

Chapter 2

Exit, Voice, and Loyalty

Albert Hirschmann formulates individual choices in an organization or in a society as consisting of exit, voice, and loyalty. The organization can be a business organization, a political party, a non-profit civic organization, or anything. Irrespective of the nature, aim, and scope of the organization, individuals face three choices: exit, voice, and loyalty. Hirschmann's interest lies in the relationship among the three as conditions on the organizational quality of life deteriorate. The individual can get out if they don't want to stay; they can raise their hand and register constructive criticism for the betterment of the organization; or they can remain quiet while others harshly critique the organization, thus waving the flag of loyalty. As loyalty becomes a rare commodity, power shifts to those solid and loyal organizational members.

My interest is in what factors lead an individual in an Asian society to choose one of the three options of exit, voice, and loyalty. The factors that I am interested in the relation to quality-of-life components under varying Asian societal umbrellas.

The question we pose to respondents in the *AsiaBarometer Survey* interview is:

You requested a government permit. You were told to wait some time patiently. What would you do? Choose one from among the following seven choices: (1) use connections; (2) nothing can be done; (3) wait and hope that things will go well; (4) write a letter; (5) act without a permit; (6) bribe an official; (7) don't know.

The style of the question needs attention. The question assumes the context in which respondents would choose one of the seven actions. Why not adopt more straightforward questions like: Did you bribe an official? Or did you act without a permit? The most important factor for not posing these types of questions is the predominance of authoritarian politics in many of the 29 surveyed Asian societies. Respondents may not be as forthcoming and may distort their responses as saying that one bribed officials or that one operated a business without a permit, even in the form of a response to an interview, for instance, would cause severe hesitation. In many authoritarian regimes, public opinion companies are often tied to the internal security agency, thus making respondents legitimately apprehensive to answer honestly. Therefore, the direct straightforward question as adopted by the

Transparency International or some others when asking about bribes may not be appropriate in trying to attain responses not unnecessarily distorted.

The crux of the matter is whether the question posed elicits real honest responses. Here, the fundamental issue of getting responses through face-to-face interviews and getting verbal responses to an interviewee in survey research methodology comes up. My answer is that the survey research method has developed in societies where freedom of expression and democracy are reasonably solid. In an extremely authoritarian society where the phrase “open your mouth only to a dentist” is not a joke but has real meaning, survey methods require modification to suit the political reality. Nevertheless, polling has become such a popular practice in business, politics, and academic research for all kinds of society that it is difficult not to use it, even in an authoritarian political context. If that is the case, the wording of a question may as well be made to suit both free and unfree societies. And that is the choice we made in wording the question. Even when considering these restraints, responses can still be “distorted” by subtle and not so subtle changes of wording in a question.

From the Hirschmann framework of exit, voice, and loyalty, I have amalgamated four answers into two categories: “Use connections” and “bribe an official” are amalgamated into a broader voice and “nothing can be done” and “wait and hope” are amalgamated into a broader loyalty. Thus the response patterns move closer to the Hirschmann framework.

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