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The multiple streams framework in a nondemocracy: The infeasibility of a national ban on live poultry sales in China

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Abstract

In response to calls to apply the multiple streams framework to nondemocracies, this article adapts the framework to an authoritarian context and applies it to a case study of live poultry sales in food markets in China, a key issue in epidemic prevention. Using a dataset consisting of Chinese policy documents, Chinese news articles, World Health Organization data, and secondary literature, the study shows that despite the public health threat posed by live poultry sales and despite high-level political support, a national-level permanent ban has not been adopted because it is technically infeasible, financially inviable, and inconsistent with existing norms and values. The study suggests that—despite the country's top-down governance style and lack of political pluralism—policy preferences expressed by members of the policy-making elite are not necessarily adopted in authoritarian China. Future research should test the proposed hypotheses in other policy areas and other authoritarian contexts.

KEYWORDS

authoritarianism, China, epidemic prevention, multiple streams framework

INTRODUCTION

Although a large share of the world population lives in nondemocracies, the existing policy process literature focuses almost exclusively on democracies (Jones et al., 2016; Williamson & Magaloni, 2020). As a result, the extent to which existing policy process theories explain policy change in nondemocracies remains unclear. In our globalized world, domestic issues can easily affect other parts of the world, as illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore need to better understand domestic policymaking across the world, not just in democracies.

The multiple streams framework (MSF) is a case in point: despite its popularity among policy scholars, Jones et al. (2016) identified only a handful of English-language applications to nondemocracies, including Iran, Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, and China. Others have noticed this gap too. Herweg et al. (2018) explicitly encourage scholars to adapt the framework to and test it in nondemocratic contexts.

In response, I adapt and apply the framework to China, the world's most populous nondemocracy.¹ I do so through a deductive case study of live poultry sales in food markets, a key issue in preventing epidemic outbreaks. Using the adjusted MSF and covering both agenda-setting and policy adoption, the case study explains why China has not permanently banned live poultry sales in food markets through national-level policies. Based on an original dataset consisting of more than 800 documents, including Chinese news articles, Chinese policy documents, journal articles, and World Health Organization Disease Outbreak News, the case study argues that while scientists and policymakers in China widely recognize live poultry sales as a direct source of epidemic outbreaks and despite high-level political support, a national-level permanent ban has not been adopted because such a ban is technically infeasible, financially inviable, and inconsistent with current norms and values of Chinese citizens. Challenges include limited public support, the emergence of black markets, economic losses for the poultry industry, and limited availability of fresh and frozen poultry products.

This article contributes to theory development in at least three ways. First, by systematically adjusting existing MSF hypotheses to an authoritarian context and by illustrating the operationalization of the adjusted hypotheses in the case study, the article provides a starting point for future studies to systematically test the MSF in authoritarian settings. Second, the case study confirms that high-level political support in an authoritarian context does not necessarily lead to policy adoption. Third, I identify priority areas for future MSF research in nondemocracies.

The paper is structured as follows. I first provide an overview of the MSF and adjust the MSF to China's authoritarian context. The second part applies the MSF to the issue of live poultry sales in food markets. The third part discusses the study's implications for our understanding of the MSF, policy processes, and epidemic prevention in China.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The multiple streams framework: Key elements

In his seminal study of agenda-setting in the US federal government, Kingdon (1984) examined why policymakers pay attention to certain issues but not to others through what became known as the MSF. The MSF is now a prominent lens to examine policy processes (Herweg et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Zahariadis, 2014).

The MSF core consists of the problem stream, the policy stream, the political stream, a policy window, and a policy entrepreneur (Herweg et al., 2018). The framework assumes that policymaking is not rational and linear. Instead, problems, policy solutions, and politics develop mostly independently from each other until a policy window opens and a policy entrepreneur connects these three streams.

The problem stream consists of issues that need to be addressed by the government according to policymakers or citizens (Herweg et al., 2018; Zahariadis, 2014). It is shaped by the number of issues requiring attention, policy feedback, focusing events (e.g., a school shooting), and indicators (e.g., the number of HIV infections) (Zahariadis, 2014).

The policy stream consists of ideas for policy change, which are constantly evolving and floating around policy sectors. These ideas are not necessarily developed in response to a particular problem, but are often reused, combined, and adapted to fit new problems. Whether ideas reach the agenda and decision-making stages depends on financial viability, technical feasibility, and compatibility with norms and values of policymakers and citizens (Herweg et al., 2018; Zahariadis, 2014).

The political stream is shaped by the national mood, interest group activity, and developments in the government (Herweg et al., 2018). National mood reflects the extent to which “a rather large number of people out in the country are thinking along certain common lines” (Kingdon, 2014, p. 146). Here, key is how political leaders *perceive* the national mood to be. Recent research has used opinion polls as an indicator of the national mood (Herweg et al., 2018). Interest group activity refers to opposition to or support for an idea by interest groups (Herweg et al., 2018; Zahariadis, 2007). Developments in the government include elections (Kusi-Ampofo et al., 2015) and appointments of key officials.

Following Kingdon (2014, p. 3), agenda-setting here refers to a topic receiving “serious attention at any given time” from “government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials.” This becomes more likely if the three independent streams converge, which is a process in which the policy entrepreneur plays a central role (Zahariadis, 2014). A policy entrepreneur is an individual, group, or organization who not only draws attention to a problem or solution, but also attaches problems to solutions and vice versa and couples those with politics (Abiola et al., 2013; Petridou & Mintrom, 2020; Zahariadis, 2014). Policy entrepreneurs’ successes are shaped by available resources, access to policymakers, and manipulation strategies (Blum, 2018; Dolan, 2021; Jones et al., 2016).

Coupling of the three streams is more likely when a policy window opens, which is a limited period of time during which there is “an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems” (Kingdon, 2014, p. 165). Policy windows open either by a shift in the political context (e.g., election results) or by the emergence of a pressing problem (Zahariadis, 2014).

The MSF has been extended to policy adoption (Herweg et al., 2018; Howlett et al., 2015; Zohlnhöfer, 2016). Herweg et al. (2015) distinguish between agenda windows (for agenda-setting processes) and decision windows (for decision-making processes). In decision making, the *political* entrepreneur (instead of the policy entrepreneur) is responsible for coupling by moving problems and solutions through the decision-making arena, using a variety of techniques, including concessions, package deals, and manipulation (Herweg et al., 2015).

The multiple streams framework in the Chinese context

Because Kingdon (1984) originally developed the MSF to explain agenda-setting in a democracy, it remains unclear whether the framework explains policy change in nondemocracies such as China. Some have argued that institutional differences and restrictions on policy entrepreneurship prevent the framework from full translation to contexts other than the United States (Béland & Howlett, 2016). On the other hand, Herweg et al. (2018) argue that—if adapted—the framework should be helpful even in contexts with limited political freedom because there is always a need to match solutions to problems while dealing with limited resources.

While the MSF is used in Chinese-language public policy literature, few English-language peer-reviewed articles have been published about the MSF in the context of China.² Following Kuhlmann and Van der Heijden's (2018) literature review strategy (2018), an extensive search in four major online search engines and databases (Google Scholar, World Cat, JSTOR, and Web of Science) led to just 12 articles on the MSF in China. Appendix 1 summarizes these articles.³ Except from Zhu (2008), the articles focus on applications rather than on theory development.

The themes emerging from this dozen MSF publications on China reflect the key differences between democratic and authoritarian systems: the dominant role of a single party, limited space for interest groups and policy entrepreneurship, and restricted information flows. This directly contrast with key features of democracies: political pluralism and elections, public participation, transparency, and openness (Dahl, 1998; Linz, 2000). The sections below discuss these differences in light of existing MSF hypotheses as developed by Herweg et al. (2018) and adjust these hypotheses to the context of authoritarian China.⁴

The adjusted hypotheses presented below focus on national-level policymaking. Key players in national-level policymaking are the National People's Congress—China's legislature—and the State Council (Li, 2019; Saich, 2015). The latter is the highest administrative executive authority and governs over the country's ministries as well as national commissions, administrations, and committees. The State Council and these constituent organizations implement national-level laws and make policies through administrative regulations, departmental rules, notices, reports, and statements, making the State Council a powerful policymaker. The Communist Party is present in all aspects of policymaking as it controls the appointment of key positions in legislative and executive bodies (Saich, 2015).

Problem stream

China's Communist Party strictly controls information and public discourse, which is especially relevant for the MSF's problem stream and policy stream. High-level bureaucratic and political units use various mechanisms to control the timing, volume, and tone of information shared offline and online (Kuang, 2018; Shi-Kupfer, 2017). China's censorship system includes, *inter alia*, a licensing system for media outlets, mandatory real-name registration for internet users, blocked websites (e.g., Google) and platforms (e.g., Twitter), bans on specific content, and (paid) online propaganda commentators (Roberts, 2018).

These restrictions on information affect all constituting elements of the problem stream, that is, indicators, focusing events, policy feedback, and problem load. It may be challenging or impossible to define a condition as a problem because knowledge—crucial in agenda-setting (Knaggård, 2015)—may not be available or cannot be (fully) shared. In particular, quantification of a problem through indicators (DeLeo, 2018) is not always possible due to insufficient data availability. Data collection, especially by non-governmental actors, may be too sensitive. Similarly, policy feedback may be unavailable or inaccessible and official data in China is often unreliable. Likewise, although focusing events can draw attention to a problem, news and internet media are subject to censorship, which is especially true if events attract substantial societal attention. And finally, the lack of government transparency obscures the number and range of problems decision makers are working on at any given time, making it difficult for policy actors to anticipate favorable moments to draw attention to problems.

Information restrictions depend on an issue's political sensitivity, which may vary over time (Stockmann, 2013). Online censorship is triggered by a perceived threat of mobilization, regardless of whether online posts support or criticize the government (King et al., 2013). Once an issue becomes politically sensitive, censors either completely remove the issue from news reporting, resulting in a news blackout, or only allow certain perspectives. In addition, propaganda authorities “guide public opinion” (*yulun daoxiang*), meaning that they actively instruct news media to promote selected news topics in order to divert attention from sensitive topics (Chan, 2007).

There is thus less space to make sense of and define an issue as a problem in China compared to democratic contexts (Chan & Zhao, 2016), which requires adaptation of the MSF. As outlined above, whether a problem can be defined using indicators, focusing events, and policy feedback depends on its political sensitivity. This leads to the following hypothesis, adapted from Herweg et al. (2018).⁵

Problem stream hypothesis: A condition reaches the policymaking agenda if an indicator changes to the negative, a harmful focusing event occurs, or if a government program does not work as expected, unless the condition is politically sensitive and censored.

Policy stream

Both restricted information flows and single-party politics directly affect the policy stream in terms of value acceptability of proposed solutions. Proposals that run counter to party ideology are unlikely to

reach the policy agenda, let alone get adopted. At the same time, there is only limited space to openly deliberate and mobilize support for policy proposals. Consequently, the range of solutions that can be proposed is different, and possibly smaller, compared to democratic contexts. Moreover, policy entrepreneurs require more sensitivity and creativity when proposing solutions compared to their peers in democracies.

One strategy to overcome these limitations in China is to take a pragmatic approach and put forward an incremental, technically well-developed, and non-regime threatening proposal (Hand, 2006). Broad and far-reaching proposals such as Charter 08, which demanded substantial amendment of the constitution, are likely to get suppressed and hence cannot reach the policy agenda (Feng, 2012; Liu, 2013). Conversely, in the case of Sun Zhigang, a man beaten to death while in custody in 2003, legal scholars called for non-regime threatening, moderate change (Hand, 2006; Teng, 2004). In response, policymakers reformed existing policies, albeit not exactly as demanded in the proposals (Hand, 2006).

Zhu (2008) proposed another strategy, namely to put forward a politically feasible but technically infeasible policy alternative. Zhu (2008) argued that, in China, politically feasible but technically infeasible solutions are more likely to receive substantial media attention and force policymakers to respond, whereas technically feasible solutions need to go through established channels and hence will not attract the same level of attention. However, the distinction between politically and technically feasible solutions needs further clarification. It is also unclear whether this strategy is relevant in other cases (Hammond, 2013). It is thus too early to exclude technical feasibility as a precondition for a mature policy stream. Altogether, this leads to the following policy stream hypothesis:

Policy stream hypothesis: A proposal reaches the policymaking agenda if the proposal is financially viable, technically feasible, and consistent with existing norms and values of policymakers and citizens, but only if it is non-regime threatening.

Political stream

Given China's one-party political system, decision makers have more room to ignore the national mood relative to their counterparts in democracies because of the lack of accountability through direct elections (Truex, 2016). Under certain conditions, the Communist Party, legislature, and administration respond to popular demands, a phenomenon captured in the concept of responsive authoritarianism (Weller, 2008). In this delicate balance of tolerance and control, citizens are to a certain extent allowed to express their opinions, the pressure of which leads decision makers to selectively meet public demands to avoid social instability (Heurlin, 2016; Stockmann, 2013). Similarly, Truex (2016) showed that, for non-sensitive issues, demands of the population correspond with legislative activity of the National People's Congress. Yet, the lack of direct elections means larger flexibility in terms of taking into account the national mood.

Single-party politics also limits space for opposing views, restricting opportunities for interest group campaigns. The so-called democratic parties that co-exist alongside the Communist Party have an advisory role at best. Interest groups such as unions and industry associations exist, but room to publicly oppose an idea is limited. At the same time, actors within the administration and Communist Party systems or actors with strong links to these systems have opportunities to shape agenda-setting and policy adoption. Yet, the Communist Party leadership is careful to portray itself as one united, unanimous organization (Shirk, 2007). Internal deliberations remain taboo for news media and leaders generally do not "publicize speech contrary to decisions at the national-level in the media" (Stockmann, 2013, p. 87).

Because the Communist Party is not a monolithic entity, but a large organization consisting of many individuals and units with diverse agendas, change in leadership potentially shapes policymaking. Leadership change is especially relevant in the top echelon of the Communist Party, where leaders distinguish themselves by emphasizing certain societal sectors more than others and by launching

their own pet projects. To illustrate, President Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) focused on economic growth, whereas his successor Hu Jintao (2003–2013) emphasized the need to balance economic growth with societal development.

Notwithstanding the importance of the national mood, interest group campaigns, and legislative or administrative turnovers, Herweg et al. (2018) argue that, ultimately, the political stream is ready for coupling in the agenda-setting stage when policy proposals are consistent with the ideology of the governing party or parties. In the case of China, this means consistency with the ideology of the State Council or the Communist Party, which leads to the following hypothesis:

Political stream hypothesis: A policy proposal reaches the policymaking agenda if it fits the general ideology of the State Council or the Communist Party.

Policy window

China's single-party politics also affect the policy window. Herweg et al. (2018, p. 30) theorize that a *problem* window is more likely to open if “a condition puts a policymaker's reelection at risk.” Given the lack of direct elections, this reasoning does not apply to the Chinese context. Instead, the focus is on the survival of the Communist Party, which requires a certain level of legitimacy. Similarly, an open window in the *political* stream is not affected by a partisan shift in the legislature or administration but can be shaped by a change of elite leaders in the Communist Party and administration. This includes leaders in the Politburo—a group of approximately 25 individuals selected by the Central Committee of the Communist Party—and the State Council. Given that Chinese leaders monitor public opinion, the national mood may also open a political window. At the same time, given limited space for opposing views and restrictions on (long-term) mobilization in China, interest group campaigns are unlikely to open a political window. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Problem window hypothesis: A policy window opens in the problem stream if a condition puts the survival of the Communist Party at risk.

Political window hypothesis: A policy window opens in the political stream as a result of a perceived change in the national mood or leadership change in the Politburo or State Council.

Agenda-setting and policy adoption

Restricted information flows and single-party politics shape the activities of the policy entrepreneur. Knowing *how* to frame and *when* to communicate an issue (Knaggård, 2015) appears particularly important in the Chinese context. Moreover, although opportunities for agenda-setting are pluralizing in China (Mertha, 2009), getting access to policymakers remains difficult. Nevertheless, successful policy entrepreneurs in China feature the same characteristics as their peers in democracies, namely social acuity, effective problem definition, team building, and leading by example (Hammond, 2013; Zhu, 2008). While more systemic studies are needed to better understand the specific strategies (Mintrom, 2019) and obstacles of policy entrepreneurs in China, such an analysis goes beyond this study's scope. Instead, I adopt the following overarching hypothesis from Herweg et al. (2018):

Agenda-setting hypothesis: An issue reaches the agenda if (a) a problem or political window opens; (b) the streams are ready for coupling; and (c) a policy entrepreneur promotes policy change.

The dominance of the Communist Party not only shapes the political stream during agenda setting, but also during policy adoption. The policy adoption hypotheses proposed by Herweg et al. (2018) include concepts such as elected leadership, majority party, and issue salience among voters, none of which apply in the same way to China. Although ideas for change can come from a wide range of actors both inside and outside the Communist Party, policy adoption ultimately implies the party's approval.

At the same time, the Communist Party, administration, and legislature consist of many different actors who need to reach consensus in order to adopt a policy (Ma & Lin, 2012). National-level policies (i.e., laws, regulations, and rules) are typically not made by a small number of elites but are shaped by a range of official and semi-official actors, including, for example ministries, subnational governments, state-owned enterprises, and state-sponsored industry associations. As a result, policymaking tends to involve extensive bargaining before reaching consensus and policy adoption (Van Rooij & Van den Dool, 2016). Opposing interests (e.g., Liu & Jayakar, 2012; Wan et al., 2018) and subsequent bargaining can easily lead to a gridlock that prevents or delays policy adoption (Truex, 2018). Policy adoption is thus not just shaped by the dominance of the Communist Party, but also by the level of consensus among the individuals and units *within* the party, the administration, and the legislature.

Yet, top level leaders can and do exercise control over policymaking processes, albeit little is known about the extent to which and under what conditions this takes place (Miller, 2015). To illustrate, all laws drafted and deliberated by the National People's Congress must be submitted to the Communist Party's Central Committee for approval (Qin & Li, 2003). While the Central Committee meets infrequently, the Politburo meets more often and thus has more opportunities to shape policymaking. Given China's authoritarian context, proposals that are actively supported by leaders in the Politburo or State Council are more likely to be adopted even in the absence of consensus, leading to the following hypothesis:

Policy adoption hypothesis: A policy is adopted if top leaders publicly express support for a proposal or if there is consensus among policymakers regarding the substance of the proposal.

METHODS, DATA, AND OPERATIONALIZATION

After adapting the MSF hypotheses developed by Herweg et al. (2018) to China's authoritarian context, the next section applies the framework to a qualitative case study of live poultry sales in food markets in China.

From a theoretical perspective, a case study of live poultry sales in China is justified because, as an influential case (Gerring, 2008; Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016), it potentially calls established MSF hypotheses into question. In particular, the MSF hypothesizes that agenda-setting is a product of a mature problem, policy, and political stream that are coupled by a policy entrepreneur during an open policy window. However, as shown below, the policy stream was not mature. Moreover, the case study provides insight into the understudied concept of non-adoption after successful agenda-setting (Herweg et al., 2018). While non-adoption is itself a common phenomenon, this case stands out because high-level political leaders have publicly expressed support for ending live poultry sales, yet no national-level policy has been adopted. This raises questions about MSF's assumptions about the role of political support in policy adoption. The case study is furthermore a good fit for the MSF because the issue of live poultry sales displays ambiguity—a basic assumption of the MSF (Zahariadis, 2014)—as it can be viewed as a public health risk, a food safety problem, a traditional food source, and crucial income for farmers and traders. The same is true for proposed solutions.

From an empirical perspective, I selected the case of live poultry sales in food markets because of issue salience and data availability. Both science and history show that live poultry sales in food markets contribute to the emergence and spread of (new) diseases. COVID-19 vividly illustrates the urgent need to improve epidemic prevention and control. This case study contributes to epidemic prevention and

control by providing insight into the regulation of an important source of epidemic diseases. Moreover, citizens, scientists, politicians, and policymakers in China have all paid attention to the issue of live poultry sales, which is evidenced by a substantial number of news articles, policy documents, and peer-reviewed journal publications. This data availability makes it possible to actually study the issue.

The case study analyses the problem, policy, and political streams and identifies policy windows and policy entrepreneur(s) based on a dataset consisting of 251 Chinese news articles, 221 Chinese policy documents, 90 English-language journal articles,⁶ and 320 World Health Organization Disease Outbreak News (DON) articles. Using multiple sources allows for triangulation, which is especially important given China's context of restricted access to reliable information. The collected material covers the period 2000–2020. I selected this period because it covers multiple disease outbreaks, including SARS (2002–2003) and COVID-19 (2019–2021). Both are often described as turning points or policy windows. Moreover, available data prior to 2000 is limited, making the year 2000 a natural cut-off point.

Following calls for more transparency regarding research methods in MSF research (Cairney & Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2016), Table 1 operationalizes each of the adjusted hypotheses.

Data was collected through several databases. I collected Chinese news articles (see Appendix 2) through the Chinese database CNKI, using the search terms “live poultry” (*huoqin*) combined with “markets” (*shichang*) or “trade” (*jiaoyi*) or “engaging in” (*jingying*). I excluded articles without an online full-text version. Policy documents (in Chinese) were collected through a full-text search for “live poultry” in PKUlaw (see Appendix 4), the most comprehensive database for Chinese policy documents, hosted

TABLE 1 Operationalization of adjusted MSF hypotheses, based on Herweg et al. (2018)

Hypothesis	Analysis (data)
<i>Problem stream</i> A condition reaches the policymaking agenda if an indicator changes to the negative, a harmful focusing event occurs, or if a government program does not work as expected, unless the condition is politically sensitive and censored	Indicator(s): disease outbreaks and number of infections (WHO Disease Outbreak News) Policy feedback: perceived effectiveness of government policies (policy documents and journal articles) Focusing events: Disease outbreaks (WHO Disease Outbreak News, policy documents, journal articles) Censorship (news articles; third party reports)
<i>Policy stream</i> A proposal reaches the policymaking agenda if the proposal is financially viable, technically feasible, and consistent with existing norms and values of policymakers and citizens, but only if it is non-regime threatening	Proposed solutions (policy documents, journal articles) Tone surrounding policy proposals: perceived technical and feasibility, financial viability, consistency with norms and values; perceived threat to governing party (journal articles)
<i>Political stream</i> A policy proposal reaches the policymaking agenda if it fits the general ideology of the State Council or the Communist Party	Identification of support from the State Council or the Communist Party (policy documents, news articles)
<i>Problem window</i> A policy window opens in the problem stream if a condition puts the survival of the Communist Party at risk	Official rhetoric about the event (policy documents)
<i>Political window</i> A policy window opens in the political stream as a result of a perceived change in the national mood or leadership change in the Politburo or State Council	Identification of leadership change (policy documents, news articles) Official rhetoric (policy documents)
<i>Agenda-setting</i> An issue reaches the agenda if (a) a problem or political window opens; (b) the streams are ready for coupling; and (c) a policy entrepreneur promotes policy change	Identification of policy entrepreneurs (policy documents, news articles, journal articles)
<i>Policy adoption</i> A policy is adopted if top leaders publicly express support for a proposal or if there is consensus among policymakers regarding the substance of the proposal	Identification of political support from high-level individual(s) (news articles, policy documents)

by the Peking University School of Law. I collected English-language journal articles (see [Appendix 6](#)) through CAB Abstracts, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, using the search terms “poultry” combined with “market*” or “trade” in the title and “China” (or “Chinese”) in the title/abstract. I excluded articles that did not focus on mainland China.⁷ I downloaded the World Health Organization's Disease Outbreak News (DON) articles about China from the DON archive on the organization's website.

For data analysis, I used NVivo to code the news articles and spreadsheets for the other material. After having coded all documents, research assistants coded a randomly selected sample of the journal articles ($N = 45$) and news articles ($N = 63$). At least 80% of the articles or documents in each sample were coded identical. Codebooks are available in the appendices.

RESULTS

Problem stream: Live poultry sales recognized as public health threat

Scientists have identified China as a hotspot for zoonotic diseases, that is, diseases that are naturally transferred from vertebrate animals to humans (Liu et al., 2014; Osterholm, 2005; Wei et al., 2015). This is due to China's population size and density combined with vast amounts of wild and farmed animals (especially birds and pigs), often held in close proximity to humans, creating a breeding ground for (new) infectious diseases in humans and animals (Diamond, 1997; Ke & Han, 2007; Liu et al., 2014).

Live poultry sales in consumer and wholesales food markets create a risk for the emergence of (new) infectious diseases (Yang et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2014). Animals are slaughtered on the spot before taken home by the customer for consumption. Markets are favorable environments for the emergence, reassortment, and dissemination of pathogens because of the mix of different animal species from different farms and regions, and because (direct or indirect) contact between these animals and humans (Liu et al., 2015; Wan et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014).

Virtually all 90 journal articles on live poultry sales in markets in China analyzed for this study confirm the relationship between live poultry sales and disease outbreaks. The articles report the detection of influenza viruses in poultry markets, both in animals and in the market environment, for example, on knives, wastebins, chopping boards, and de-feathering machines. Moreover, a third of the articles ($N = 31$) even link live poultry sales to the risk of a pandemic. Notably, researchers have not only detected (new) viruses, but also mutations and reassortments, which is an indicator for pandemic risk.

In addition to contributing to scientific debate, these studies serve as policy feedback. Most of the journal articles ($N = 74$) are co-authored by one or more individuals based at Chinese government organizations, such as ministries, Animal Disease Control Centers, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Moreover, the main funders include Chinese government organizations such as the National Natural Science Foundation, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and provincial governments. Hence, information about the extent and seriousness of the issue directly loops back to policymakers.

The policy documents analyzed for this study confirm the existence of negative policy feedback and explicitly reiterate the causal link between live poultry sales and epidemic outbreaks. A 2004 National Patriotic Hygiene Commission report documented persisting shortcomings in hygiene at farmers' markets regarding the sales and slaughtering of live poultry. A 2009 government survey mentioned that a number of markets failed to implement best practices for epidemic prevention such as market rest days and separation of waterfowl from poultry (Ministry of Agriculture, 2009a). Moreover, similar policy instructions reappear during 2000–2020, often combined with words such as “strengthen” (*jiaqiang*) and “improve” (*jinyibu zuohao*), which indicates incomplete implementation and weak enforcement of existing policies.

News media also repeatedly discussed the causal link between live poultry sales in markets and the emergence of infectious diseases. More than 85% of all new articles on live poultry and markets analyzed for this study were either directly triggered by specific outbreaks or by (local) epidemic prevention policies. Especially prevalent were references to avian influenza and COVID-19.

Due to political sensitivity, government authorities in China may censor information and news about disease outbreaks. To illustrate, news about the H7N9 virus in 2013 first appeared on social media but was censored soon (Van den Dool, 2019). The government announced the novel virus three weeks later. In subsequent weeks, social media was closely monitored for H7N9 content (Chen & Zhang, 2013; Henochowicz, 2013). Similarly, government authorities initially suppressed information about the COVID-19 virus in late 2019. Notably, political sensitivity not only triggers the removal of messages but may also include administrative and criminal detainment. In fact, China criminalized the spread of rumors about epidemic outbreaks in 2015 (Van den Dool, 2019), which illustrates the sensitivity surrounding disease outbreaks.

Nevertheless, the issue of live poultry sales still appeared in news articles, suggesting that this aspect of epidemic outbreaks has not been censored or only in limited ways. Figure 1 provides evidence of this. Peaks in media attention ran parallel with major outbreaks, namely H5N1 avian influenza in 2005–2006, H7N9 avian influenza in 2013–2017, and COVID-19 in 2020.

In sum, the link between live poultry sales and the emergency of (new) diseases is widely acknowledged by both scientists and policymakers in China, and news media frequently discuss the issue, especially during epidemic outbreaks.

Policy stream: Obstacles to a national-level permanent ban on live poultry sales

To address public health risks from live poultry sales, the national government has adopted a mix of policy instruments. The policy documents and news articles analyzed for this study show both short-term and long-term policy responses to outbreaks. The former typically include isolation of infected areas and a ban on the sales, trade, and transportation of live poultry in those areas; enforcement of a product tracking system; increased animal inspections; improved disinfection; temporary market closures; and enforcement regarding illegal live poultry trade.

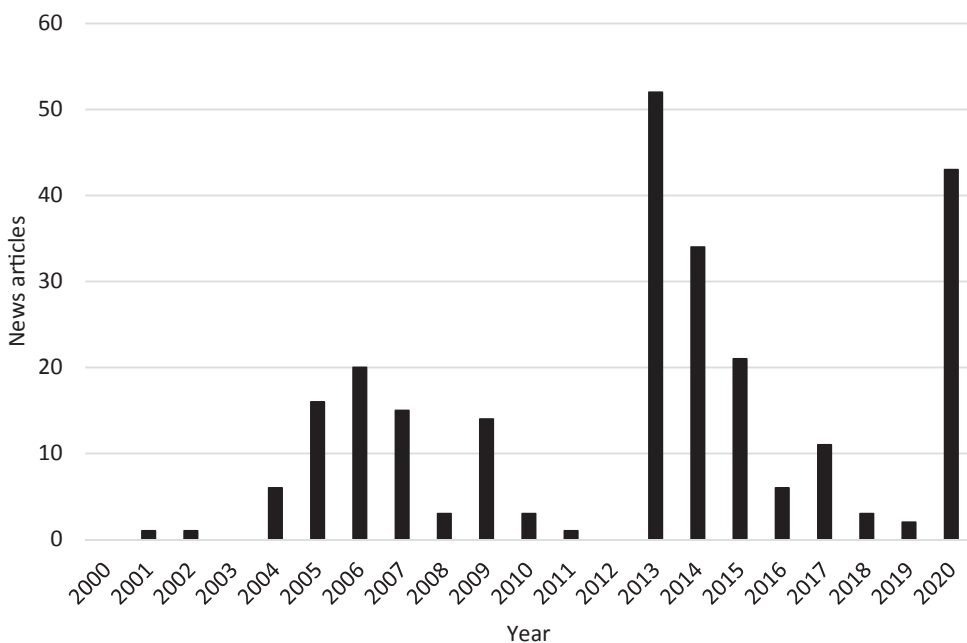


FIGURE 1 Chinese news articles on live poultry sales in food markets, 2000–2020

In terms of long-term policies, especially relevant are the “Rules for Live Poultry Trade in Markets to Prevent and Control Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza,” issued by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2006. These rules require, inter alia, a disinfection system, a tracing system for live poultry, segregation of poultry from other animals (including waterfowl), and physical separation between customers and the slaughtering site. Also relevant is the 2009 reform program for live poultry trade in markets, which aimed to implement the aforementioned Rules (Ministry of Agriculture, 2009b). More recently, the “1110 system” has been promoted, which prohibits markets from keeping unsold poultry overnight and requires daily cleaning and disinfection, weekly extensive cleaning, and monthly market rest days.

However, because public health risks continue to exist, a number of policy proposals have been put forward to further regulate live poultry sales. Table 2 lists the 10 most commonly recommended interventions in English-language journal articles. The evidence presented in Table 2 suggests consensus among Chinese scientists—many of whom are based at government organizations and/or are funded by the government—that increased and improved surveillance of markets, humans, and animals is necessary to detect (new) viruses before they mutate and spread. At the same time, and despite the above-mentioned existing government policies, almost a fifth of the articles stresses the need for improved cleaning, disinfection, and manure processing as well as separation of poultry from other animals. More than ten percent mention the need to separate poultry from other animals. These recommendations indicate incomplete implementation of existing policies. Other proposals include transportation restrictions, a ban on keeping live poultry overnight in food markets, and the protection of workers through, for example, education, vaccination, and protective equipment.

Temporary bans on live poultry sales have been implemented throughout the 2000–2020 period analyzed in this study and have been recommended by scientists (see Table 2) but support for a *permanent* ban is limited. Only nine (12%) out of the 74 English journal articles that contain policy recommendations propose permanently banning live poultry sales in food markets. This is despite scientific consensus that live poultry sales create opportunities not just for the spread of viruses, but also for mixing of different viruses, potentially leading to new harmful viruses.

A major obstacle to a national-level permanent ban is a strong cultural preference for slaughtered-on-the-spot poultry. The proposal for a permanent ban is thus inconsistent with existing norms and values of citizens, a key aspect of the policy stream. Retail supermarkets are increasingly common across China, but consumers still largely rely on food markets for meat because of perceived freshness (Si et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2020). According to the State Administration for Market Regulation, as of July 2020, more than 70% of poultry is purchased through farmers’ markets and wholesale markets (NHFP, 2020). Despite significant disease outbreaks, research shows limited support from citizens for

TABLE 2 The 10 most common policy recommendations in journal articles on live poultry sales

Policy recommendations	Articles (percentage)
Surveillance (markets, animals, humans)	57 (77)
Improved cleaning, disinfection, manure processing	14 (19)
Temporary ban on live poultry sales	13 (18)
Market rest days	9 (12)
Permanent ban on live poultry sales	9 (12)
Separation of poultry from other animals	9 (12)
Ban on keeping live poultry overnight	8 (11)
Transportation restrictions	5 (7)
Protection of poultry workers (e.g., protective equipment, vaccination)	5 (7)
Education	5 (7)

Note: Total number of articles containing one or more recommendations: 74. Articles may contain multiple proposals.

a permanent ban on live poultry sales (Wu et al., 2015; Yuan et al., 2014). This is also evidenced by the emergence of black markets during (temporary) market closures, which makes disease monitoring even more difficult (e.g., Lau, 2017; Liu, 2016; Wang, 2014).

Another obstacle to a ban is the substantial negative economic impact on the poultry industry. This lowers the financial viability of the proposal, which is another key aspect of the policy stream. Poultry is the second most consumed meat in China. A substantial share of China's poultry industry consists of small-scale farmers whose income relies on live poultry sales (Khokhar et al., 2015). Qi et al. (2014) show that just a two-month ban on live poultry sales during the 2013 H7N9 avian influenza outbreak caused a USD 1.25 billion loss in poultry sales in ten provinces alone. Permanently banning live poultry sales thus has substantial impact on rural livelihoods. Moreover, a ban would affect poultry traders, which are often small businesses without modern slaughtering and refrigeration facilities, with only limited resources to upgrade their production process. Finding alternative employment is difficult for live poultry traders due to low education levels (Ma et al., 2014).

At the same time, because China's cold chain is still developing, the supply of fresh and frozen poultry products in retail stores is limited. To ease the transition from live poultry sales in food markets to retail stores, local governments are implementing a mandatory system of centralized slaughtering. In localities where this policy has been rolled out, consumers can only buy poultry that is already slaughtered instead of buying a live chicken on the market that is slaughtered right on the spot. However, the central slaughtering system has not yet been fully implemented.

In sum, various policy interventions have been proposed to address public health risks emanating from live poultry sales in markets. However, permanently banning live poultry sales receives only limited support from scientists based at Chinese (government) organizations. Such a ban faces several obstacles including limited public support, the emergence of black markets, economic losses for the poultry industry, and a lack of cold chain supply for fresh and frozen poultry products.

Political stream: High-level support for banning live poultry sales

As evidenced by Figure 2—which shows the ten most active policymaking stakeholders regarding live poultry sales in food markets—the issue of live poultry sales has received attention from policymakers and this has been the case for almost two decades (see Figure 4). As early as 2006, the State Council issued an opinion on reforming live poultry sales in markets, which expressed the view to “step by step cancel the sales and slaughtering of live poultry in markets in large cities” and to, instead, develop a system of central slaughtering facilities and promote the sales of fresh packaged poultry (State Council General Office, 2006). This opinion was a notable departure from previous State Council policies, which focused on outbreak containment through, for example, transportation bans, temporary market closures, and improved market management. The State Council reiterated the need to transition to central slaughtering facilities in policy documents issued in 2014 and 2020.

Likewise, the Ministry of Agriculture—the most important regulator in the area of live poultry as evidenced by Figure 2—called for “gradually extending central slaughtering” and to “reduce live poultry sales in markets as much as possible” as early as 2005 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2005). In 2014, the Ministry released a draft of the Livestock and Poultry Slaughtering Management Regulations, which banned poultry slaughtering in places other than designated slaughtering locations. However, the legislative process subsequently stagnated. The Regulations were included in the State Council's 2016 legislative plan, meaning they had reached the official decision-making agenda. However, these Regulations were no longer included in the 2017 and 2018 legislative plans. The Ministry of Agriculture (2018) downgraded the regulations to departmental rules in its 2018 plan for oversight of the slaughtering industry.

Another important regulator of live poultry sales, the State Administration for Market Regulation, also expressed the desire for a permanent ban. In response to the detection of the COVID-19 virus in a wholesale market in Beijing, the Administration announced in July 2020 a gradual phase out of

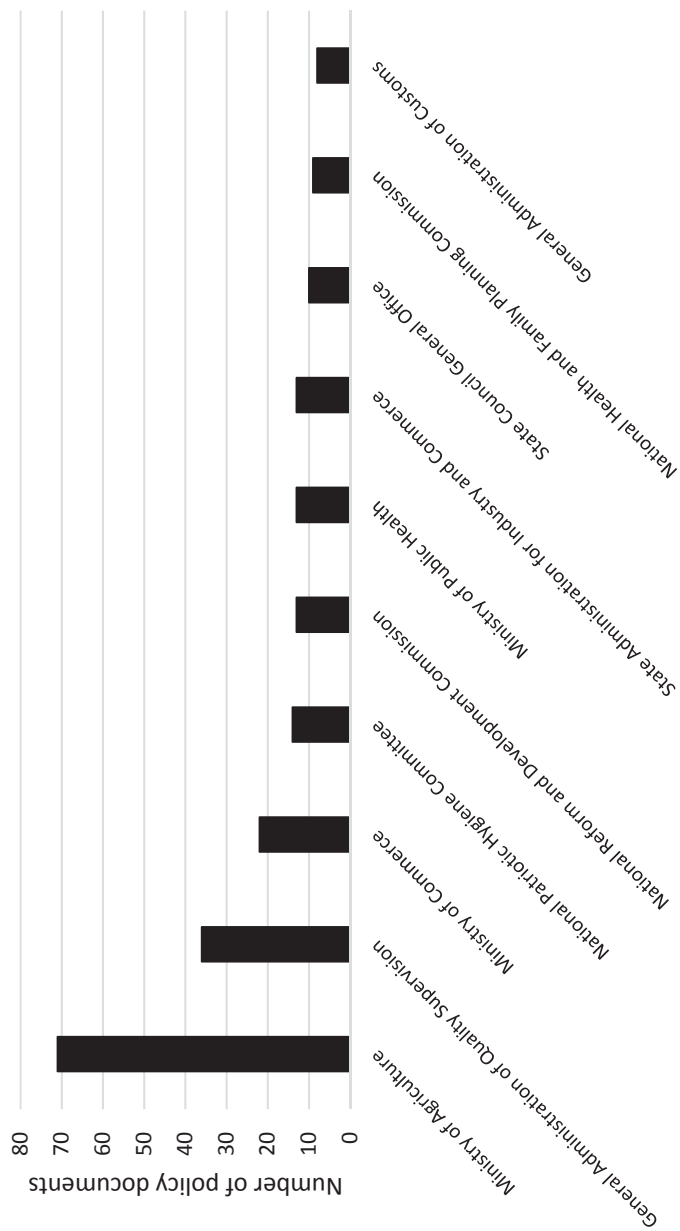


FIGURE 2 Policy documents mentioning “live poultry,” per government organization, 2000–2020

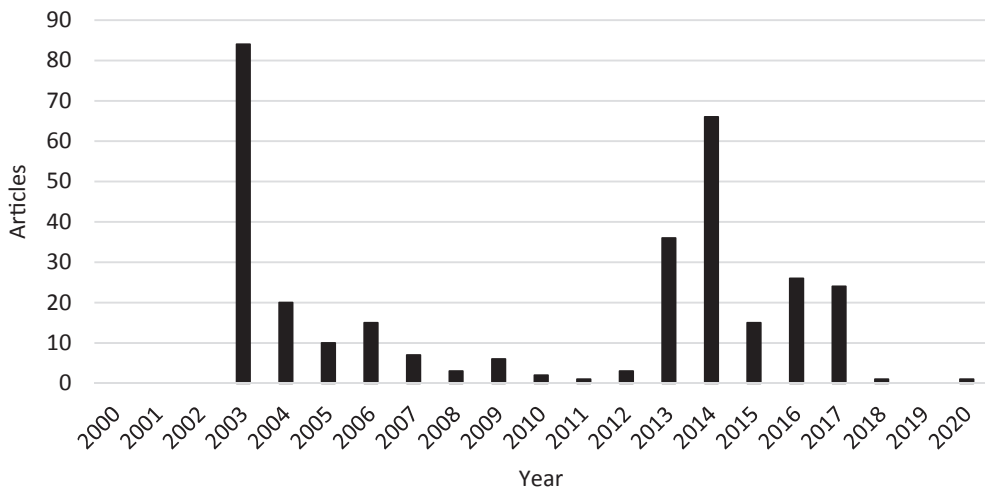


FIGURE 3 WHO Disease Outbreak News for China per year, 2000–2020

live poultry sales in food markets (National Health Commission, 2020). This Administration was established in 2018 and absorbed the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, both of which were key stakeholders in live poultry sales, as shown in Figure 2.

The State Council and several of its subordinate organizations such as the Ministry of Agriculture thus pay attention to the issue of live poultry sales and have shown support for a permanent national-level ban on live poultry sales in China. This means that the policy proposal fits the general ideology of the State Council, which is a key aspect of the political stream.

Multiple open problem windows

Based on the World Health Organization's Disease Outbreak News (DON), I identified outbreaks of four diseases during 2000–2020 in China, which is shown in Figure 3 and Appendix 8. The first disease, emerging in 2003, was SARS. It infected 5336 people in China, 349 of whom died. The second disease, recurring multiple times during 2004–2015, was H5N1 avian influenza. Despite no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission, the virus was considered to have pandemic potential and was therefore closely monitored by governments around the world. The third disease, emerging on multiple occasions from 2013 until widescale poultry vaccination in 2017, was H7N9 avian influenza. Like H5N1, this virus was considered to have pandemic potential. Moreover, both were directly linked to live poultry sales in food markets. The fourth disease, appearing in late 2019, was COVID-19. Rather than communicating about COVID-19 through Disease Outbreak News, the WHO instead used other channels. Hence the low number of DON items shown for 2020 in Figure 3.

While the overall number of cases and deaths (see Appendix 8) in these outbreaks was relatively low considering China's vast population, the point here is not the number of cases, but the high case fatality rate and pandemic potential. The case fatality rate was approximately 60% for H5N1 avian influenza and 40% for H7N9 influenza. Despite lower rates for SARS (5%–13% in China) and COVID-19 (5% in China), all these viruses (had potential to) spread from human-to-human, infecting thousands and millions, respectively, and leading to serious political consequences. SARS is considered to be one of the most serious threats to the Communist Party's legitimacy (Huang, 2004). The onset of COVID-19, too, triggered

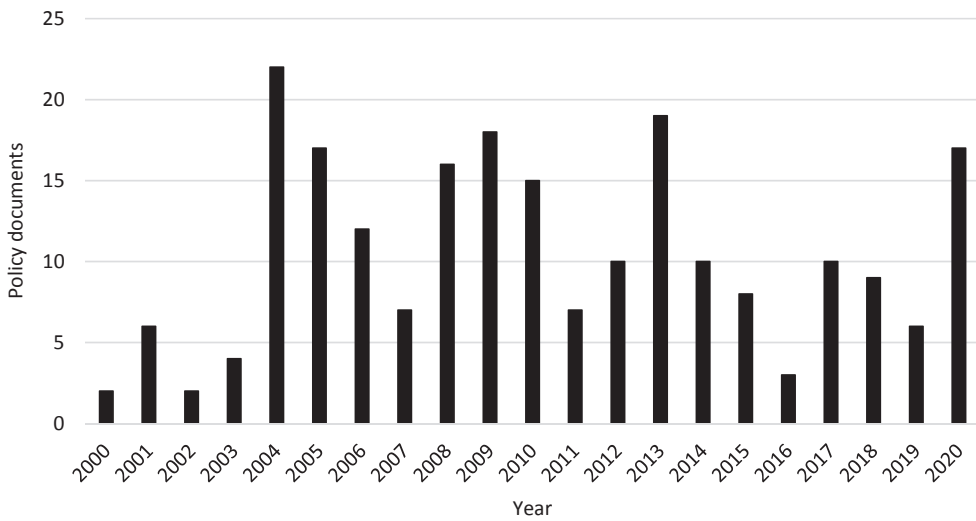


FIGURE 4 Number of policy documents mentioning “live poultry,” 2000–2020

domestic criticism toward the Chinese government. Disease outbreaks are thus pressing problems that provide an opportunity to advocate for a permanent national-level ban on live poultry sales in food markets.

Absence of a policy entrepreneur

There is no evidence of an individual policy entrepreneur advocating for a permanent national-level ban on live poultry sales in food markets. Instead, due to the interdisciplinary nature of live poultry sales, a multitude of actors is actively involved in the issue. The governmental policy community involved in the regulation of live poultry sales in food markets alone consists of a wide range of actors: 40 different government and Communist Party organizations were identified in the policy documents analyzed for this study.

Figure 2 shows the 10 most active policymaking stakeholders regarding live poultry sales in markets, which include the Ministry of Agriculture; the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine; and the Ministry of Commerce. In terms of live poultry sales in relation to avian influenza, the most active actors are the Ministry of Agriculture, the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, and the Ministry of Health. This shared responsibility is also made explicit in multiple policy documents. Even though the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, and the State Administration for Market Regulation have all expressed the desire to phase out live poultry sales, none of these government organizations has publicly announced a timeline or roadmap for doing so.

Agenda-setting without policy adoption

As shown above, Chinese policymakers are aware of the public health risks brought about by live poultry sales and their attention to the issue increases during epidemic outbreaks. This is captured in Figure 4, which shows the number of policy documents that mention “live poultry” combined with “markets” or “trade” at least once during the period 2000–2020.

All attention peaks were directly triggered by disease outbreaks. The first peak appeared in 2004, which was caused by H5N1 avian influenza: 19 of 22 policy documents issued in 2004 mention avian

TABLE 3 Case study results: MSF hypotheses and relevant evidence

Hypothesis	Evidence
<i>Confirmed hypotheses</i>	
<i>Problem stream</i> A condition reaches the policymaking agenda if an indicator changes to the negative, a harmful focusing event occurs, or if a government program does not work as expected, unless the condition is politically sensitive and censored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator: four different diseases during 2000–2020 each with 30–100,000 deaths • Policy feedback: scientists link live poultry sales to (specific) outbreaks; policy documents on live poultry sales mention avian influenza; multiple government documents on failed policy implementation • Focusing events: four different (potentially) pandemic diseases during 2000–2020 • No or only limited censorship regarding live poultry sales
<i>Political stream</i> A policy proposal reaches the policymaking agenda if it fits the general ideology of the State Council or the Communist Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for permanent ban: State Council, Ministry of Agriculture, State Administration for Market Regulation
<i>Problem window</i> A policy window opens in the problem stream if a condition puts the survival of the Communist Party at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disease outbreaks are a potential threat to the Communist Party's legitimacy, most clearly observed during SARS
<i>Unconfirmed hypotheses</i>	
<i>Policy stream</i> A proposal reaches the policymaking agenda if the proposal is financially viable, technically feasible, and consistent with existing norms and values of policymakers and citizens, but only if it is non-regime threatening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various solutions are proposed, including ban • Ban not perceived as regime-threatening • However, negative tone toward permanent ban: limited public support, emergence of black markets, economic losses for the poultry industry, limited availability of fresh and frozen poultry products
<i>Political window</i> A policy window opens in the political stream as a result of a perceived change in the national mood or leadership change in the Politburo or State Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No political windows have been observed based on the dataset used in the case study
<i>Agenda-setting</i> An issue reaches the agenda if (a) a problem or political window opens; (b) the streams are ready for coupling; and (c) a policy entrepreneur promotes policy change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Live poultry” frequently mentioned in policy documents during 2000–2020 and government-sponsored research on live poultry sales • No evidence of a policy entrepreneur
<i>Policy adoption</i> A policy is adopted if top leaders publicly express support for a proposal or if there is consensus among policymakers regarding the substance of the proposal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level support: State Council, Ministry of Agriculture, State Administration for Market Regulation • Draft Regulations (not passed) included a ban • No further evidence of a national-level ban

influenza as the trigger for the document. A second, smaller peak appeared in 2009, which was again triggered by avian influenza: four human cases (including three fatal) were reported in December 2008 and January 2009. As a result, 6 out of 18 documents issued in 2009 refer to avian influenza as trigger. The peak in 2013 was triggered by avian influenza H7N9: 12 out of 19 documents mention avian influenza as trigger event. The H7N9 virus was detected for the first time in humans in February that year in Shanghai. Finally, the 2020 peak was triggered by COVID-19.

The issue of live poultry sales in food markets reached the national-level policy agenda multiple times during 2000–2020, but no national-level permanent ban has been adopted. Despite the COVID-19 induced July 2020 announcement by the State Administration for Market Regulation to gradually phase out live poultry sales in food markets, no timeline has been released. This response is in stark contrast with the ban on selling and consuming wild animals, which was also announced in response to COVID-19. The National People's Congress subsequently started to revise the Wild Animals Protection Law. However, when it comes to live poultry sales in food markets, policies to restrict live poultry sales have instead been adopted by individual provinces and cities. Such policies may include a (temporary or

partial) ban. At the same time, policies differ between localities and are not always fully implemented or enforced. This is evidenced by frequent news reports of illegal sales of live poultry.

DISCUSSION

The case study showed that epidemic outbreaks and research on live poultry sales in China—mostly conducted by government affiliated and/or government sponsored researchers—have repeatedly highlighted the public health risk emanating from live poultry sales in food markets. Policy documents acknowledge this risk and repeatedly mention unsatisfactory policy implementation. The problem stream was thus mature. In the political stream, the State Council as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and State Administration for Market Regulation—both subordinates of the State Council—all expressed support for a permanent ban. The proposal of a ban thus fits with the general ideology of the State Council, which means that the political stream was also mature. At the same time, several consecutive epidemic outbreaks opened multiple problem windows. SARS showed that such epidemic outbreaks can threaten the legitimacy of the Communist Party. Hence, the problem window hypothesis is also corroborated. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

Contrary to my expectations based on the adjusted MSF hypotheses, the issue of live poultry sales and the solution of a permanent ban reached the policy agenda despite (a) such a ban being technically infeasible, financially inviable, and inconsistent with existing values and norms and (b) the absence of a policy entrepreneur. The permanent ban was technically infeasible in the sense that China's cold chain for poultry is underdeveloped with most poultry still sold at markets rather than in retail grocery stores. A ban's negative financial impact on the poultry industry makes it—at least until the cold chain is fully developed—financially unattractive. And finally, consumers show limited support for a ban and black markets have been reported in areas where live poultry sales in food markets have been banned. This means that a national-level permanent ban is inconsistent with existing values and norms. The case study findings are thus inconsistent with the policy stream and agenda-setting hypotheses. Moreover, despite support for a permanent, national-level ban on live poultry sales in food markets, this has not been adopted. This is (at least partly) inconsistent with the policy adoption hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

This paper adjusted existing MSF hypotheses to authoritarian China and tested these in a case study that examined why national-level policymakers in China have not permanently banned live poultry sales in food markets, despite public health risks emanating from this practice. The study shows that despite the public health threat posed by live poultry sales and despite high-level political support, a national-level permanent ban has not been adopted because it is technically infeasible, financially inviable, and inconsistent with existing norms and values.

This study addresses several research gaps in the MSF and policymaking literature. First, I systematically reviewed and adjusted existing MSF hypotheses to authoritarian China, which is exactly what Herweg et al. (2018) called for. The study also responds to existing MSF applications to China that identify differences between China and democracies but stop short of clear and justified modifications. Failure to do so not only undermines the framework's explanatory power but also impedes MSF theory development regarding nondemocratic contexts. The proposed adjustments and the subsequent operationalization as demonstrated in the case study pave the way for more *systematic* and *comparative* MSF research, both of which have been identified as research priorities (Cairney & Jones, 2016; Herweg et al., 2018).

Second, from a substantive perspective, the case study contributes to our understanding of authoritarian policymaking, particularly regarding the role of high-level leadership and the nature of policy solutions. Although the State Council and several of its subordinate executive departments

have expressed support for phasing out live poultry sales on multiple occasions since the mid-2000s, policymakers have not formally adopted a national-level permanent ban. While much remains unknown about the exact role of high-level leadership in policymaking in China, this confirms Tanner's (1999) argument that top-level leaders are less involved in policymaking than often assumed based on the country's authoritarian regime. I argue that a ban has not been adopted because of the immature policy stream, namely that it was technically infeasible, financially infeasible, and inconsistent with societal values. This suggests that policymakers in authoritarian China, despite the lack of direct political opposition and a top-down governance style—under certain conditions or in certain policy areas—avoid adopting policies that face major implementation challenges such as limited societal support.

Overall, the MSF is a useful lens to help explain agenda-setting and policy adoption in the case of live poultry sales in food markets in China. It showed that the combination of a mature policy stream, political stream, and problem windows contributed to agenda-setting of both live poultry sales and the solution of a potential ban. The immature policy stream helped explain why a permanent ban was not adopted despite high-level political and policy support.

This is the first English-language study that systematically adjusts the MSF to an authoritarian context and, consequently, much research remains to be done to test the proposed hypotheses. First, additional case studies are needed to determine the generalizability of this study's findings. A relevant contextual feature of the live poultry sales case is that subnational governments in China are authorized to—and to some extent do—regulate this issue (albeit in a fragmented way), which is not possible for issues that fall outside the scope of subnational legislative and policymaking power. Second, we need to better understand how the nature of policy proposals shapes non-adoption. In China's context, one promising pathway is an analysis of items that are included in the legislative plans of the State Council and the National People's Congress but have not been adopted. Third, to shed light on the role of high-level leadership in agenda-setting and policy adoption in China, I suggest distinguishing between abstract versus detailed proposals as recent research shows that post-event policy change in China is more likely when policy elites express detailed, concrete policy preferences (as opposed to vague or abstract proposals) (Liu, 2019). Fourth, political sensitivity warrants further study. If sensitive issues reach the "censorship agenda," how—if at all—are they addressed beyond censoring? And finally, because the case study showed that live poultry sales in China are mostly regulated at subnational levels in China, future research ought to examine local level policymaking. Here, a policy cycle perspective (Howlett et al., 2009) would be insightful as this covers not just agenda-setting and policy formulation (e.g., market rest days or improved hygiene), but also policy implementation, which is crucial given evidence of non-compliance.

Instead of adopting a national-level permanent ban, policymakers in China rely on a fragmented, incremental approach to regulate live poultry sales. National-level policies promote centralized slaughtering and the expansion of a cold supply chain (i.e., improved access to frozen and fresh poultry meat in supermarkets), while local governments increasingly regulate live poultry markets through mandatory rest days, intensification of hygiene measures, and closures.⁸ Poultry vaccination has also been used. Although a fragmented, incremental response may be the only feasible approach in China's current context, it does require long-term commitments to enforcement and disease surveillance. Until policymakers announce a timeline for fully phasing out live poultry sales and unless policymakers substantially increase resources for enforcement, education, and surveillance, outbreaks of (new) diseases linked to live poultry sales in food markets are likely to occur again in the future.

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ENDNOTES

1. Parts of this research appeared in my Ph.D. dissertation, titled “Never Again: Legal Change after Public Health Crises in China” (Van den Dool, 2019).
2. The search term “multiple streams theory” (*duoyuanli lilun*) in CNKI—the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a widely used Chinese database—resulted in 167 journal articles published between 2005–2020. Search conducted on 25 August 2020. The concept of the policy entrepreneur has received more attention, but these studies tend not to cover other key elements of the MSF (e.g., Hammond, 2013; Mertha, 2009; Zhu, 2012).
3. Only peer-reviewed articles with full text version available online have been included.
4. To allow for future comparative research, I have stayed as close as possible to the original wording. However, given that probabilistic hypotheses do not work well in case studies (Liebersson, 2000), I rephrased them into deterministic hypotheses.
5. In contrast to Herweg et al. (2018), I exclude the “problem broker” from the adjusted problem stream hypothesis. This concept is relatively new and except from Knaggård (2015), it has not been consistently integrated into the MSF literature. Moreover, the study’s scope is already rather extensive.
6. Note that 88 out of 90 articles were co-authored by at least one individual affiliated with a Chinese institution. This indicates that focusing on English-language journal articles does not constitute an undesirable non-Chinese bias in this particular case study.
7. Originally, the database searches yielded 120 unique English-language journal articles, but 30 articles were excluded for the following reasons: geographical focus not mainland China (19), full text not available (4), focus on aspects other than live poultry (e.g., food safety or food quality) (6), Chinese-language article (1).
8. According to Xinqinkuang—a Chinese online news channel on WeChat that specializes in poultry industry news—133 cities had implemented bans on live poultry sales in China as of July 2021. A reader survey showed that only in a third of the readers’ areas, live poultry sales have been completely banned. See Xinqinkuang (2021).

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