

# Contemporary Japanese Politics and Anxiety Over Governance

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## Chapter 4

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### **Japanese risk perceptions and anxiety over governance**

The international context of Japanese  
political anxiety

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## 4 Japanese risk perceptions and anxiety over governance

### The international context of Japanese political anxiety

#### Conceptualization of anxiety over governance

“Anxiety over governance” is a new key phrase to describe citizens’ perceptions of Japanese politics. In the following two chapters, we investigate its significance for Japanese politics and provide an overall understanding of how anxiety over governance is linked to the changes in the contemporary Japanese political landscape described in the first three chapters.

The phrase “political distrust,” which could be perceived to have a similar meaning to that of anxiety over governance, is everyday use. It has long been a subject of research in the context of political science in Japan. For example, the *Annals of the Japanese Political Science Association* published a special issue on “Trust and distrust in politics and public administrations” in 2010. The Japanese Association of Electoral Studies featured subjects related to political distrust up to four of the 13 issues of the *Election Study Book Series* in the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In his book titled *Trust and Distrust in Politics in Japan*, Zenkyo (2013) contrasted political trust and distrust, distinguished between cognitive trust–distrust and affective trust–distrust, and attempted to identify empirically the former as a source of variation in political distrust among Japanese people.

Political distrust is not a phenomenon unique to Japan. Leading scholars in the context of comparative politics in developed countries (Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Norris, 1999) have shown that trust in politicians, political parties, and parliaments declined over the last three decades of the 20th century in trilateral democracies in North America, Europe, and Japan.

However, Japanese political attitudes are not only similar to those in developed countries. The World Values Survey Sixth Wave (WVS6) Japan Survey (2010) identified a number of peculiarities in Japanese political attitudes compared with the responses of citizens in other countries. The high level of distrust in politics makes Japanese citizens less actively involved in governance and governmental affairs, and it is undeniable that the Japanese are bystanders in politics and government. In addition, while Japanese citizens are firm supporters of liberal democracy,

There is a marked tendency among them to be strongly hesitant to express their opinions publicly. The Japanese have a consistently strong tendency

to withhold opinions about matters beyond the everyday and about public events, including attitudes toward religion and the role of women in general, and they are hesitant to participate directly in politics.

(Ikeda, 2016, p. 299)

Withholding opinions and distancing oneself from politics does not resolve distrust in politics; on the contrary, distrust is preserved intact because of a lack of involvement.

Noting the contrast between this sense of distance in politics and the firm democracy cultivated by postwar Japanese people (Chapter 3), this chapter proposes a new concept of anxiety over governance. We believe that this key phrase captures a phenomenon that cannot be explained by political distrust. Many phenomena engender distrust in politics, such as various kinds of wrongdoing by politicians and administrators, overrepresentation or concealment of certain interests and pursuit of self-interest, overreaches of legitimate power, and lack of responsiveness to citizens. Political distrust leads to low opinions of the current and past state of politics and government.

On the other hand, we believe that anxiety over governance stems from citizens' gaze toward the future of the country. It arises from a sense of insecurity about the future, about what citizens believe or fear may occur in their country that rulers may be unable to control, and about what citizens may be unable to reverse if it happens, despite their strong support for democracy. As we will see in this chapter, this anxiety over governance is stronger in Japan than in other countries. While political distrust is not unique to Japan, anxiety over governance is unique to Japan especially among developed countries.

As we examine in detail below, the social risk perceptions of the Japanese outweigh their objective risk assessments. Their fears of war, civil war, and terrorism, as well as those of unemployment and failure to educate their children, are consistently greater than in other countries. We believe that this exaggerated perception of risks of social problems stems from low evaluations of the ability of their government or country as a whole to cope with problematic situations when they occur. We name this measure of excessive risk perception the Anxiety over Governance Index and use it as a measure of the extent to which anxiety impinges on governance in our analysis. We add "index" because it is a risk perception scale that gauges and indexes anxiety over governance, as we demonstrate in the following pages.

The analysis in this chapter proceeds as follows. First, we compare objective data and risk perceptions to highlight the inflated risk perceptions of Japanese people. Second, by analyzing the index of anxiety over governance based on responses to the same items of the WVS gathered three times in Japan in 2010, 2019, and 2020, we compare the index under the Democratic Party Japan (DPJ) administration in 2010, the Abe Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) administration in 2019, and in November 2020, when the same administration was in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. We also examine the stability of the index<sup>2</sup> and consider four issues: (1) If this index is a stable characteristic of the Japanese citizens, it should be commonly observed under the DPJ as well as LDP administration; (2)

has the COVID-19 pandemic further heightened anxiety over governance?; (3) is the pandemic indeed linked to perceptions of governance; and (4) is the Japanese response to the pandemic in line with theoretical predictions of anxiety over governance? (This is considered further in Chapter 5.)

Third, using the pooled worldwide WVS6 and WVS7 data (2010–2020), we examine whether the Japanese idiosyncrasies of anxiety over governance initially estimated from WVS6 data (Ikeda, 2019) can be stably observed in the period just before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis when the WVS7 data are measured. We also examine the determinants of anxiety over governance as a social risk perception at the global level.

Fourth, based on the analysis of the entire chapter, we theorize the conceptual position of anxiety over governance as “negative diffuse future expectations” and generate three hypotheses for analysis in the next chapter.

### **Excessive risk perception: The international position of Japanese anxiety over governance**

A question in WVS6 and WVS7, “To what extent are you worried about the following situations?” measured citizens’ perceived current and future risks related to home/family, such as losing or being unable to find a job or provide a good education for their children, related to their society and nation, such as war, terrorist attacks, civil war, or government wiretapping and censorship of letters and e-mails. These are risks related to the present and future of their society and nation. These do not so much reflect current problems as perceptions of risks at some future point in time. We believe that these perceptions indicate anxiety about whether their rulers can really control these risks.

Table 4.1 shows the position of the Japanese in these risk perceptions in the WVS6 and WVS7 data.<sup>3</sup> Overall, Japanese people rank relatively high in anxiety, although not exceptionally. Japan’s ranking between the two waves is slightly lower in the WVS7 for unemployment and civil war anxiety, but levels of education, war, and terrorism anxiety remain stable.

A factor analysis shows that responses to the five items common to waves 6 and 7 are unidimensional (by the principal factor method, we found only one factor with an eigenvalue of 1 or more: Table 4.2). This means that there is a common latent perception of these concerns. The factor score obtained here is what we call the Anxiety over Governance Index. The Japanese ranked 20th (out of 60 countries) in wave 6, and 24th (out of 48 countries) in wave 7.

The anxiety of the Japanese people is not very high in this index, but when it is correlated with objective risks and dangers, the justification for claiming it reflects excessive anxiety over governance by the Japanese becomes clearer. Let us consider the sixth and seventh waves in combination in relation to the objective data in the scatterplots. The peculiarities of the Japanese psychological perceptions of risk emerge.

First, consider the statistical ranking (on the objective index) of Japan’s unemployment rate. According to ILO data at the time of the sixth and seventh waves of



D) Terrorist attack			E) Civil war			F) Government wiretapping and censorship								
Wave 6			Wave 7			Wave 6			Wave 7					
Rank	Average score	Rank	Average score	Rank	Average score	Rank	Average score	Rank	Average score	Rank	Average score			
1	Tunisia	3.90	1	Myanmar	3.87	1	Tunisia	3.89	1	Myanmar	3.87	1	Malaysia	3.42
2	Rwanda	3.89	2	Ethiopia	3.66	2	Rwanda	3.85	2	Ethiopia	3.79	2	Georgia	3.15
3	Malaysia	3.65	3	Indonesia	3.66	3	Georgia	3.67	3	Kyrgyzstan	3.66	3	Mexico	3.15
4	Yemen	3.57	4	Kyrgyzstan	3.64	4	Malaysia	3.64	4	Zimbabwe	3.57	4	Tunisia	3.14
5	Mexico	3.57	5	Tunisia	3.55	5	Yemen	3.59	5	Indonesia	3.57	5		
13	Japan	3.38	15	Japan	3.29	24	Japan	2.92	31	Japan	2.58	55	Japan	2.96
56	Slovenia	2.15	44	New Zealand	2.28	52	New Zealand	1.72	42	Germany	1.76	55	New Zealand	1.82
57	New Zealand	1.99	45	Iran	2.26	53	Germany	1.67	43	Greece	1.72	56	Slovenia	1.75
58	Argentina	1.97	46	Hong Kong	2.23	54	Australia	1.66	44	Iran	1.65	57	Holland	1.68
59	Sweden	1.93	47	Argentina	2.23	55	Holland	1.39	45	Australia	1.58	58	Sweden	1.66
60	Holland	1.79	48	Macau	1.81	56	Sweden	1.31	46	New Zealand	1.55	59	Jordan	1.64

Note: This table shows the first five rank and the last five rank nations/regions in addition to the ranks of Japan.  
 Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6 and WVS7.

Table 4.2 Factor analysis of Anxiety over Governance Index

	<i>Factor loading</i>
Losing my job or not finding a job	0.486
Not being able to give one's children a good education	0.549
A war involving my country	0.883
A terrorist attack	0.890
A civil war	0.879
Variance explained	2.883
(%)	57.656

Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6 and WVS7.

the survey,<sup>4</sup> Japan's unemployment rate was 42nd out of 60 countries in WVS6, and as low as 45th out of 48 countries in WVS7. Next, in terms of the average number of years of education for children, Japan ranks 15th out of 59 countries for which objective data are available (WVS6) and a relatively high third out of 46 countries (WVS7). Furthermore, in terms of war, terrorism, and civil wars in Japan, the Global Peace Index (from the Economist Intelligence Unit in the UK) shows that Japan ranks second in both the WVS6 and WVS7 periods, making it one of the most peaceful countries in the world, at least in these time periods. Finally, in terms of indicators related to eavesdropping and censorship, Japan ranked seventh out of 60 countries (WVS6) in the Freedom of the Press Ranking (Freedom House, 2010) and fifth in the Freedom of the Internet Ranking (Freedom House, 2013).<sup>5</sup>

Japanese anxiety over governance exceeds the ranks examined above, as may be seen in the scatterplot of the index of some of the objective data.

From Figure 4.1, we see that Japan is a country with high anxiety (high average index scores) despite its relatively low unemployment rate. If we draw a diagonal line from the lower left to the upper right of the figure, the countries located above the line have higher anxiety than the objective measures. Japan is one of these countries, although it is not unique.

Considering its relationship with average years of education (Figure 4.2), Japan is not a clear outlier, but if we draw an upward left diagonal line in the figure, countries with people who worry excessively are located in the upper right and those who worry too little are located in the lower left. It becomes obvious that Japan is one of the countries with considerable excess anxiety, although it declined slightly in the seventh wave.

Next, let us examine the relationship of anxiety with the Global Peace Index score (Figure 4.3). The results show that Japan is quite distinct in that objective risk and the psychological index of anxiety scores are not correlated. In relation to the right-hand ascending diagonal line if we were to draw one, Japan is an outlier located in the upper left-hand quadrant.

While it could be argued that the peace score reflects the unique situation in East Asia, the fact that concern about civil war, which is in the same outlier





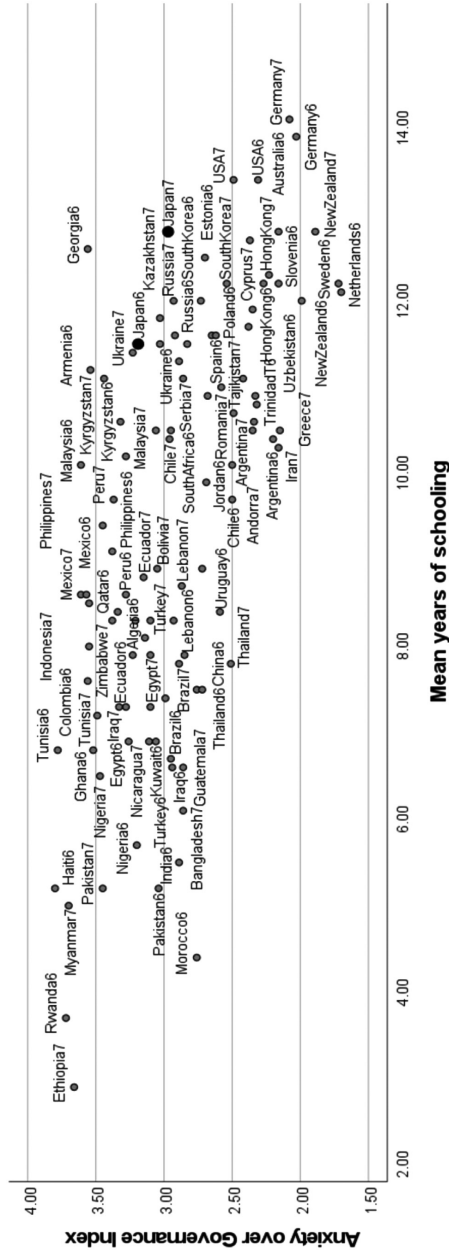


Figure 4.2 Anxiety over Governance Index and mean years of schooling. (Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6, WVS7, and UNDP [United Nations Development Programme].)

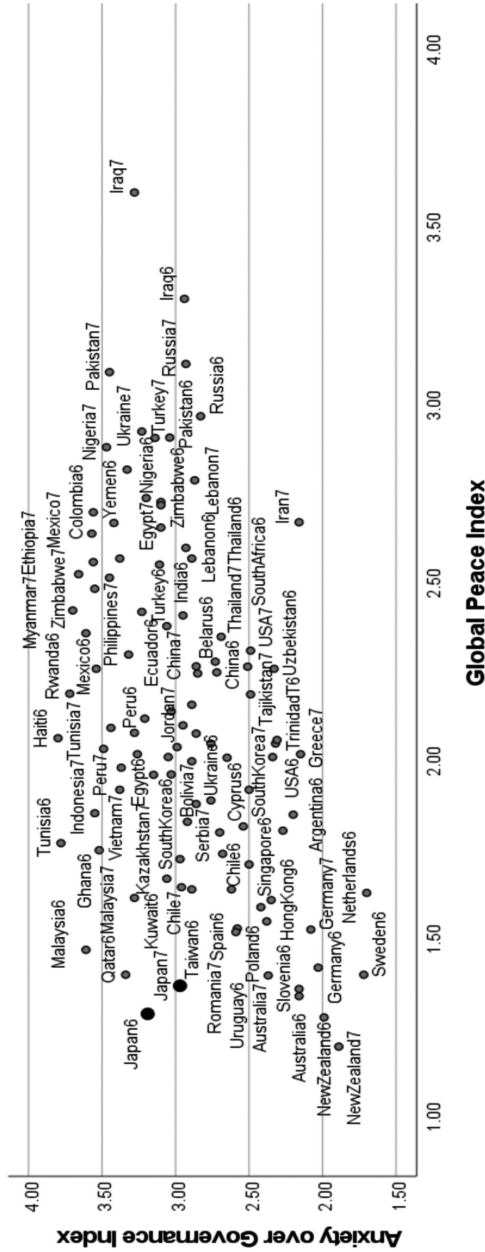


Figure 4.3 Anxiety over Governance Index and the Global Peace Index. (Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6, WVS7, and Global Peace Index.)

position, has similar results even though it is not directly related to geopolitics suggests that the situation in East Asia is not the reason. Anxiety about war is much higher in Japan, even though it has had the same peace scores as Sweden and New Zealand over waves 6–7.

The scatterplot of the Anxiety over Government Index and the Freedom of Press Index<sup>6</sup> again shows that Japan is an outlier (Figure 4.4). There is a gap between the index of anxiety and objective reality, and subjective anxiety is higher.

In more detail on the reality of Japanese international and domestic situations, the WVS6 Japan data was obtained in November–December 2010, and the WVS7 was conducted in September 2019. Therefore, it is conceivable that the worsening confrontation between Japan and China triggered by a Chinese fishing boat collision incident near the Senkaku Islands (of which ownership is “disputed” by Japan and China) in September 2010 and the sense of crisis caused by North Korea’s series of missile tests in 2017 (North Korea has been at odds with Japan for many years over abductions of Japanese citizens) somehow affected risk perception in both WVS6 and WVS7. However, the scores on fears of war are highly correlated with those of civil war and terrorism, with 0.62 and 0.76 in WVS6 and 0.63 and 0.77 in WVS7, respectively, and they are stable. There is no reason why the perceived risk of civil war or terrorism would be consistently high against the background of friction with neighboring countries, so it is unlikely that external friction is the cause. In addition, Japan’s most recent civil war was the Satsuma Rebellion (1877), and no civil war is currently imminent. Moreover, among the risks to family and professional life, the widening gap in unemployment, which has been a focus of attention since the latter half of the Koizumi administration, continued into the late 2010s, and it can be pointed out that there is a similar rationale for educational opportunities, but these are still outlier risk perceptions in international rankings.<sup>7</sup>

What are the implications of these consistent gaps? In terms of the actual reality measured by the source of anxiety, Japanese citizens are not in a situation where they are worried that they might starve to death tomorrow. It may also be argued that Japanese people are not in a situation where society and politics cannot protect citizens from national conflict. Then there may be no point in focusing on anxiety over governance.

However, we would like to emphasize that anxiety over Japanese governance is not an existential threat, such as hitting absolute rock bottom and being unable to recover, but rather a sense of decline, known as relative deprivation (Merton, 1957). Relative deprivation is the feeling that compared with others or in temporal comparison with one’s own past, one is being unfairly deprived of rights, happiness, and benefits, and that one’s projected future is worse than that of others or a past situation. It is a sense of anticipation and fear that society as a whole is falling, arising from a lack of ability and foresight on the part of those who govern. The index here reflects that sense, and that is why we consider it to be an index. Deprived citizens visualize a future of the country wherein they should be able to enjoy more peace and be more secure in their jobs. In reality, however, the future appears to be highly risky. In other words, we think of this index as one of fear of being deprived of a reality that should be more risk-free.



The excessive anxiety relative to objective evidence reflects a fear of the possibility that objective reality will fall to that subjective level of risk. In this sense, Japanese citizens are expressing a fear of deprivation that may occur in the future, a fear that the peace, employment, and development that this country has achieved from the end of World War II to the present will come crashing down. As our analysis in Chapters 1 and 2 suggests, the deterioration of the political environment, including the lack of alternative political options and the decline of social capital, raises the specter of relative deprivation in the future, which is reflected in anxiety over governance.

We will demonstrate the significance of this anxiety over governance in Japanese politics. Before we extensively examine this area, we wish to introduce a study that supports this argument. Tanabe (2020) analyzed data on 20–40-year-old Japanese generations from 2007 to 2018 and found that nearly 30% of this age group persistently perceived that their “living conditions will deteriorate in 10 years,” a genuine anticipation of decline. He examined whether this perception drove politics and the results were negative. He concludes that pessimists, despite their perceptions, are on the sidelines rather than driving politics from there.

It can be further inferred from the following scatterplot of the Freedom House score that this premonition of deprivation is related to perceptions of governance. Figure 4.5 clearly shows that while enjoying the governance under the highest class of democracy (the lowest Freedom House score), the Japanese score high on the index of anxiety over governance. They are positioned far from the right ascending diagonal line. This implies that excessive anxiety should be examined in terms of perceptions of democratic governance.

Therefore, this chapter examines the structure of excessive risk perception as an index of anxiety over governance and shows that this perception is relevant to judgments about governance. In the next chapter, we examine risk perceptions and government evaluation more directly in relation to the COVID-19 crisis of 2020.

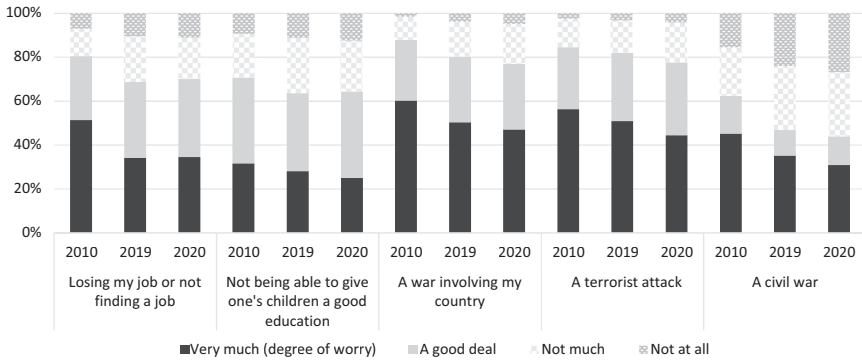
### **The index of anxiety over governance: Japanese data 2010–2020**

Does the uniqueness of Japanese people’s anxiety over governance depend on the views of a particular generation or group of people? First, let us examine the Japanese on the WVS data, i.e., three surveys conducted in Japan using the same questions: WVS6 and WVS7 conducted in 2010 and 2019, as well as a resurvey of WVS7 at the end of 2020.

Figure 4.6 shows the risk perception items used to create the Anxiety over Governance Index. Over the three years, perceived risk has declined for all items. The mean values of the governance anxiety factor for each of the three surveys are 0.15,  $-0.08$ , and  $-0.18$ , respectively.<sup>8</sup> There was a statistical difference between the first and the second surveys, as well as the first and third surveys, with the first having a higher value for the index (factor score) of anxiety over governance.

Next, we examine the relationship of this index with various factors that may explain it.





*Figure 4.6* Japanese risk perception items for Anxiety over Governance Index. (Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6, WVS7, and WVS7 [2020 Japan].)

### *Variable selection and hypothesis generation*

To select variables to explain anxiety over governance, we consider differences in the following three factors:

1. Demography
2. Attitudes toward institutions responsible for addressing risk situations
3. Values related to perceived societal goals

The demographic variables to be examined in greater detail are gender, age, education, and employment status.<sup>9</sup> When governance is poor, the socially vulnerable are more likely to be affected than the strong. Therefore, being female, young, having less education, and being unemployed will increase insecurity.

Second, we will examine attitudes toward institutional factors that can prevent risky situations. If institutions responsible for protecting people's safety and security are effective and trusted, perceived risks will be reduced. A factor analysis of the institutional trust items in the WVS Japan data yields four dimensions (promax rotation by the maximum likelihood method was used). The four dimensions, in order of eigenvalue, are trust in political and administrative institutions, trust in voluntary organizations, trust in social control and infrastructure institutions, and trust in media institutions. Among these, the first and the third institution factors may be directly related to the perception of responsibility for coping with national issues. If we can trust those institutions, we can expect to feel less anxious over governance. If trust in political institutions is perceived to be important in handling the COVID-19 crisis experience, this correlation will increase in 2020.

Among the other dimensions of institutional trust, trust in the mass media may lead us to speculate whether the press has any effect on anxiety over governance.

This may also vary by year. The extent of news coverage of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 was unusual, as no comparable crisis was reported in 2010 or 2019.

Whereas the effects of institutional trust will reflect the perceived responsiveness of the social institutions responsible, we should also consider the perceived effectiveness of governance on democracy, i.e., evaluation of governance operations. As suggested in Figure 4.5, objective measurement of democratic governance was generally positively correlated with the index, as we expect perceived democratic governance will be. To measure this, we used the question: “how democratically is this country being governed today?” (WVS7, Q251). We predict that greater perceived democracy would be associated with lower anxiety. The presumption is that if the country is well governed in a democratic manner, then risks are more likely to be avoided or at least believed to be avoidable. We might call this confidence in the performance of democracy. We assume this holds true for the Japanese because the belief in the importance of democratic values for governance is widely shared (see the analysis of the WVS in Chapter 3).

Third, we enter social participation, political participation, and interest in politics as control variables. As for the social participation and political participation factors, both of which have a high level of involvement in society, they may be expected to lead to a broad view and awareness of society. However, it is not clear whether this will lead to excessive risk perceptions, and we would like to use this as an RQ (Research Question). The interest in politics variable is expected to correlate with anxiety over governance, as interest in politics leads to a more sensitive awareness of social problems and issues.

Fourth, we examined the values that influence the goals of a society. The difference between materialistic and post-materialistic values, which is well known from the WVS, is based on the view that human behavior and orientation differ depending on whether the goal of society is to seek material fulfillment, such as satisfying physiological needs and the desire for safety or nonmaterialistic satisfaction, such as freedom of speech or having more say in politics. According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, which was the source of this logic, at the lower levels of human needs, materialistic values are prioritized, and we assume that corresponding perceptions of risk are likely to arise.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, people with high materialism scores are more likely to perceive risks in their lives and be more sensitive to social and national risks such as war, terrorism, and civil war are also directly related to material scarcity. Thus, materialism as a whole would be positively correlated with anxiety over governance. Because the correlation between the materialism and post-materialism scales is 0.71, the latter is not included in the analysis. Conceptually, it is more appropriate to include the former.<sup>11</sup>

## **Results and discussion**

The results of the ordinary least-squares (OLS) model with no interactions with survey year are shown in Table 4.3 (Model 1). None of the expected interactions were statistically significant.



Table 4.3 Determinants of Anxiety over Governance Index: Japan data 2010–2020

<i>Anxiety over Governance Index</i>	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>Coefficient t</i>		<i>Coefficient t</i>	
2019 survey dummy	-0.13	-2.83 **	-0.11	-2.35 *
2020 survey dummy	-0.28	-5.98 ***	-0.25	-5.55 ***
Institutional trust 1 Political institutions	-0.03	-0.85	-0.07	-2.04 ***
Institutional trust 2 Voluntary organizations	0.05	1.68 +	0.07	2.28 *
Institutional trust 3 Social control institutions	0.07	1.70 +	0.04	0.88
Institutional trust 4 Media organizations	0.08	2.43 *	0.09	2.59 *
Perceived national democratic governance	-0.05	-4.56 ***		
Social participation	-0.01	-0.65	-0.01	-0.57
Political participation	-0.04	-1.55	-0.04	-1.84 +
Interest in politics (rev)	-0.10	-3.53 ***	-0.09	-3.19 **
Materialism	0.02	2.05 *	0.01	1.57
Gender	0.31	8.62 ***	0.32	9.30 ***
Age	0.00	1.43	0.00	0.66
Education	-0.08	-4.01 ***	-0.10	-5.04 ***
Employed	0.03	0.75	0.03	0.68
City size	0.02	1.51	0.03	1.85 +
Constant	-0.37	-1.91 +	-0.47	-2.49 *
R-squared	0.08	***	0.07	***
N	3,072		3,318	

0.05 <  $p$  < 0.1 +, 0.01 <  $p$  < 0.05 \*, 0.001 <  $p$  < 0.01 \*\*,  $p$  < 0.001 \*\*\*.

Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6, WVS7, and WVS7 (2020 Japan).

First, the effect of demographic variables on the index of anxiety over governance is characterized by the following findings. Women are more anxious than men, and the lower their level of education, the more anxious people are. In other words, insecurity is higher among the socially vulnerable, as expected.

Second, it is difficult to see obvious and strong associations between the majority of the factors of institutional trust. Among these factors, only institutional trust in the media (TV and newspapers/magazines) showed a significant difference, and the more the media are trusted, the higher the anxiety. The results reinforce the conjecture that elements of the social information conveyed by the media increase anxiety over governance, echoing Pharr's (2000) argument about political distrust.<sup>12</sup>

With respect to interest in politics, the greater the interest, the higher the anxiety, which may be related to the level of contact with social information (coverage of events, disputes, and conflicts). Furthermore, the expected effect was found for materialism, but no effect was found for social capital such as social and political participation.

The perceived degree of democratic governance was negatively associated with the index of anxiety over governance, as predicted. The more people believe

in democratic governance, the lower the perceived risk in Japan. Although no effect of trust in political institutions on trust in government was found in Model 1, we argue that the effect of perceived democracy on governance anxiety will increase when people perceive democracy to be rooted in society as a stable institutional system and well governed. In light of the fact that the effect of trust in political institutions becomes significant when the OLS is recalculated without the perceived governance variable (Model 2), the perception of the degree of democracy appears to be linked to trust in political institutions (the correlation between the two is 0.37), and institutional trust indirectly determines anxiety over governance.

The effect of the year of the survey dummy variables on the level of index is clear, with the highest level of anxiety in 2010, followed by 2019 and 2020.<sup>13</sup> The anxiety has fallen in stages. One reason for the weakening of governance anxiety in 2020, a survey year in which the COVID-19 crisis was not yet resolved, may be that the index of anxiety of governance itself did not include anxiety items associated with the pandemic. We can speculate that this is because the relative anxiety of the five items measured here, such as war, was lower than the overwhelming anxiety about the pandemic. However, considering that anxiety over governance in 2019 was also lower than in 2010, it is certain that Japanese people's anxiety over governance was reduced in the nine years since 2010. It is possible that this is because of the more stable governance of the LDP's long-term Abe administration (2019) compared with that of the DPJ administration (2010). Rather than ideological factors,<sup>14</sup> this could be attributed to a long-term administration, which is rare in Japan, leading to the perception of stable governance.<sup>15</sup> However, as we have seen in this chapter's section "Excessive risk perception," even in 2019, the level of anxiety was much higher than the objective risk. This inflated anxiety emerged clearly during the COVID-19 crisis (see Chapter 5).

The overall explanatory power of this analysis is not high. This may imply that the high Japanese perceptions of risks are considerably more widely shared across society than is explained by the effects of a particular group of Japanese who share a social or psychological characteristic.<sup>16</sup> This view informs the logic of the last section of this chapter, "The conceptual position of anxiety over governance," which considers the overall high anxiety over governance to be diffuse anxiety.

### **Country-fixed effects model analysis of Japanese anxiety over governance: Global comparison**

Next, we examine where the Japanese people stand in relation to the rest of the world, and whether there are differences in the structure of Japanese anxiety over governance compared with that in other countries, using international comparative data spanning two waves – WVS6 and WVS7 – over about a decade. As in Chapter 3, we conducted a country-fixed effects model analysis, controlling for differences among the countries. The number of countries and regions that could be used in the analysis without missing values in the dependent variable as well as with having both waves of data were 32, i.e., 64 surveys in total.<sup>17</sup>

In the analyses, we tried to keep the independent variables in the previous section as much as possible. However, many surveys from WVS lacked the city size and social participation independent variables, so they could not be included. Also, when we conducted a factor analysis of institutional trust across WVS6 and WVS7, we identified trust in political institutions, voluntary organizations, and media institutions, but we were unable to identify trust in social control institutions, so this is not included as an independent variable.<sup>18</sup> As country-level variables, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, Freedom House score, and the wave 7 dummy are also included. GDP per capita is an objective indicator of material wealth, and the Freedom House score is an objective indicator of democratic governance, so these are considered in the analysis as control variables.

Finally, country dummy variables (Japan as a reference) are introduced at two points, for the differences in the intercept (basic level of the Anxiety over Governance Index) and the differences in the effect of perceived national democratic governance.

Based on the discussion on the WVS analyses in Chapter 3 and on the Japanese data analysis in the previous section in this chapter, we posit that the Japanese peculiarity on the Anxiety over Governance Index would emerge at two points. The first point is the overall level of anxiety, which is higher than the objective, and the second is that confidence in a country's democratic governance will lower that anxiety. By examining these two points, the implications of country-specific differences will be clarified. In particular, it is important to examine whether the effect of institutional evaluation to support liberal democracy is particularly strong in Japan among the various countries in the world that differ in their political systems and their evaluation of democratic governance. As the Japanese are strong supporters of liberal democracy, as seen in Chapter 3, it will be good news for them if their support alleviates their anxiety over governance. The same could be true for citizens in other countries.

We show the result table in the Chapter Appendix Table 4.4, as it is very large. Based on the table, firstly, Model 1 reveals that anxiety over governance is higher for women, younger people, the less educated, and those who are employed in the world context. The results, except for employment, are the same as those from the Japanese data.

Similarly, the lower the perceived evaluation of democratic governance is, the greater the trust in voluntary organizations, the higher the political interest, and the higher the level of materialism, all of which lead to higher anxiety over governance, i.e., the results are mostly consistent with the Japanese results. The main difference may be that the effect of trust in media institutions was not significant, possibly because media coverage varies from country to country, and some countries (often intentionally) exclude content that could prompt governance concerns. The effect of GDP per capita and the Freedom House score were not found. Their effects were absorbed in the effects of countries (basic regression without country clusters shows both effects are highly significant).

Looking at country-level differences in the intensity of anxiety over governance, 11 of the 32 countries/regions (14 if marginal significance is included) are

significantly less anxious than Japan, which is in the reference category. The United States, Germany, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, which are among the major OECD countries, all had lower anxiety over governance than Japan. No country had statistically higher levels of anxiety over governance than Japan, but Mexico, Colombia, and Turkey were among the OECD countries that did not differ from Japan. However, GDP per capita in these countries was much lower than Japan's and was four to six times smaller than Japan's in both wave 6 and wave 7 of the WVS.<sup>19</sup> In addition, there were 15 non-OECD countries (17 if the marginals are included) that did not differ from Japan. In other words, Japan had a high-risk perception that differed from that of countries with high economic development, and furthermore, no country had a risk perception significantly higher than that of Japan.

Next, we extend Model 1 by examining the effects of the country dummies as a function of evaluation of perceived democratic governance. That is, we test whether the index of anxiety over governance is a function of Japanese idiosyncrasy in relation to the perceived performance of democracy in Model 2.

Model 2 is the result of adding country-specific effects on the perceived evaluation of democratic governance.

First in this model, the intercept differences found in Model 1 become clearer. Compared with Japan, 19 of the 32 countries/regions were significantly less anxious than Japan (21 if marginal significance is included), making the higher base level of anxiety over governance in Japan even clearer.

Furthermore, in the country-specific effects on the perceived evaluation of democratic governance, the slope for Japan, the reference category is  $-.046$  and significant in the negative direction, and its slope is statistically significantly steeper than 25 countries/regions out of 32. Up to 21 of these countries had a Freedom House score of 3 or higher, which is not a high level of democracy compared with Japan, where the score was 1.5 in the sixth wave and 1.0 in the seventh wave. In this respect, the perception of democratic governance, based on Japan's firm democratic practice as shown by the Freedom House score, is an important factor in lowering anxiety over governance in Japan, and this effect emerged in the international context, as in the previous section that focused only on the Japanese. Note that Cyprus and South Korea did not differ from Japan, while the slope was steeper in Germany, New Zealand, Australia, and Egypt than in Japan, the slope was gentler in the United States than in Japan.<sup>20</sup>

To examine these effects more visually, Figure 4.7 shows the results of the post-hoc simulation based on the Model 2 analysis. The regression line for Japan is shown as the thickest solid line. The country-specific effects on the intercept and perceived evaluation of democratic governance are clear. Japan is close to Mexico, Tunisia, Colombia, the Philippines, and Kyrgyzstan, for instance, in terms of the absolute level of the Anxiety over Governance Index, but the effect of perceived level of democratic governance on the level of anxiety is not observed in these high anxiety countries. Countries with steeper downward slopes of the effect of the degree of democratic governance as in Japan can be seen to have a much weaker intercept on anxiety over governance than Japan, such as New Zealand, Germany, or Australia.

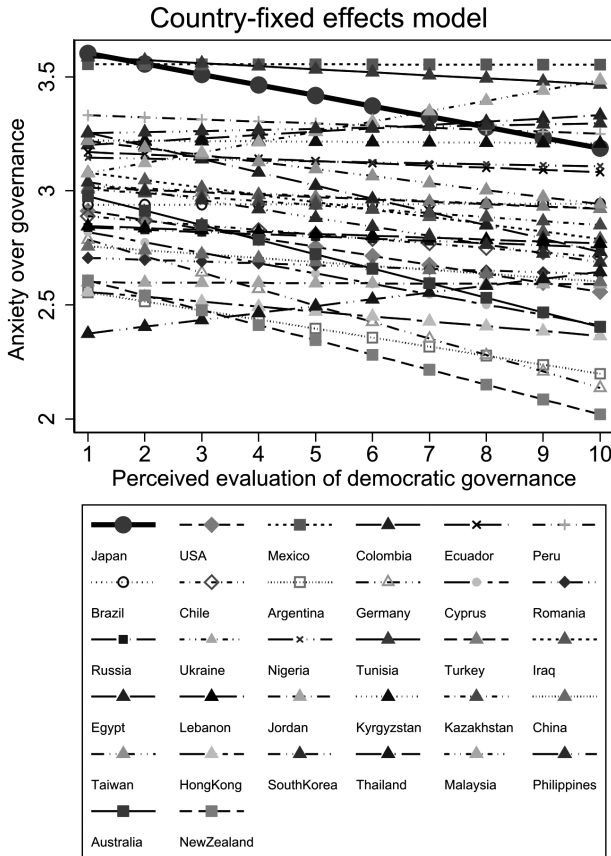


Figure 4.7 Perceived degree of democracy on the Anxiety over Governance Index by the targeted WVS 6–7 countries. (Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6 and WVS7.)

In sum, we can see that the peculiarity of Japan’s anxiety over governance manifests itself in the composite of excessive risk perception relative to the country’s development and the strong impact of supporting democratic governance even under high-risk perception.

### The conceptual positioning of anxiety over governance

In the analysis in this chapter so far, the index of anxiety over governance has shown that Japanese people’s risk perceptions are far beyond the objective risks and are even stronger when they do not perceive the country to be democratically governed. The former effect remains to be further articulated and examined, i.e., what explains excessive risk perceptions of Japanese people compared with their

objective social environment? In this final section, we conceptually locate anxiety over governance and propose hypotheses to elucidate Japanese people's excessive risk perceptions. The hypotheses will be tested in the analysis of the COVID-19 crisis in Chapter 5.

At the beginning of this chapter, we discussed the contrast between political distrust and anxiety over governance. This reminds us of the contrast between retrospective performance and prospective expectations (Fiorina, 1981) examined in Chapter 1, leading us to construct another pair of parallel concepts: *Diffuse* political distrust as a negative form of retrospective evaluation and *diffuse* anxiety over governance as a negative form of prospective expectations, which are the negative sides of retrospective and prospective evaluations, respectively.

We use the term “diffuse” here because we believe that unlike retrospective and prospective evaluations, neither political distrust nor anxiety over governance distinctly and directly determines political actions such as voting direction (e.g., which party to vote for). Anxiety over governance is a sum of negative systemic evaluations of the overall state of governance of a country as possible results of the conducts, discourses, and policies of political actors, rather than evaluations of specific cabinets, prime ministers, or political parties as retrospective/prospective evaluations suggest. In other words, anxiety over governance is *a feeling of prevalent and multifaceted uncertainty about the future of politics as a whole*, as if no governing party or government could respond appropriately to the risks faced when a problematic situation arises in Japan in the near future; moreover, neither supporters nor opponents of the government could respond effectively to future challenges. This leads to a vague sense of relative deprivation in the overall future of Japanese society and life, as contended in the section “Excessive risk perception” of this chapter.

Let us examine the evidence for diffuseness. First, consider political distrust. While the retrospective performance evaluation of a particular cabinet concerns its policy performance, political distrust is based not only on political actors' misbehavior and failure to implement policies (leading to lower ability ratings and poor retrospective performance evaluations) but also on the failure of rival political parties and political governance as a whole to prevent such behavior. Similarly, Putnam, Pharr, and Dalton (2000) model political distrust as a combination of factors, such as declining government capacity, bureaucratic corruption, declining social capital, and failure to restructure political parties (although they only examine each of these factors separately and do not seem to try to integrate them).

Diffuseness of political distrust causes inflated negative judgments. A typical example is the perception of prevalent corruption and bribery. The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) asks, “How widespread do you think corruption and bribe-taking are in prefectures/municipalities or central government offices” (ABS5 Japan survey Q57, Q58; ABS1-4 pooled data Q109, Q110). In the responses to the fifth wave in 2019, only around 2% of the Japanese respondents at each institutional level responded that “hardly anyone is involved.” In contrast, as many as a quarter of respondents chose either “almost everyone is corrupt” or “most officials are corrupt.” In addition to corruption, the survey also asked, “How often do government

officials withhold important information from the public?” (Q50; ABS Q103) and “How often do you think government leaders break the law or abuse their power?” (Q51; ABS Q104). Again, only around 2% of the respondents answered “rarely” to both of the questions, while nearly 60% answered “always (withhold)” or “most of the time” to the first question, and nearly 50% answered “always (break the law/abuse power)” or “most of the time” to the second. Does such loose discipline and lack of responsibility exist in reality? Is it the case that most Japanese government officials are corrupt (which means they commit crimes)? In absolute terms, this is an overestimation, and the root of political distrust seems to be negative and generalized impressions of politics and government that are not based on specific examples. It may be that the perception of probability is raised by a prominent case (e.g., the Lockheed case [Zenkyo, 2013]), or it may stem from the spectacular media coverage of politicians’ misdeeds (Pharr, 2000). Even so, these judgments of citizens must be considered *diffuse* exaggerations. We believe that the diffuse nature of political distrust has led to overly heightened perceptions of negative outcomes, such as an abundance of corruption. This diffuse generalization seems to be the cumulative outcome of negative evaluations of the complex factors listed by Putnam et al., rather than a simple consequence of special cases or media reports.

In the same vein, with regard to anxiety over governance, diffuse anxiety is tied to excessive risk perceptions. An example is the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 and 2021 (at least). This was an unforeseeable disaster. A very high perceived risk was that the next wave of infection might strike at any moment, or a virulent mutant strain might appear and spread without warning. In addition, there was a high degree of uncertainty as to whether adequate medical care would be available for infected people, when the vaccine would be available, how effective the vaccine would be, and whether it would be effective on a sustained basis. It was against this background of multifaceted uncertainty and risk that an insecure sense of governance became visible. As we saw in Introduction and will see in the next chapter, the Japanese not only perceived the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic as greater than the objective reality but also criticized the government’s overall response, which seems not to have occurred in other countries where citizens often experience as many or more unforeseeable pandemics than the Japanese.

However, Japanese citizens continued to criticize the government’s response in a sweeping and almost indiscriminate manner, even though the government was attempting to do the same as other countries (such as reducing contact with those who were infected) to combat the unforeseeable disaster. Rather than a specific lack of appreciation for individual measures, it was a risk perception that the entire political response to COVID-19 could go in the wrong direction. It was a perception of undue risk of policy and implementation failure, not only targeting the Prime Minister and government but also a wider range of political actors, such as the opposition party, the administration, local governments, health centers, and medical associations. In addition, the intensity of the anxiety was diffuse and excessive, lacking evidence and specific details about the objective level of risk. This was not only linked to negative prospective expectations of the target government and the perception of a “ruler who could do terrible things” but also

to the “inadequacy of the opposition,” “slow response and inaction by the administration,” “political strife between the central and local governments,” and “the inability of the medical association to reconcile the interests of the health care providers,” i.e., a recognition of various dysfunctions of governance as a whole. There was a diffuse sense that the future of the country was in jeopardy.

Thus, anxiety over governance does not arise merely from perceptions of excessive risk but is an inevitable consequence of the entire dysfunction of politics and national governance, which is why it is described as a diffuse phenomenon. Indeed, as we have pointed out in the analysis of Japanese politics prior to the COVID-19 disaster, effective alternatives other than the ruling party have disappeared in electoral politics (Chapters 1 and 2), political attitudes and behavior are torn between the values of East and West political cultures or are hybridized versions (Chapter 3), and we saw the loss of circuits that link social capital to politics (Chapter 1). In Chapter 5 we also describe an absence of a mechanism to control politics in an alternative manner to paternalism (e.g., Suga’s leadership under the COVID-19 disaster in 2020–2021). These challenges of the past two decades seem to be converging in a single direction with the diffuse anxiety over governance.

Next, we formulate three hypotheses and one RQ on anxiety over governance and proceed to test them empirically in the next chapter.

- H1: Japanese citizens’ excessive perception of risk stems from their perception that there is a problem with the country’s governance.<sup>21</sup>
- H2: Perceptions of governance difficulties are linked to negative diffuse future prospective expectations of national politics. These negative diffuse expectations are heightened by the accumulation of compounded negative expectations for various aspects of politics. In other words, because of the sense that Japan faces deprivation in a wide range of political areas in the near future, people are highly aware of future political contingencies and risks that could shake the foundations of prosperity and the future of Japan.
- H3: Negative diffuse expectations of the future lead to indiscriminate negative evaluations of the government’s performance, i.e., rigid and inflexible public disapproval of the government’s measures in response to problematic events, failure to respond to or rationally assess political actors, and a continuation of uniformly low evaluations, which can significantly undermine the legitimacy of governance in the long run. However, there is of course the possibility that government measures may indeed lead to sloppy and poor performance.
- RQ: Are there any factors that can help people to abandon rigid or diffused negative future expectations and harsh criticism of the government and reduce the uncertainty of governance? This diffuse aspect of anxiety over governance accompanied by harsh criticism of politics does not assume that citizens are able to or have the chance to force political actors to change it. Citizens forming social movements to develop the power to change politics is something that most Japanese people do not anticipate (as seen in Chapter 1 or the first section of this chapter). In the final chapter, Chapter 6, we will examine the possible power of the grassroots to overcome anxiety over governance.



**Notes**

- 1 Japanese Association of Electoral Studies. Election study series. <https://www.jaesnet.org/research/publications/series.html>.
- 2 The 2020 WVS7 Japan survey is independent and included no questions about the COVID-19 crisis. The same questionnaire was used in 2020 and 2019 WVS7 surveys; however, it is possible to examine whether the 2020 disaster, experienced by all Japanese people, changed the structure of anxiety over governance. I would like to express my gratitude to Dentsu Research Institute for providing these 2020 data.
- 3 We assigned four points for “very concerned” and one point for “not concerned at all” using a four-point scale. The dataset compiled data from 60 countries from wave 6 and 49 countries from wave 7 (based on the dataset downloaded in December 2020 from <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>). As data for some countries are missing, some lists in Table 4.1 may not include the 60th or 49th countries. In the seventh wave, the question on “government wiretapping and censorship of letters and e-mails” was not asked.
- 4 The rate in each country corresponds to the year of the survey for the country in question.
- 5 This was in the sixth wave of the survey. No data are available for the seventh wave. Data for 24 of the countries analyzed in the WVS6 were missing from the Internet Freedom Rankings 2013.
- 6 Though the perceived risk of eavesdropping and censorship was measured only in WVS6, the correlation with the index is as high as 0.55. In Figure 4.4, we show Freedom of the Press rankings in both WVS6 and WVS7.
- 7 Although censorship is prohibited by the Japanese Constitution, Japan’s ranking of press freedom has dropped to 72nd out of 180 countries in 2016 because of the way in which the nuclear accident and the passage of the Act on the Protection of Specific Secrets (which is not directly related to censorship) were reported. However, there are no WVS7 risk perception data for 2019 so this cannot be confirmed.
- 8 The scores are from a factor analysis of pooled data from the three surveys. The factor loadings for the first two items (the two left-hand items in Figure 4.6) in the Japanese data were around 0.6, and the factor loadings for the latter three items were around 0.8. There has been no dramatic change in any of the objective risks corresponding to these five items over the past decade.
- 9 City size of respondents’ residence is also controlled statistically.
- 10 In Chapter 3, we used self-expression and secularism as cultural values from the WVS. In this chapter, we will use the materialism/post-materialism scales to analyze factors directly related to risk perception.
- 11 Here, we examine whether values determine risk perceptions, but the causal relationship may be the other way around (as we live in an environment that poses material risks and therefore emphasizes materialistic values). For the time being, this chapter will not examine causality. We will assume that the two are mutually reinforcing.
- 12 The level of mass media exposure is partially controlled by the age variable because age is highly correlated with time exposed to mass media in Japan. Therefore, the effect of trust in the media system (after controlling for age) could be an effect of trust in media content, rather than a simple contact effect.
- 13 Based on an analysis using 2010 as the reference category and contrasting it with 2019 and 2020.
- 14 For instance, the correlation between this index and ideological self-perception (progressive–conservative ten-point scale) is as low as 0.034 in WVS7 (2019).
- 15 In the first half of the Abe administration, attempts to promote reform projects that were not ultimately policy successes, such as “Abenomics” and “work style reform,” as well as efforts to improve Japan’s diplomatic presence, may have increased the sense of control over the future to some extent. Another interpretation of the higher index value in 2010 is that the DPJ government was so unpredictable, which raised anxiety.

- 16 Although the general expectation of higher risk perception by a sensitive population such as women or the less educated was as predicted, this does not mean that particular groups of Japanese people are different and peculiar, as this is common worldwide (see the next section in this chapter).
- 17 In order to perform country-fixed effects model analysis, we need to have two or more datasets at each cluster (i.e., country).
- 18 The institutional trust variable was a one-dimensional measure in Chapter 3, but in this chapter, three dimensions were extracted corresponding to a four-dimensional measure in the Japanese data based on the factor analysis with Promax rotation. The correlation coefficients for each dimension are high, ranging from 0.54 to 0.64, which is not inconsistent with the scale in Chapter 3.
- 19 The GDP per capita of those countries are as follows: Mexico (US\$10241 at wave 6, US\$9687 at wave 7), Colombia (US\$7957, US\$6692), Turkey (US\$11231, US\$9506), and Japan (US\$44507, US\$40113).
- 20 Most of the countries mentioned score good Freedom House ratings; Cyprus (1 in Wave 6, and 1 in Wave 7), South Korea (1.5, 2), Germany (1, 1), New Zealand (1, 1), Australia (1, 1), Egypt (5, 6), and the USA (1, 1).
- 21 We have already seen evidence to support this point, but this will be tested in a different context in Chapter 5.

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**Appendix***Table 4.4* Determinants of Anxiety over Governance Index: Country-fixed effects model

	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>t</i>
Wave 7 dummy	0.015	0.33	0.025	0.57
GDP per capita	0.000	-0.54	0.000	-0.63
Freedom House score	0.026	0.53	0.025	0.52
Country	(reference category = Japan)			
USA	-0.641	-5.64 ***	-0.698	-6.14 ***
Mexico	0.223	0.76	-0.094	-0.32
Colombia	-0.058	-0.18	-0.462	-1.45
Ecuador	-0.199	-0.61	-0.470	-1.43
Peru	-0.039	-0.12	-0.309	-0.95
Brazil	-0.404	-1.38	-0.711	-2.34 *
Chile	-0.539	-2.08 *	-0.741	-2.81 **
Argentina	-0.988	-3.83 **	-1.055	-4.05 ***
Germany	-1.001	-25.41 ***	-0.791	-25.14 ***
Cyprus	-0.742	-6.05 ***	-0.784	-6.62 ***
Romania	-0.663	-2.23 *	-0.935	-3.08 **
Russia	-0.543	-1.75 +	-0.800	-2.76 *
Ukraine	-0.358	-1.02	-0.617	-1.76 +
Nigeria	-0.201	-0.56	-0.499	-1.40
Tunisia	0.198	0.56	-0.049	-0.14
Turkey	-0.361	-1.21	-0.624	-2.11 *
Iraq	-0.385	-1.12	-0.537	-1.61
Egypt	-0.298	-0.80	-0.336	-0.93
Lebanon	-0.528	-1.66	-0.795	-2.55 *
Jordan	-0.718	-2.01 +	-1.049	-3.00 **
Kyrgyzstan	-0.104	-0.28	-0.426	-1.15
Kazakhstan	-0.409	-1.29	-0.624	-2.03 +
China	-0.657	-1.92 +	-0.875	-2.60 *
Taiwan	-0.284	-1.56	-0.399	-2.06 *
Hong Kong	-0.897	-8.04 ***	-1.071	-11.33 ***
South Korea	-0.501	-3.81 **	-0.572	-3.00 **
Thailand	-0.784	-2.36 *	-1.305	-4.01 ***
Malaysia	0.014	0.05	-0.617	-2.18 *
Philippines	-0.021	-0.06	-0.401	-1.15
Australia	-0.746	-4.56 ***	-0.608	-3.73 **
New Zealand	-1.129	-21.24 ***	-0.977	-15.22 ***
Perceived evaluation of democratic governance	-0.015	-3.89 **	-0.046	-15.42 ***
Interaction country × Perceived democratic governance				
USA			0.007	3.20 **
Mexico			0.046	12.79 ***
Colombia			0.061	13.99 ***
Ecuador			0.036	9.84 ***
Peru			0.037	11.74 ***

*(Continued)*

Table 4.4 (Continued)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coefficient	t	Coefficient	t
Brazil			0.047	8.95 ***
Chile			0.026	11.35 ***
Argentina			0.007	3.18 **
Germany			-0.026	-11.62 ***
Cyprus			0.001	0.37
Romania			0.038	13.45 ***
Russia			0.036	12.38 ***
Ukraine			0.035	18.15 ***
Nigeria			0.042	14.48 ***
Tunisia			0.033	15.32 ***
Turkey			0.036	16.33 ***
Iraq			0.014	5.17 ***
Egypt			-0.012	-4.49 ***
Lebanon			0.038	7.66 ***
Jordan			0.045	16.57 ***
Kyrgyzstan			0.045	19.24 ***
Kazakhstan			0.029	9.25 ***
China			0.029	10.32 ***
Taiwan			0.015	5.87 ***
Hong Kong			0.025	10.14 ***
South Korea			0.007	0.69
Thailand			0.076	30.83 ***
Malaysia			0.092	20.16 ***
Philippines			0.051	17.56 ***
Australia			-0.017	-12.85 ***
New Zealand			-0.019	-8.64 ***
Trust in political institutions	-0.017	-0.98	-0.014	-0.83
Trust in media institutions	0.018	1.55	0.017	1.52
Trust in voluntary organizations	0.044	5.12 ***	0.044	5.10 ***
Political participation	-0.009	-0.99	-0.006	-0.72
Interest in politics	0.027	3.59 **	0.028	3.87 **
Materialism	0.024	4.22 ***	0.025	4.39 ***
Gender	0.101	7.63 ***	0.100	7.55 ***
Age	-0.005	-7.66 ***	-0.004	-7.68 ***
Level of education	-0.049	-3.58 **	-0.046	-3.49 **
Employed	0.068	4.50 ***	0.067	4.49 ***
Constant	3.254	7.56 ***	3.474	8.13 ***
N	84,458		84,458	
Clusters	32		32	
R-squared	0.2729		0.2775	

0.05 <  $p$  <= 0.1 +, 0.01 <  $p$  <= 0.05 \*, 0.001 <  $p$  <= 0.01 \*\*,  $p$  < 0.001 \*\*\*.

Source: Created by the author using data from WVS6 and WVS7.