.189	0.149
14. If the government is constantly checked by the legislature, it cannot possibly accomplish great things	0.529	-0.009	0.129	0.131
15. If a political leader really believes in his position, he should refuse to compromise regardless of how many people disagree	-0.099	-0.029	0.589	0.059
16. The most important thing for a political leader is to accomplish his goals even if he has to ignore the established procedure	0.259	0.051	0.611	-0.131
17. As long as a political leader enjoys majority support, he should implement his own agenda and disregard the view of the others	0.169	-0.051	0.651	0.029
18. A political leader should not tolerate the view of those who challenge his political ideas	0.169	-0.019	0.0661	0.000

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**Note:** DPD=*Democratic procedure*; DAT= *Democratic affection*; CRB=*Conflict resolving behaviour*; ALH=*Authoritarian leadership*; DAD= *Democratic attitude*

## Results and Discussion

This study has examined mean score of every dependent variable and compared the social classes individually. Statistically, it is found that the middle class have weaker democratic attitude as compared to the remaining classes, if middle class is defined through certain level of annual income. Further, there is no significant difference

noticed in the three variables' mean score among the social classes. In variable 'democratic procedure', significant difference was found. Despite, mean score for middle class was observed lower as compared to the other social classes. When middle class described through income, it reveals lower level of preference to democracy in particular dimension and political procedure. We cannot consider this difference as robust because it was not statistically rectified in other factors.

*Table: 4. Mean differences between the social classes defined by income (ANOVA)*

Classes	DPD	DAT	ALH	CRB
Upper	0.19	0.0029	0.031	-0.029
Middle	-0.23	0.030	0.00	-0.019
Lower	-0.20	-0.029	-0.09	-0.069
N	896	896	896	896
F	45.21	0.89	1.61	1.09
P	0.00	0.41	0.19	0.29

**Note:** DPD=Democratic procedure; DAT= Democratic affection; CRB=Conflict resolving behaviour; ALH=Authoritarian leadership

In this way, a significantly stronger democratic attitude has been observed in middle class than the lower, if it is described through 'self-perception'. When compared to the upper class, result suggests a weaker democratic attitude in middle class. Finding reveals a positive and significant association between social status and democratic attitude. The higher level of attachment to the social status the stronger it correlates to the democratic attitude in China. Elaborating further, middle class is not an exclusive class as a whole when it is compared to the remaining two classes in China. Summarily, middle class was found having balanced (not lower, not

higher) democratic attitude.

*Table: 5. Mean differences between the social classes defined by self-perception (ANOVA)*

Classes	DPD	DAT	ALH	CRB
Upper	0.09	0.19	-0.039	0.31
Middle	0.039	0.0042	0.021	-0.017
Lower	-0.09	-0.079	-0.041	-0.070
N	896	896	896	896
F	4.71	6.51	0.61	7.89
P	0.01	0.003	0.61	0.00

**Note:** DPD=Democratic procedure; DAT= Democratic affection; CRB=Conflict resolving behaviour; ALH=Authoritarian leadership

Result of the current study highlights that the experience and the occupation of the members of middle as well as upper class was overlapping each other. It provides a potential reason to combine these both classes as a whole to compare with the lower class (Table 3a & 3b). After combining these two classes, we found a higher democratic attitude in both of these classes as compared to the lower class in three variables like; democratic procedure, affection and conflict resolving behaviour at the significant level ( $\alpha=0.10$ ).

Middle class will advocate democratic transition in China, the substantial support for this argument presented by those who marginalize the classes by using occupational approach. Table 6, shows that middle class have significantly higher democratic attitude as compared to the members of the non-middle classes.

*Table: 6. Mean differences between the social classes defined by occupation (ANOVA)*

Classes	DPD	DAT	ALH	CRB
Middle	0.69	0.041	0.21	0.25
Non-Middle	-0.21	-0.21	-0.029	-0.049
<i>N</i>	896	896	896	896
<i>F</i>	199.4	9.41	6.61	19.39
<i>P</i>	0.000	0.001	0.02	0.000

**Note:** DPD=Democratic procedure; DAT= Democratic affection; CRB=Conflict resolving behaviour; ALH=Authoritarian leadership

As compared to the workers, administrators/ managers, professionals and clerical staff shows stronger preference for democracy. Higher level of democratic affection has been found in the people belonging to these professions. Adversely, they were not advocating the system having authoritarian government. If attitude is considered as the fundamental factor, which drives public behaviour, then it must be expected that middle class defined through specific occupation would drive democracy in China. Statistically, the difference which is found between middle and other social classes might be due to the result of third factor. Hence, for contradictory factor, multiple regressions may provide the robustness to the results of ANOVA. Despite many attempts, regression fails to add smartness to the analysis which was observed by applying ANOVA. Conclusively, simple ANOVA was found more suitable for the analysis, and interpretation of the data.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that middle class' preference for democracy is based on the way in which middle class is going to be measured. If middle class is a group of certain people having annual income, which falls in a particular level than this study finds that middle

class is not inclined towards democracy. Contrary, if this class consists of those, who distinguish themselves as middle class then this group reveal significant attitude towards democracy as compared to the lower class. Additionally, if this class is described on the basis of specific occupations then the current study finds a higher level of attitude towards democracy in all aspects. Statistical results of the current study show that higher income is not related to the higher democratic preference. Democracy will not be benefited by the economic growth of China because it also provides benefit to the rising middle class. The members of this class are conscious about their social status, benefits and liberty. Therefore, they have started to think about their political and social rights for that, they were found more advocating the democratic transition in China. After identifying the actual notion of middle class, people begin to dislocate them from the political system that is based on the traditions. In this way, democratic values like; liberty, equality, individualism and pluralism increase among the members of middle class and they feel the responsibility to advocate social and political change. Summarily, people's self-consideration as a middle class introduces them to the democratic transition. If it is recognized that political attitude manoeuvres public political behaviour then it could be optimistically argued that democratic change will be supported by a higher number of people. It can be concluded tentatively that a broad social category has been increased and connected to the democracy through economic growth of China. Future researchers are required to work on the class structure of Asia generally and particularly China. The current study was done by applying cross-sectional survey strategy; in future longitudinal study can be used in order to get comprehensive results of the democratic attitude.

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