

Political Participation, Political Efficacy and Trust for Government

-- An Empirical Analysis Based on CGSS2010 Data

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Abstract. A person without trust cannot stand. A country without trust might decline. The rapid development of China's economy and the growing strength of the country cannot be separated from mutual, effective, coordinated and sustainable interaction between the government and the citizens. The achievement can neither be separated from the citizens' trust for the government, nor from the government's improvement of the citizens' political participation and the cultivation of their sense of political efficacy. This paper uses 11,783 pieces of data from the China General Social Survey (2010) to further refine political participation into institutionalised and non-institutionalised participation through factor analysis and regression analysis to explore the effects and mechanisms of influence between institutionalised participation, non-institutionalised participation, political efficacy and trust for government. The results of the analysis show that institutionalised participation has a non-significant positive effect on trust for government, non-institutionalised participation has a significant negative effect on trust for government and political efficacy has a significant positive effect on trust for government. Based on these findings, it is proposed to strengthen the institutionalisation of political participation and improve government performance assessment to further enhance citizens' trust for government.

Keywords: Political participation; Sense of political efficacy; Trust for government.

1. Introduction

According to the 2021 Global Trust Survey released by US PR firm Edelman, China leads the world's major economies in terms of citizens' trust for government, with the proportion of 91%^[1]. *The Analects Yan Yuan* mentions that a person without trust cannot stand, and a country without trust might decline. Trust for government is the evaluation of citizens' trust in the exercise of government functions and rights in the process of decision-making, operation and supervision. It is a subjective expectation of citizens, but it also carries risk. It is a long-formed perception based on their social capital and past experiences. A higher level of trust for government maintains political stability and is an important factor in the smooth development of government and the country as a whole.

Aristotle once said, "man is by nature a political animal, and he who is by nature and not by chance detached from the city-state is either a superman or a despicable man". According to the *Survey Report on the Political Participation of the Chinese Public* released by the People's Forum Questionnaire Survey Centre in 2021, it can be observed that the Chinese public has a high awareness of political participation, and the sense of political efficacy is an important factor influencing political participation.

It is undeniable that today's fast-moving modernisation process is facing a number of difficulties. Some agitated members of the public are expressing their interests not only through existing legal and regulated channels, but also through various misconducts. The intricacies of political participation, if not regulated and channelled, can easily lead to misunderstanding and mistrust for government by citizens. As Huntington said, "modernity breeds stability, but the process of modernization breeds unrest."^[3] The development of society requires a stable political ecology, and there is an urgent need for the maintenance of a better system of political participation and an increased sense of political efficacy among citizens.

In recent years, most studies on the relationship between political participation, political efficacy and trust for government have focused on using the "perception-behavior" model to analyze the influence of

political efficacy and trust for government on political participation, especially political participation through the use of online media^[4], but perception and behavior are not just one-way interaction. In the process of political participation, citizens can also perceive the government, form an evaluation of the government and then act on 'behaviour' again. Therefore, this study proposes the idea of "behaviour-inductive perception-integrated evaluation" on the basis of "perception-behaviour" to explore the influence of political participation and political efficacy on trust for government, and to consider the problems arising from non-institutionalised political participation behaviour in the real society. The study also examines the impact of political participation and political efficacy on trust for government.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

2.1 Political Participation and Trust for Government

Political participation, as the core concept of political science, is the act of citizens using their own social capital or certain public channels to influence the decision-making or operation process of the political system. It has existed and played a role since the earliest days of ancient Greece. In the modern sense, political participation is the act of citizens trying to influence the political process through certain ways and channels^[5]. It originates from the idea of people's rights in modern democratic theory and is the basis on which the democratic system in modern society exists. It is generally accepted that orderly political participation is both an important element of democratic politics and an effective guarantee of political order. With the further deepening of social reforms, the development of information technology and the rise of civic consciousness, many "illegitimate" phenomena have emerged in citizens' political participation, and scholars have begun to further expand and refine the concept of political participation, dividing it into non-institutionalised and institutionalised political participation. According to Chen^[6], political participation is divided into legal and illegal political participation according to whether or not it conforms to existing laws and regulations, while Hu^[7] believes that institutionalised participation usually takes place within the framework of laws and institutions. Japanese scholar Ikuo Kamashima^[8] believes that non-institutionalised political participation is a form of political participation that is outside the "system". He^[9], in his book *The Modernisation Trap*, refers to non-institutionalised political participation as a form of political participation that contradicts and violates existing laws and institutions.

Compared to non-institutionalised participation, institutionalised participation is associated with a higher degree of social organisation in China, including grassroots election voting, policy-making hearings, online policy consultation and advice, etc. It is characterised by a single form of participation and a wide audience for participation, but more passive than active participation, mostly under the implication, call, encouragement or even threat of political organisations to participate in political activities. The expression of citizens' interests is limited and the expression of their sense of participation is singular. However, it is undeniable that institutionalised political participation has a positive impact on the enhancement of political trust, regulating the dysfunctions and conflicts between the government and citizens. This is also generally agreed by academics, such as Xie.^[10]

Non-institutionalised participation is characterised by conflict, illegitimacy and resistance. From the perspective of political stability, the reason for this is that today's society is full of too many unstable factors, profound reform and development is already facing many difficulties, and the international community has not yet achieved a peace and tranquility. In addition, there is a phenomenon of differential trust for government (Li, 2012) in China and Lv^[11] has used empirical research to demonstrate that differential trust for government is widespread, with citizens having different levels of trust in different levels of government and tending to believe that a higher level of central government is more aligned with their own interests. In practice, the resolution of non-institutional political participation such as cross-tier petitions, collective petitions, mass incidents and acts of resistance is not yet well developed in China. It is normal for people to get rejected. As citizens' level of political trust

decreases, their approach to political participation tends to be unfavorable to a higher level of trust for government.

Based on the above literature review, this paper proposes the following research hypothesis. H1: Institutionalised political participation has a significant positive effect on trust for government. H2: Non-institutionalised political participation has a significant negative effect on trust for government.

2.2 Sense of Political Efficacy and Trust for Government

A sense of political efficacy refers to "the feeling that individual's political action does or can have an impact on the political process. At the same time, it is a sense that political and social change is possible and that individual citizens can play a part in driving such change."^[12] It depends on the real-life political environment, the political system and the individual's personal experience. Specifically, political efficacy includes an individual's ability to perceive his or her own influence on politics and the degree to which the individual values the government's response, i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic efficacy, and is a complex political psychological phenomenon that combines many psychological elements, including government response, political cognition, and political concern. In essence, political efficacy is one of the most important criteria to reflect citizens' trust in the political system. Although trust for government is the same as perception of political efficacy, it is more evaluation-oriented, and the behaviour of political participation is summarised into the perception of political efficacy in terms of responsiveness, cognition and the extent of one's influence on the government, and then integrated and upgraded into the evaluation of trust in the government system as a whole, which belongs to the overall idea of "behaviour - inductive perception - integrated evaluation", which is a holistic approach.

Based on the above literature review, this paper proposes the following research hypothesis. H3: Political efficacy has a significant positive effect on trust for government.

2.3 Political Participation and Sense of Political Efficacy

Regarding the relationship between political participation and political efficacy, it is generally agreed that political efficacy is one of the important predictors of political participation and that political efficacy can facilitate political participation. According to social cognitive theory, Xu et al. argue that in orderly political participation activities, the stronger the citizens' sense of political efficacy, the stronger their willingness to participate will be^[13]. In her analysis of the value of political efficacy, Li pointed out that high political efficacy is one of the important indicators to predict political participation, and citizens with high political efficacy have higher levels of political participation^[14]. Zheng Jianjun also pointed out that a sense of political efficacy will lead to stronger willingness to participate based on motivating personal behavior^[15]. According to the Survey Report on the Political Participation of the Chinese Public in 2021, it can be seen that the sense of political efficacy is an important factor affecting the political participation of the public in China, which is influenced by political outlook, gender and education level^[16].

As the political system undergoes deeper changes, more people are able and willing to participate in community or everyday government decisions, and have the opportunity to participate directly or indirectly in the process of political elections, seeking opinions and reflecting on issues.

2.4 Political Participation, Sense of Political Efficacy and Trust for Government

Public political participation, sense of political efficacy and trust for government are mutually reinforcing. In the process of forming trust for government, political participation as a substantive act directly allows citizens to perceive the government's responsiveness, the importance it attaches to public political participation, its efficiency and authority, and directly influences citizens' willingness to engage in political participation again, further deepening their perceptions of government, and thus forming their sense of intrinsic and extrinsic political efficacy. Li argues that political trust, as a formulation that omits specific goals of trust, relies more on the past reputation and current performance of the political system, mainly the public's perception of the political system's governance performance^[17], making the goal of enhancing trust for government more concrete.

3. Data Source and Variable Measurements

3.1 Data Source

This paper uses data from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) 2010, with a sample size of 11,783. As the first nationwide, comprehensive and continuous large-scale social survey project in China, the CGSS aims to collect data on all aspects of Chinese society on a regular and systematic basis to explore social issues of great theoretical and practical significance. The questionnaire, which has been in existence since 2003, has a rigorous scientific sampling process, and the statistics are highly representative and credible, reflecting the true situation of the respondents.

3.2 Measurement of Variables

3.2.1 Independent Variables

The independent variables in this paper are the public's political participation and sense of political efficacy.

The two factors of political participation were measured by respondents' responses to the question "In the past year, have you participated in any of the following activities in your community?", which included "participating in the work of the village committee, neighbourhood committee, or property management committee", "participating in group petitions", "participating in protests or petitions", etc. The answers were "No (0)" and "Yes (1)". To ensure reliability, the six items were tested for reliability and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.724, indicating that the scale has high reliability and is suitable for factor analysis. In order to facilitate the subsequent analysis, the scale was downscaled with the help of SPSS 22.0 software using principal component analysis. The results of the factor analysis are shown in the figure below.

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Political Participation

	Institutionalised Participation	Non-institutionalised Participation	Mean Value
Participating in group petitions	0.163	0.576	0.0880
Participating in writing joint letters	0.206	0.541	0.1377
Reflecting the problems of the community to the relevant government departments	0.376	0-.180	0.0123
Making suggestions or comments to the village committee, neighbourhood committee, or property management committee	0.353	-.210	0.0078
Participating in the work of the village committee, neighbourhood committee, or property management committee	0.234	0.015	0.0108
Reflecting the issues in community to the news media	0.338	-.198	0.0077
Participating in protests or petitions	0.163	0.576	0.0880
Eigenvalue	1.816	1.261	
Explained Variance	31.315	30.227	

Note: KMO = 0.598 ($p < 0.001$).

The political efficacy factor was measured by respondents' perceptions of "whether they agree with the following statements", including "The work of government is so complex that it is hard for people like me to understand", "I feel capable of being involved in politics", "If I were to be a government official, I would be perfectly capable of doing so", "People like us have no influence on government decisions", "Government officials don't really care what people like me think", "When I make recommendations to government agencies, they are taken up by the relevant authorities", "I think I often have a different view of politics than others", "Government officials will value our attitudes and perceptions of the government", "I have little confidence in myself when discussing the work or practices

of the government with others", and "My suggestions/opinions about government departments can be made known to leaders." The answers were "Completely Disagree (1)", "Moderately Disagree (2)" and "I Don't Care if I Agree or Disagree (3)", "Moderately Agree (4)" and "Completely Agree (5)". To ensure reliability, these 11 items were tested for reliability, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.345, indicating that the scale has a certain level of reliability and is suitable for factor analysis. In order to facilitate the subsequent analysis, SPSS 22.0 software was used to reduce the dimensionality of the scale by means of principal component analysis. Based on the purpose of simplifying the interpretation of the observed variables, a maximum quadratic rotation method was used to extract the factor of "political efficacy".

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Political Efficacy

	Sense of Political Efficacy	Mean Value
The work of government is so complex that it is hard for people like me to understand.	-.165	3.5034
I feel capable of being involved in politics.	0.206	2.5919
If I were to be a government official, I would be perfectly capable of doing so.	0.191	2.5925
People like us have no influence on government decisions.	-.152	3.5505
Government officials don't really care what people like me think.	-.163	3.5238
When I make recommendations to government agencies, they are taken up by the relevant authorities.	0.189	2.6033
I think I often have a different view of politics than others.	0.068	2.6861
Government officials will value our attitudes and perceptions of the government.	0.170	2.8148
I have little confidence in myself when discussing the work or practices of the government with others.	-.131	2.9018
The party is willing to accept people like me into the party.	0.192	3.0692
My suggestions/opinions about government departments can be made known to leaders.	0.200	2.7579
Eigenvalue	1.816	
Explained Variance	31.315	

Note: KMO = 0.766 ($p < 0.001$)

3.2.2 Control Variables

In this paper, gender, age, educational attainment, income, political affiliation and happiness index were selected as control variables and further data processing was done for gender, age, educational attainment, income and political affiliation. For gender, 0 represents female, 1 represents male. Age is collapsed by 2010 - year of birth. For educational attainment, it is divided into 11 levels, from "0 represents no education at all" to "20 represents postgraduate and above". The unit of million is used to indicate income. For political affiliation, 0 represents non-party member group, and 1 represents party member group.

3.2.3 Dependent Variable

Table 3. Factor Analysis of Trust for Government

	Trust For Government Factor	Mean Value
Courts and Judicial System	0.813	3.92
Central Government	0.802	4.40
Local government (rural means township government)	0.498	3.68
Military	0.113	4.39
Public Security	-0.021	3.94
Eigenvalue	3.111	
Explained variance	62.215	

Note: KMO = 0.808 ($p < 0.001$)

The trust for government factor was measured by respondents' responses to the question "How trustworthy do you feel about the following institutions?" The responses were divided into five levels, from "1 - Not Trustworthy At All" to "5 - Completely Trustworthy". In order to ensure reliability, these five items were tested for reliability and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.843, indicating that the trust scale has high reliability and is suitable for factor analysis. Based on the purpose of simplifying the interpretation of the observed variables, a maximum quadratic rotation method was used to extract the "trust for government" factor.

Table 4. Measurement of Variables

Variable Type	Variable Name	Measurement Questions	Measurements	
Independent Variables	Political Participation	Have you participated in the work of the village committee, neighbourhood committee, or property management committee in the past year?	0-No 1-Yes	
		Have you made suggestions or comments to the village committee, neighbourhood committee, or property management committee in the past year?	0-No 1-Yes	
		Have you participated in writing joint letters in the past year?	0-No 1-Yes	
		Have you participated in writing joint letters in the past year?	0-No 1-Yes	
		Have you reflected issues in community to news media in the past year?	0-No 1-Yes	
		Have you participated in protests or petitions in the past year?	0-No 1-Yes	
	Sense of Political Efficacy	The work of government is so complex that it is hard for people like me to understand.	Completely Disagree-1 Moderately Disagree-2 I Don't Care if I Agree or Disagree -3 Moderately Agree -4 Completely Agree-5	
		I feel capable of being involved in politics.		
		If I were to be a government official, I would be perfectly capable of doing so.		
		People like us have no influence on government decisions.		
		Government officials don't really care what people like me think.		
		When I make recommendations to government agencies, they are taken up by the relevant authorities.		
		I think I often have a different view of politics than others.		
		Government officials will value our attitudes and perceptions of the government.		
		I have little confidence in myself when discussing the work or practices of the government with others.		
		The party is willing to accept people like me into the party.		
		My suggestions/opinions about government departments can be made known to leaders.		
	Control Variables	Individual	Gender	1-Male, 0-Female
			Age	Continuous variables

	Characteristics	Level of Education	0-No Education at All, 3-Literacy Classes, 6-Primary School, 9-Junior High School, 12-General High School, 13-Secondary School and Technical School, 14-Specialist Adult Higher Education, 15-Specialist Formal Higher Education, 16-Undergraduate Adult Tertiary Education, 17-Undergraduate Formal Tertiary Education, 20-Postgraduate and Above.
		Income	Continuous Variables
		Political affiliation	0-Non-party Member 1-Party Member
		Well-being Index	Totally unhappy-1 Relatively Unhappy-2 Can't Say if I'm Happy or Not-3 Happier-4 Very happy - 5
Dependent Variable	Trust for Government	How much trust do you have in the courts and the judicial system?	1-Not Trustworthy at All, 2-Not So trustworthy, 3-Between Trustworthy and Untrustworthy, 4-Moderately Trustworthy, 5-Completely Trustworthy
		How much trust do you have in central government?	
		How much trust do you have in your local government (rural means township government)?	
		What is your level of trust in the military?	
		How much trust do you have in the Public Security Department?	

3.3 Descriptive Statistics

In order to simplify the regression model in the latter part of the paper, the scores of the synthetic factors are calculated in the section involving factor analysis with the help of the formula: Total Factor Score = (Contribution/Cumulative Contribution) * F. The results of the standardised scores are shown in the descriptive statistics section of the variables below.

The information in the table shows that the number of men and women in the sample of 9,197 is basically equal; in terms of age and income level, middle-aged people at low and middle-income levels

predominate; the majority of the group are non-party members, tend to score positively for happiness, and are Han Chinese and urban residents, with an average education level at junior high school.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Average	Standard Deviation	Maximum Value	Minimum Value	Number
Trust for Government	-1.59e-06	.99999992	1.23081	-4.25287	9197
Institutionalised Participation	3.49e-06	.99999995	3.40956	-6.61528	9197
Non-institutionalised Participation	-2.30e-07	.9999998	14.4534	-.26021	9197
Sense of Political Efficacy	-3.20e-08	1	3.79342	17	9197
Age	47.53963	15.32775	94	0	9197
Gender	.5023377	.5000217	1	0	9197
Income	1.945562	8.333419	600	0	9197
Political affiliation	.1300424	.3363684	1	0	9197
Happiness	3.774165	.875699	5	1	9197
Household Registration	.6008481	.4897507	1	0	9197
Ethnicity	.9139937	.2803886	1	0	9197
Education Level	9.203545	3.993946	20	0	9197

4. Regression Results

Separate regression analyses were conducted for the three models mentioned above and the results are shown in table 6.

Table 6. Regression Results

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Institutionalised participation	0.013714** (1.36)			0.0012792*** (0.13)
Non-institutionalised participation		-.0447861*** (-4.50)		-.0517565*** (-5.21)
Sense of political efficacy			0.1071105 (9.82)	0.1108881 (10.09)
Age	0.0060404*** (8.09)	0.0061986*** (8.32)	0.0063757*** (8.59)	0.0064823*** (8.72)
Gender	0.0048972*** (0.24)	0.0079231*** (0.39)	-.0189922*** (-0.93)	-.0166785*** (-0.82)
Income	-.0056011*** (-4.62)	-.0056623 (-4.67)	-.0055359*** (-4.59)	-.0055902*** (-4.64)
Political affiliation	0.0749595* (2.28)	0.0876473* (2.69)	0.0074436*** (0.22)	0.0126138** (0.38)
Happiness	0.1741522 (15.16)	0.1736242 (15.13)	0.1605425 (13.94)	0.1589675 (13.82)
Household Registration	-.2411941*** (-10.44)	-.2431473*** (-10.57)	-.2443078*** (-10.67)	-.2434895*** (-10.61)
Ethnicity	-.1738142*** (-4.86)	-.1799161*** (-5.04)	-.1526531*** (-4.29)	-.1559386*** (-4.38)
Education level	-.0351495*** (-10.66)	-.0347998*** (-10.57)	-.0403495*** (-12.14)	-.0402956*** (-12.14)
Constant term	-.3184628*** (-4.42)	-.3235085*** (-4.50)	-.2319942*** (-3.21)	-.2308325*** (-3.20)
R2	0.0917	0.0936	0.1010	0.1035
N	9197	9197	9197	9197

Note: *P<0.1 **P<0.05 ***P<0.01, t-values in brackets.

From model 1, institutionalised participation has a positive impact on trust for government, and for every unit increase in institutionalised participation, the level of trust for government increases by 0.0114 units, but it is not significant. The reasons for the insignificance are: on the one hand, the previous analysis shows that institutionalised participation is mostly obedient participation rather than belief participation, and this kind of passive participation is mostly implied, called, mobilised or even threatened by the organisation, so the behaviour made when participating may hide the real thoughts due to the organisation's implication, mobilisation or even threat, on the other hand, from the perspective of China's political ecology, the long-term self-sufficient and closed smallholder economy makes the public is only a passive recipient of politics and habitually abandons its political personality to safeguard its economic interests, and thus does not adequately express its true views on politics.

From model 2, it can be concluded that non-institutionalised participation has a significant negative effect on trust for government, the hypothesis was verified. Non-institutionalised participation reduces the level of trust for government due to the extent to which it disrupts political order and affects the public's goodwill towards the government. However, it is undeniable that China is currently in a specific historical period of social transformation, which is prone to conflicts, and there is an urgent need for the government to improve and perfect the channels of institutionalised participation, so that citizens can express their interests and demands.

From model 3, the regression coefficient of political efficacy is 0.107, with a p-value less than 0.05. Therefore, political efficacy has a significant positive effect on trust for government, and the hypothesis was verified.

5. Conclusions

This study verified the positive effect of political efficacy and institutionalised political participation on trust for government and the negative effect of non-institutionalised political participation on trust for government. In order to further adapt to the development of the times and improve citizens' trust for government, this paper makes the following recommendations.

5.1 Strengthening Institutionalized Guidance for Political Participation and Sound Development of Socialist Democratic Politics

The report of the 18th Party Congress proposes to "accelerate the institutionalization, standardization and routinization of socialist democracy and expand citizens' orderly political participation from all levels and fields." This can be achieved in several specific ways. Firstly, by expanding institutionalised channels for political participation and increasing the number of ways to express public opinion, citizens' views can be conveyed more efficiently, government information more transparent and problems more conveniently resolved. Online government websites, WeChat official accounts, microblogs, WeChat videos, etc., should be expanded to include a feedback section for citizens' opinions, with emphasis on "online political participation", while at the same time speeding up the regulation of online political participation, so as to ensure that questions are always answered and that they are always followed up. This is not only the basic idea of the New Public Management, but also enhances citizens' sense of political efficacy. On the other hand, to enhance citizens' trust for the grassroots government, the grassroots government should, with the starting point of serving the people, be alert to large-scale, non-orderly political participation, make good contingency plans, understand public opinion in depth, know about public sentiment, gather public wisdom, highlight solutions to public concerns and social concerns, conduct a comprehensive and objective understanding and summary of the facts, take the initiative to divert the public and reduce the "degree of disorderly trust for government".

5.2 Improving Government Performance Appraisal and Further Enhancing Public Trust for Government

Enhancing public perception and nurturing the performance of the political system in governance is essential to citizens' trust for government in modern society. In the days when the economy was backward and people's material living resources were scarce, it was essential for the government to attach great importance to the performance appraisal on economic performance; but as society progresses and the main contradiction in society changes to the contradiction between residents' growing need for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development, the public is no longer satisfied with the pursuit of material things alone, but cares more about social justice and the exercise of legitimate rights. However, at present, China's government performance appraisal mainly relies on internal organisations, with government departments often monopolising both the management of performance evaluation and retention of a greater weight of evaluation power, and the public lacking the necessary voice^[18]. Therefore, improving government performance appraisal helps to guarantee the effectiveness of political participation, enabling citizens to exert substantial influence in the process of government management and operation, which in turn indirectly enhances the responsiveness of the government, strengthens the degree of public awareness of the government, directly raises the awareness of government staff to citizens' reflections and suggestions, and improves the degree of citizens' trust for government.

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