

A Suspended Sky: Chinese Women's Changing Political Interests

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INTRODUCTION

“Women hold up half the sky,”

Mao Zedong famously declared as he led the country into a communist revolution. Sixty-five years later, China has changed socially, politically and economically. The research uses both historical context and data to explore how women's political interests have changed from the reform era to modern day China, if China has a political interest gender gap and how these factors measure up on a global scale. Data is drawn from the World Values Survey.

OBJECTIVES/ HYPOTHESES

Does China have a political gender gap?

It is important to examine political interest in China as the communist country continues to undergo rapid change. If it is changing, why? Main questions posed throughout the research:

- Does a gender gap exist in political interest among male and female citizens?
- How have Chinese women's political interest changed since Mao and the Communist Party first invited women to join the political sphere?
- How does Chinese women's political interests and the existing gender gap between men and women's interest compare to other countries?

HYPOTHESES

1. Data will reveal China has a gender gap in political interests between men and women.
2. The data will show women's political apathy has grown over time.
3. When compared to other nations, China will have a higher gender gap than most countries surveyed.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

It's important to understand women's place in Chinese history when examining women's political interests.

- **Confucianism:** A set of ideals that shaped much of historic Chinese society and meant a life structured around hierarchies, rituals and family ideals. These principles were very repressive towards women, who held little value in the familial hierarchies, expect to produce a son.
- **Revolution:** After the dynastic system collapsed in 1912, women formed political organizations but were ignored by the new government.
- **Communism:** Mao incorporated women and gender equality into the party platform and several initiatives:
 - Marriage Law of 1950
 - Great Leap Forward
 - Chinese National Women's Congress
 - Cultural Revolution

GENDER GAP IN POLITICAL INTERESTS: CHINA AND OTHER NATIONS

World Values Survey Question: How interested would you say you are in politics?

Fig. 1 Chinese Women's Political Interest
World Values Survey, 1990-1994 through 2010-2014

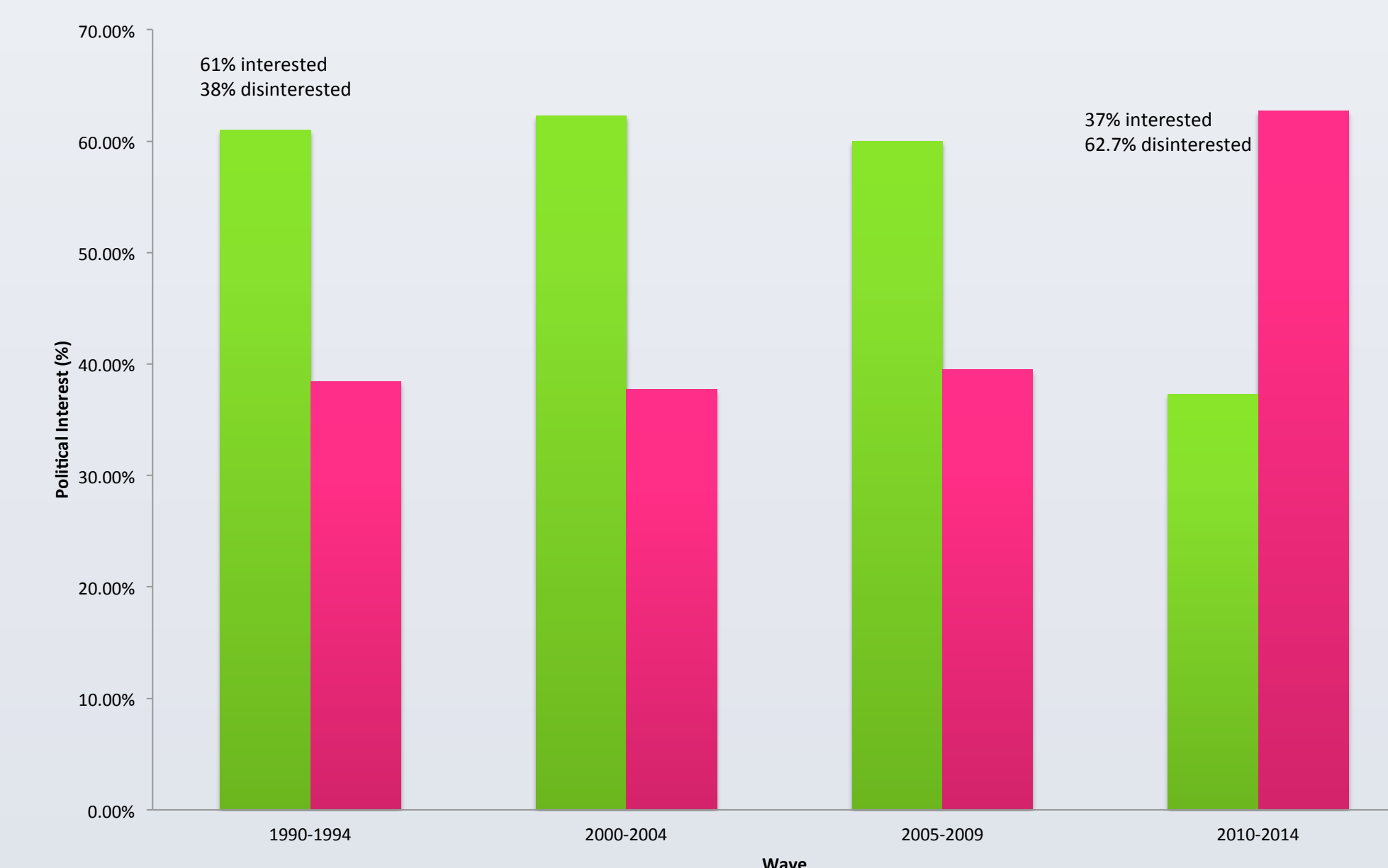


Fig. 3 Global Gender Gaps in Political Interest
World Values Survey, 2010-2014

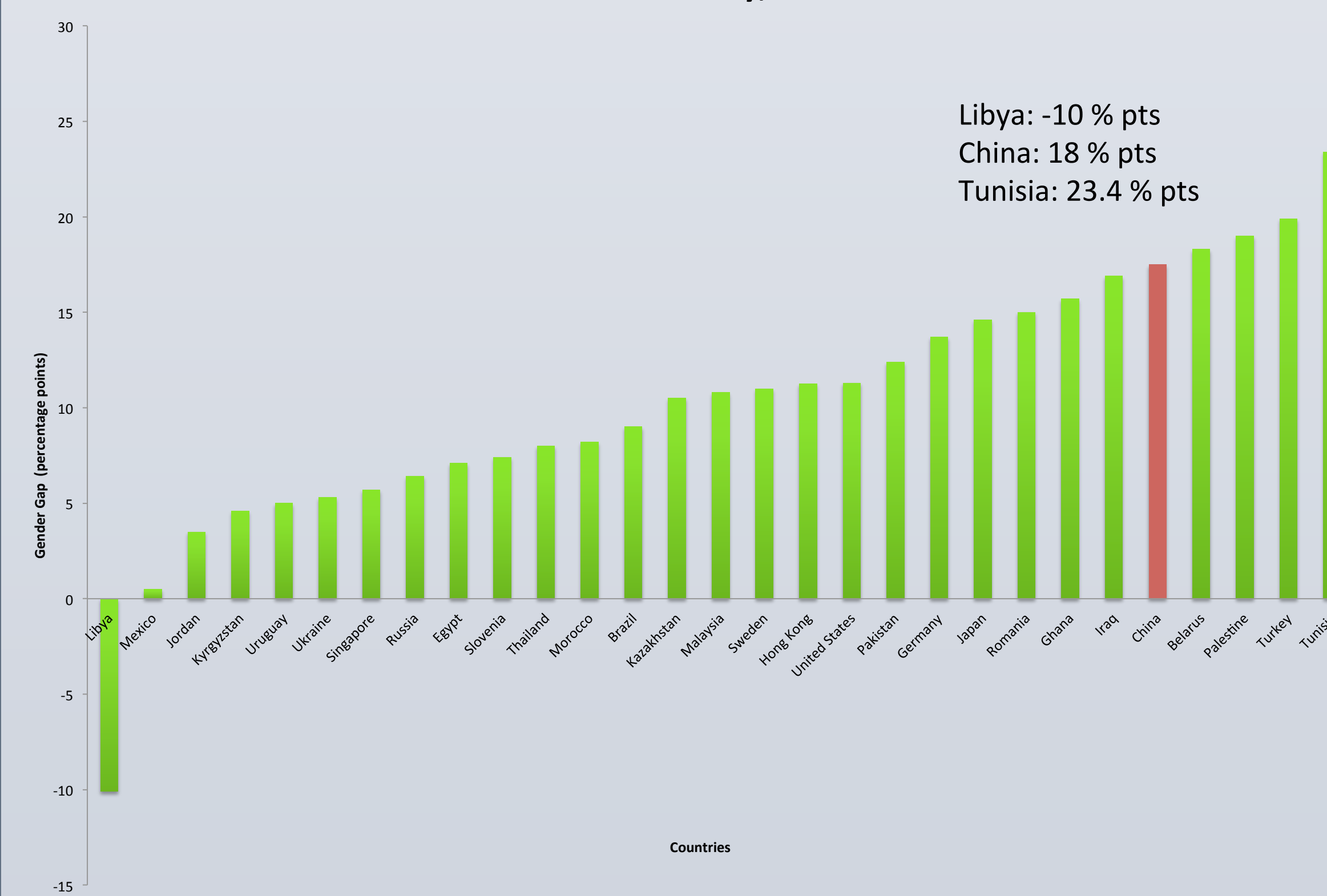


Fig. 2 China's Political Interest Gender Gap
World Value Survey Waves 1990-1994 to 2010-2014

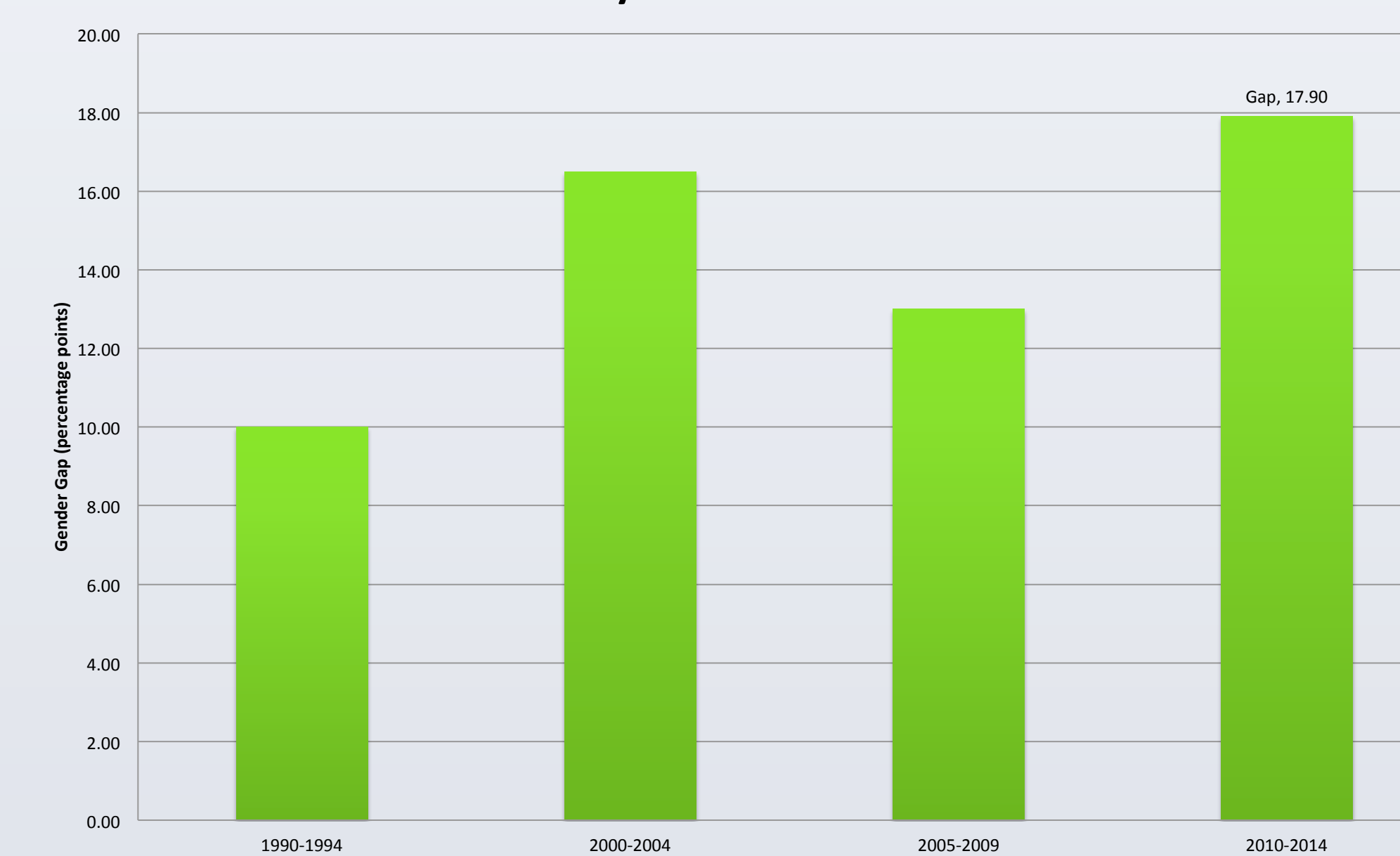


Fig. 4 Political Interest Gender Gap among Countries
World Values Survey, 1990-1994



KEY FINDINGS

To quantify the change in political interests among Chinese women, the research utilizes several waves of the World Values Survey, a multi-country effort to examine values and beliefs of populations from across the globe. By examining one question about an individual's interest in politics, the research explores how interest has changed between the 1990-1994 WVS wave and the latest, 2010-2014. The graphs above reveal the following:

- **Figure 1:** A 20-year span reveals Chinese women's political interest has declined. The latest data shows most women are not interested in politics.
- **Figure 2:** Men have also shown a decline in political interest, but not at the same rate as women. There is an increasing gender gap.
 - **GENDER GAP:** Refers to the percentage point difference between collective male and female respondents' indicated interest in politics.
- **Figure 3:** On a global scale, China ranks among countries with the highest gender gaps, according to latest WVS data.
- **Figure 4:** A supplement to Figure 3, the earliest WVS data shows China wasn't always among countries with high gender gap.
 - **NOTE:** It's not a perfect example, the sample is a lot smaller than later data, but it does sample a variety of countries.

CONCLUSION

Chinese civilization spans far back into human history and has experienced significant change in the last 100 years, especially for women. There are no concrete studies or data to draw on leading up to the establishment of Communist China, but historical evidence shows the party made efforts to include women as a way to implement party ideals and expand the workforce.

Gender gap in political interest is hard to quantify, but using the World Values Survey shows Chinese women's political interests are changing:

- A majority of Chinese women once held political interests
- Now, most women admit to not being interested in politics
- Among countries surveyed, China has a higher gender gap than other countries

Pairing these findings with research that says economic systems might influence how citizens engage in politics and that women may be disproportionately impacted by a more market-driven economy.

- China's shift from a planned-economy to a more market-driven one could be one impact on the increased political apathy.

Capitalism → more money → citizens focused on \$\$ > politics ?

GOING FORWARD

Although research demonstrated the declining political interests of women and the existence of a gender gap, a lot more can be explored to explain what factors may be contributing to gender gaps that exist in political interests both in China and across the globe.

Questions for future researchers:

- What is the relationship between countries and where they are in terms of gender gaps and women's interest in politics?
- How is an increasing gender gap and the female population's interest in politics impacted by factors such as the economy, education, and the type of national government?

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