

Education

The University of Texas at Austin (Expected May 2026)

Ph.D. Candidate in Government

- **Dissertation:** *Surviving and Reviving: Religion and Politics under Authoritarian China*

- **Committee:** Xiaobo Lü, Kenneth F. Greene, John Gerring, Fenggang Yang (External), and Anna Grzymala-Busse (External)

Duke University (2019)

M.A. in Political Science

Wuhan University (2017)

B.A. in Political Science

Research Interests

Religion and politics; Authoritarian politics; Chinese Politics, Experimental methods

Dissertation

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

Publications

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

Working Papers

Miao, Kenny. Consequences of Pro-Regime Propaganda by Religious Leaders (*Under Review*)

- Presented at APSA (2024), Texas Comparative Circle Conference (2024), and Annual Meeting of Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (2024)

- Awarded Best Student Paper at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (2024)

Miao, Kenny. Revolutions and Christian Growth: How State-Building Sparks New Religious Movements.

-Presented at MPSA (2025)

Miao, Kenny. Analyzing Religious Trends in Authoritarian Countries with Internet Data: An Empirical Application

-Presented at MPSA (2024)

Miao, Kenny. The Religious China Shock: How Import Competition Affects the Religious Field in the US?

- Presented at Annual Meeting of Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) (2023)

Miao, Kenny, Jay Kao. Secondary Education and Political Liberalism: Evidence from a Natural Experiment.

- Presented at IPSA (2025)

Miao, Kenny, Jay Kao. Does Researcher Identity Affect Responses in Online Surveys? Experimental Evidence from China.

Gerring, John, Andres Cruz, **Kenny Miao**, Erzen Öncel, and Harunobu Saijo. Leader Tenure and Leader Power (*Under Review*)

Teaching

University of Texas at Austin

As (Co-)instructor:

Math Camp for Grad Students, 2022 & 2021

Math in Politics, Fall 2023

As Teaching Assistant:

Chinese Politics, Spring 2024

Introduction to American Government, Spring 2022 & Spring 2021

Suicide Terrorism, Fall 2021

U.S. Foreign Policy, Fall 2020 & Spring 2020 & Fall 2019

Awards and Fellowships

External

Best Student Paper, Society for Scientific Studies of Religion (2024)

PhD Research Grant, Society for Scientific Studies of Religion (2023)

PhD Research Grant, Institute for Humane Studies (2023)

University of Texas at Austin

Graduate School Semester Fellowship, 2025

Graduate School Summer Fellowship, 2024

Texas Politics Project Grant, 2024

Graduate School Summer Fellowship, 2023

Pre-dissertation Fellowship, 2022
ICPSR Sponsorship, 2022

Professional Experience

American Political Science Review
Editorial Assistant, 2024 - 2026

Elephant Magazine, Peking, China
Columnmist, 2019 - 2020

Caixin Media, Peking, China
Columnmist, 2018 - 2020

Leadership Experience

Co-president, GOV Graduate Student Organization, 2023-2024

Additional Training

- Text Analysis, ICPSR, Summer 2022

Skills

Languages: Chinese (native), English (fluent)
Software: R, Stata, Latex, Qualtrics

References

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University of California, Berkeley
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