

Kenny (Ling) Miao

Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin

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Education

The University of Texas at Austin

Ph.D. Candidate in Government

expected May 2027

- Dissertation: *Surviving and Reviving: Religion and Politics in Authoritarian China*
- Committee: Xiaobo Lü (co-chair), John Gerring (co-chair), Kenneth F. Greene, Amy Liu, Anna Grzymała-Busse (external), and Fenggang Yang (external)

Duke University

M.A. in Political Science

2019

Wuhan University

B.A. in Political Science

2017

Research Interests

Religion and politics; authoritarian politics; Chinese politics; experimental methods; historical political economy

Dissertation Project

My three-essay dissertation addresses the puzzle of how Christianity, a religion long marginalized in China, has grown into a major religious force despite ongoing hostility from the Chinese Communist Party. I argue that this surprising growth stems from the unintended consequences of regime action and from strategic accommodation by religious leaders. The Party's early revolutionary campaigns to restructure society disrupted the existing religious field and dismantled entrenched institutions, creating space for new religious actors; Christian leaders, in turn, adapted their messaging to navigate social hostility and broaden their appeal. I test this argument with original experiments and surveys, extensive archival research, and qualitative evidence from fieldwork.

Publications

Jason Brownlee and **Kenny Miao**. 2022. "Why Democracies Survive." *Journal of Democracy* 33(4): 133–149.

Under Review

"Preaching for Power: Consequences of Pro-Regime Propaganda by Religious Leaders." **Kenny Miao**.

- Best Student Paper Award, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (2024)
- Presented at APSA (2024), Texas Comparative Circle (2024), SSSR (2024), and New Faces in Chinese Politics (2025)

“Searching for the Gods: Internet Search as a Measure of Religious Practice in China.” **Kenny Miao**.
– Presented at MPSA (2024), SSSR (2025)

“Reading the Room: Nationality-of-Sponsor Effects on Survey Responses in China.” **Kenny Miao** and Jay Kao.

“Leader Tenure and Leader Power.” John Gerring, Andres Cruz, **Kenny Miao**, Erzen Öncel, and Harunobu Saijo.

Working Papers

“Revolutions and Revivals: How State-Building Sparks New Religious Movements.” **Kenny Miao**.
– Presented at MPSA (2025), APSA (2026)

“The Gentry and the Sectarian: Elite Status Preservation in Post-Imperial China.” **Kenny Miao**.

“Education and Selective Liberalism: Evidence from China.” **Kenny Miao** and Jay Kao.
– Presented at IPSA (2025)

Work in Progress

“Mapping the Hidden Sacred: Religious Venues and the Local Policy Environment in China.” **Kenny Miao** and Fenggang Yang.

“After the Church: Religious Institutionalization and America’s Anti-Establishment Turn.” **Kenny Miao**.

“The Measure of Religious Authority: A Denomination-Level Index for Survey Research.” **Kenny Miao**.

“Mediated Authority: Religious Institutionalization and Trust in Secular Institutions.” **Kenny Miao**.

Book Project

Leader Tenure Through History. John Gerring, Andres Cruz, **Kenny Miao**, Erzen Öncel, and Harunobu Saijo.

Grants, Awards, and Fellowships

External

Best Student Paper, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion	2024
Student Research Grant, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion	2024
Student Research Grant, Institute for Humane Studies	2024

University of Texas at Austin

Graduate School Semester Fellowship	2025
Texas Politics Project Grant	2024
Graduate School Summer Fellowship	2023, 2024
Pre-dissertation Fellowship	2022

ICPSR Sponsorship 2022

Teaching

University of Texas at Austin

As (co-)instructor

Math in Politics Fall 2023
Math Camp for Graduate Students 2021, 2022

As teaching assistant

Chinese Politics Spring 2024
Introduction to American Government Spring 2021, Spring 2022
Suicide Terrorism Fall 2021
U.S. Foreign Policy Fall 2019, Spring 2020, Fall 2020

Professional Experience

Elephant Magazine (Beijing, China), Columnist 2019–2020
Caixin Media (Beijing, China), Columnist 2018–2020

Service and Leadership

Editorial Assistant, APSR 2025–2027
Co-president, Government Graduate Student Organization, UT Austin 2023–2024

Training and Skills

Additional training: Text Analysis, ICPSR Summer Program 2022
Languages: Chinese (native), English (fluent)
Software: R, Stata, ~~TeX~~^{LaTeX}, Qualtrics

References

Xiaobo Lü (co-chair) Associate Professor Department of Political Science UC Berkeley xiaobo.lu@berkeley.edu	John Gerring (co-chair) Professor Department of Government UT Austin jgerring@austin.utexas.edu	Kenneth F. Greene Associate Professor Department of Government UT Austin kgreene@austin.utexas.edu
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