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Attitudes Regarding the Market Economy in Urban China

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ABSTRACT

Compared with only thirty-five years ago, today's China is a different country. As recently as the early 1980s, despite universal poverty, there were universal, life-time employment, cheap work-place-provided housing, national healthcare, and free college education. For those who were born under communism, attitudes toward capitalism were largely negative and large disparities in income and wealth were seen as immoral and unjust. Today the state no longer assigns jobs to those who have completed their education and urban life-time employment and national healthcare are long gone. While there have been stunning improvements in living conditions, the rapid increases in housing prices, coupled with increasing unemployment and a disappearance of job security and national health care, have made ordinary people vulnerable. Because China has become one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of income and wealth, there is also a sense of discontent among many of its citizens. Using a 2006 national survey, we explore how these changes have affected the public attitudes toward economic reform and communist rule. To our surprise, we found general agreement across different generation, education, and income-mobility groups as regards market economy, the legitimacy of profit-making and income inequality, the role and authority of the government, and the causes of poverty and inequality. The differences among generation, education, and income groups are largely in degree. We suggest that the lack of generation, income, and education differences on attitudes may be due to material benefits brought by the market economy and high economic growth.

KEYWORDS

Public Opinion; Economic Reform; Urban China

Cite this paper

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