

**From Surveillance to Empowerment: Redirecting Research in
Authoritarian Regimes through Academic Incentives and Collaboration**

A Study Conducted for Center for Long-Term Cybersecurity Center

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1 Executive Summary

Authoritarian governments monitoring citizens and manipulating public opinion is a major source of human rights violations and a critical threat to democracies worldwide. Past policy responses have faced insurmountable challenges, as domestic policies of authoritarian countries are difficult to influence.

Regulation of the academic community is an under-recognized step toward addressing this issue. Authoritarian governments ultimately rely on their own scientists to develop various technologies for political oppression. However, scientists themselves have dual identities, being subject to authoritarian governments and being part of the international academic community, with values that are often more aligned with those of the international academic community. They primarily serve their governments for career advancement purposes. If the international academic community can provide alternative incentives, we may be able to attract academic professionals to the side of protecting human rights and weakening the political control of authoritarian countries.

This report, through case studies and quantitative analysis of all papers published in Chinese on “public opinion,” finds that as many as one quarter of the studies help the Chinese government more strictly monitor and manipulate public opinion, likely driven by the motive of career advancement. A review of the codes of conduct of major academic organizations, such as The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), reveals no mention of surveillance and manipulation of public opinion, except in Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) guidelines, indicating significant regulatory gaps. This neglect stands in stark contrast to voluminous writing and agreements on ethical issues along other research frontiers, such as biomedicine or even other

areas of artificial intelligence.

The report proposes three policy recommendations for international academic organizations:

1. Incorporate Surveillance and Public Opinion Manipulation Issues into Existing Code of Ethics and Publication Review Process.
2. Establish and promote competitive incentive policies for elite scientists from authoritarian countries to encourage their engagement in research that promotes freedom of expression in public opinion.
3. Encourage international academic institutions to collaborate with international organizations, human rights groups, and media outlets to raise awareness about the issue of digital surveillance, public opinion research, and their impact on privacy and human rights.

The report emphasizes the importance of adopting a “Regulatory Collaboration” principle, which is to say, a comprehensive and balanced approach to addressing the challenges associated with international research collaborations, as opposed to an “Exclusionary Stance,” or the exclusion of scientists from authoritarian countries from participating in international academic exchange activities. By adhering to this principle, we can avoid excessive influence of xenophobic political forces and agendas on academia (such as the Trump-era China Initiative, which reduced research productivity), and maintain the principles of academic freedom, anti-discrimination, and free international academic exchange and cooperation to effectively and sustainably protect the academic community and enable global scientific research to better serve human welfare.