

# The Change of Farmer's Political Trust and Empirical Enlightenment—A Case Study Based on Major Public Health Emergencies

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## Abstract

Political trust is a weathervane of people's recognition and trust of government authority, which directly affects government authority and action force. This paper attempts to explore how political trust is affected by two different government behavior logic, namely risk society management and normal society management. Based on major public health emergencies, this paper, through a thematic study of hundreds of counties and thousands of villages in seven provinces in the Yellow River Basin, finds that political trust enhancement from the central to the grassroots level shows a unique U-shaped curve, further explores the enhancement of political trust and the behavioral logic behind it, and then provided experiences and enlightenment for building a modern governance system.

**Keywords:** public health emergencies, action logic, U-shaped phenomenon, capacity of governance

## 1. Literature Review and Formulation of the Question

It is widely agreed by academia that the study of trust started from Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* and has been widely discussed. Political trust, as the core and support of trust, has been continuously studied by many scholars at home and abroad over the years. Chinese and western different political systems caused a bigger difference in the structure of political trust, presenting the strong central government and weak local government and pyramid of two different structures of difference. People almost

agreed that China's political trust structure presents the normal pattern of strong central government and weak local government and analyze the multiple properties of political trust regard to hierarchy, diversity, and unevenness (Xie Zhiju, 2011). Professor Li Lianjiang of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Professor Yu Jianrong, a famous expert on rural issues, have also explained similar views. Accessibility to public services is significantly positively correlated with political trust (Yu Yanghang & Chen Zhixia, 2019). The enhancement of political trust plays a crucial role in political stability and is

a strong guarantee of a harmonious socialist society (Li Qing, 2011). For the continuously developing modern China, political trust also has a profound impact on the construction of the modern governance system and the legitimacy of the Party's rule and plays a role as a link among the public, government institutions and political system (Song Yanling & Yang Ronggang, 2020). According to the current situation of political trust in China, different scholars offer their own solutions from different perspectives. For example, some scholars point out that the trust crisis encountered by the government can be alleviated from three aspects: system construction, cultural construction, and government administrative capacity construction (Xiong Helin, 2014). There are also related discussions to alleviate the trust crisis from three aspects: economic construction, value judgment perspective, and administrative capacity construction (Zhou Xueqin, 2014).

As for the reasons, we can find different government behavior logics under two different governance modes: risk society management and normal society management. Under the risk society, the government takes various emergency management measures, the purpose of which is to deal with various public crises in a timely and effective manner, restore social stability and consolidate political trust. Its core concept is to be prepared for danger in times of peace and prevent it before it happens. When the epidemic outbreak of a major crisis suddenly comes, the transformation from a general situation to a special situation often reflects the ability of the Chinese government's administrative system. In the face of this public health emergency, the upper-level government launched all-out efforts to continuously improve the policy strategic layout, governance structure and means of relief and treatment guarantee, and strictly required the grass-roots government and quasi-government (village grass-roots organizations) to give implementation. However, for grass-roots governments, whether they can effectively perform the last mile task directly affects the change of people's political trust in them.

This paper analyzes the basic judgment and action performance of each level of government in the

face of the COVID-19 epidemic, explores the behavioral logic behind it, and discovers the strengths and weaknesses of each level of government at the time of this risk and crisis, so as to provide experience and enlightenment for building a modern governance system.

## 2. Sample Situation and Data Analysis Conclusions

Under the influence of COVID-19, grassroots groups, especially farmers, have increased their trust in the government at different levels in China. To understand the actual situation of this change, we used the field survey data of hundreds of counties and thousands of villages in the Yellow River Basin in 2020. Data sources are shown in Table 1. This survey involved seven provinces, and 6600 questionnaires were distributed, of which 4592 questionnaires were collected and valid, with a recovery rate of 69.58% and an effective rate of 100%.

In this sample, from the distribution of respondents' background variables, males and females accounted for 51.9% and 48.1%, respectively; the education level of the respondents was mainly concentrated in primary and junior high schools, accounting for 15.9% and 19.3%, respectively; in terms of employment status, 29.1% of the respondents are engaged in agriculture, 24.3% are only engaged in non-agricultural work, and 21.2% are currently unemployed; in terms of political status, the vast majority of respondents are the masses, accounting for 81.1%, followed by Party members and Communist Youth League members, accounting for 6.8% and 9.8%, respectively; in terms of age distribution, 15.1% are under 30 years old, 13% are between 31 and 40 years old, 22% are between 41 and 50 years old, and 21.7% are between 51 and 60 years old. Those aged 61-70 accounted for 18.2%, and those aged over 70 accounted for 10.1%. In general, the distribution of respondents' background variables in this survey are relatively balanced, and the respondents with various identities occupy the corresponding proportion. Hence, the survey data of the seven provinces in the Yellow River Basin are representative to a certain extent.

**Table 1.** Provinces where respondents lived

	Number of people	The percentage	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Ningxia	604	13.2	13.2	13.2
Inner Mongolia	306	6.7	6.7	19.8
Henan	1205	26.2	26.2	46.1
Shandong	676	14.7	14.7	60.8
Shaanxi	573	12.5	12.5	73.3
Gansu	537	11.7	11.7	85.0
Shanxi	691	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	4592	100.0	100.0	

The study in this paper focus on changes in political trust. In addition to background variables, the survey also adopted a five-point Likert scale to collect information on farmers' trust in village organizations, township government, county government, municipal government, provincial government and the central government under the influence of epidemic, and the answers were assigned 1-5 points from much lower to much higher. The hard to say item was treated as a missing value, and the mean value was used to make up for it by interpolation. For better understanding, the six types of governments are divided into three levels according to their administrative levels and jurisdictions, namely, grassroots governments and organizations (village organizations, township governments), middle-level governments (county governments,

municipal governments), and upper-level governments (provincial governments, central governments).

To ensure the validity of the data, the reliability of the original scale data was tested first, and the Cronbach Alpha value of the survey question was calculated by SPSS 25.0 as 0.929. At the same time, the validity of the sample was tested, and the results showed that the KMO sampling appropriability value was  $0.882 > 0.6$ , and there was a large number of significant correlations in all correlation matrices ( $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.01$ ). Through factor analysis, the political trust factors of the six indicators have high reliability and validity, which are suitable for the analysis needs of the model, and the structural validity and reliability of this indicator and factor analysis are shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

**Table 2.** Structure validity and reliability of the political trust variables

Clonbach Alpha.		0.929
Number of sampling appropriateness in KMO.		0.882
Bartlett's sphericity test	The approximate chi-square	23811.923
	Degrees of freedom	15
	significant	000.

**Table 3.** Factor analysis of the political trust variables

	Common factor variance		Component matrix
	The initial	extract	Component 1
Level of trust in the village organization	1.000	663.	814.

Level of trust in township government	1.000	792.	890.
Level of trust in county government	1.000	814.	902.
Level of trust in municipal government	1.000	841.	917.
Level of trust in the provincial government	1.000	784.	886.
Level of trust in the central government	1.000	550.	741.

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

a. 1 component was extracted.

According to Table 4, longitudinally, the respondents' trust in village organizations in the central government mainly changed from "Increase some" to "Increase a lot", and their trust in governments at all levels declined less. From village organizations to municipal governments, the change of respondents' trust in government mainly focused on "Increase some", accounting for 47.0%, 45.7%, 42.6%, and 40.6%, respectively. At the provincial government level, 32.5% of the respondents' trust level changed to "Increase a lot", and 39.8% changed to "Increase some". The proportion of "Increase a lot" and "Increase some" was similar; At the central government level, as many as 47.8% of the respondents' trust level changed to "Increase a lot", 36.8% of the respondents' trust level changed to "Increase some", and "Increase a lot" accounted for the

largest proportion. It can be seen that farmers' trust level in the central government has improved significantly after the epidemic. Horizontally, from village organizations to the central government, the proportion of "No change" was 22.8%, 24.7%, 28.5%, 28.3%, 26.1%, and 14.2%, showing an inverted U-shape, with the largest change at the central government level. The proportion of "Increase some" decreased continuously, which were 47.0%, 45.7%, 42.6%, 40.6%, 39.8%, 36.8%, respectively. On the whole, the proportion of "Increase a lot" kept increasing, which were 28.0%, 27.2%, 27.2%, 29.2%, 32.5% and 47.8%, respectively. From village organizations to provincial governments, the change range was small, and increased significantly at the central government level.

**Table 4.** Changes of farmers' trust in governments at all levels after the epidemic

	Village organization	Township government	County government	Municipal government	Provincial government	Central government
Decrease a lot	0.7% (31)	0.6% (30)	0.5% (24)	0.5% (22)	0.3% (15)	0.3% (15)
Decrease some	1.5% (72).	1.8% (83).	1.2% (53)	1.4% (66).	1.3% (60)	0.9% (40)
No change	22.8% (1045).	24.7% (1133).	28.5% (1307).	28.3% (1297).	26.1% (1199).	14.2% (654).
Increase some	47.0% (2158).	45.7% (2098).	42.6% (1958).	40.6% (1866).	39.8% (1828).	36.8% (1688).
Increase a lot	28.0% (1286).	27.2% (1248).	27.2% (1250).	29.2% (1341).	32.5% (1490).	47.8% (2195).
Total	100% (4592).	100% (4592).	100% (4592).	100% (4592).	100% (4592).	100% (4592).

Note: proportion of former behavior, number of cases of latter behavior

Overall, the respondents' trust in governments at all levels shows an increasing trend, and there are still large differences in the increase of trust among governments at all levels.

### 3. Reasons for Differences in Farmers' Political Trust Increments

Based on field investigation, the team conducted quantitative analysis based on the survey data of 4592 people from 66 counties in 7 provinces in the Yellow River Basin during the epidemic period and found that the impact of the epidemic greatly improved the relationship between the state and farmers, and enhanced farmers' trust in governments at all levels. However, it was different from the normal situation where the structure of farmers' political trust in the government gradually decreased from the central government to the grassroots level, the political trust of farmers in the government showed an overall upward trend from the central government to the grassroots level during the epidemic. However, there are differences in the incremental levels of farmers' trust in different levels of government, showing a unique U-shaped structure. In particular, farmers' political trust in the upper levels of government, i.e., the central government and provincial governments, especially the central government, has increased significantly, as has their trust in the grassroots governments and organizations that implement policies, but their trust in the middle levels of government, i.e., the municipal and district governments, has increased less. The main problem is the lack of contact between the middle-level government and the people, and the behavior of causing trouble during the anti-epidemic period.

First of all, the Party Central Committee and the upper government take the protection of the interests of the people, the stable performance of society and harmonious development as their main value judgment. To safeguard the life and health of the people as the starting point, they take the top in the whole system design decision-making responsibilities and shoulder the macroscopic policy and the epidemic prevention and control the overall deployment. In the whole process of anti-epidemic action, the Party Central

Committee and the upper-level government play the role of overall planning, coordination, decision-making and deployment. All provincial-level governments implemented the spirit and instructions of the Central Committee's important speech, ensured people's health and safety, and integrated their own characteristics into epidemic prevention and control.

The upper-level government quickly launched effective anti-epidemic actions during the epidemic, realized the reasonable allocation of governments at all levels under it, and successfully stabilized the epidemic situation for the first time, effectively guaranteeing the safety of people's lives and safeguarding the vital interests of the people. At the same time, the upper-level government had a high media exposure rate and the policy documents of the upper government can be timely and accurately conveyed to the local governments at all levels. The public can know the policy guidance and planning and deployment of the upper government in time through the new media matrix platform. Under the normal political trust structure, the public's political trust in the upper government is at a high level. Due to the continuation of political trust under the epidemic situation, farmers' political trust in the upper government has been greatly improved.

Second, middle-level governments played a role in the transmission of anti-epidemic actions. Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the middle-level government, under the leadership and instructions of higher levels, has gone all out to fight the epidemic and made various arrangements for local epidemic prevention and control. For example, in terms of prevention and control, Anze County of Linfen City has explored the establishment of the 3111-working mechanism. In terms of treatment, Weinan City has set up a special pneumonia center for new coronavirus infections. In terms of treatment, a special medical treatment center for new coronavirus infections was established in Weinan City. In the area of guidance, Sanmenxia City has conveyed the spiritual power for the fight against the epidemic through culture, telling the story of the fight against the epidemic from various angles. In terms of supply, financial resources at all levels were invested in epidemic prevention amounting to



tens of thousands of yuan, and various medical supplies such as masks, protective clothing and isolation suits were purchased and stocked through multiple channels to ensure the supply of medical supplies. Middle-level governments need to correctly understand the meaning behind the general guidelines for epidemic prevention and control formulated by the central government, and then carry out reasonable promotion and deployment according to the characteristics of each region within their jurisdiction, supervise the implementation of grassroots governments, and ensure the effective implementation of epidemic prevention measures. However, due to the pressure caused by the strict standards of the upper-level government, the middle-level government was difficult to meet the expected standards in the process of descending to the next level. In the whole anti-epidemic action, the middle-level government was dwarfed by the authority of the upper-level government, with limited control and a lack of governance initiative. And farmers have no direct contact with the space and lead to psychological distance far makes on the resistance to disease policy formulation and implementation to farmers, and then in the upper structural high strength of government and grassroots government extrusion embarrassing situation is difficult to make the optimum, eventually leading to increased trust middle-level government is not prominent.

Finally, grassroots governments and organizations are the main force of anti-epidemic actions, playing the role of concrete implementation in anti-epidemic actions, transforming policies from higher levels into actions that people can see and touch, and according to the actual situation, making use of the advantages of acquaintances, widely mobilizing the public, mobilizing social resources, integrating social forces, meeting people's needs, and implementing strict and precise prevention and control measures with villages or communities as the basic units. Since grassroots governments and organizations have the closest spatial distance to farmers, higher degree of contact, closer relationships, and a wider convergence of common interests, they are more aware of people's interests and needs than middle-level governments and can formulate and implement local policies more precisely. Therefore,

when the epidemic came, grassroots governments and organizations quickly assessed the risk level of disease, recognized the epidemic to be reckoned with, and used their discretion appropriately. Objectively, it verified the continuous improvement of the grassroots service system and grassroots governance capacity. Subjectively, it responded to the eager expectations of the masses. Grassroots governments and organizations successfully manifested the public value of epidemic prevention policies, met the needs of the public in higher quality, gained the support and cooperation of the public, and enhanced the satisfaction and sense of security of the public. This constitutes an important turning point in the U-shaped structure, which ultimately enhanced farmers' political trust in grassroots governments and organizations.

#### **4. Experience and Enlightenment of Building a Modernized National Governance System**

To explore the path to improve farmers' political trust, build a more pro-people government image, and further strengthen the relationship between the state and farmers to promote the construction of a modern national governance system, the research group summarized the experience and enlightenment according to the investigation as follows:

##### *4.1 Experience and Enlightenment 1*

The intrinsic reason for the U-shaped structure of farmers' incremental political trust in each level of government is related to the differential action performance of each level of government. The incremental change in farmers' political trust in each level of government under the epidemic shock is closely related to the differential performance of different levels of government in the anti-epidemic, and the deeper reason behind the performance is the differential action logic of different levels of government, so it is crucial to clarify the logic of government action. It is not difficult to find that although all levels of governments put people's lives and property safety first, they respond for different reasons: in the face of major epidemics, upper-level governments mainly take political, social and public safety goals as the starting point for emergency mobilization; while middle-level governments, guided by the effectiveness of

epidemic fighting as their performance assessment, begin to shift their action logic from giving priority to economic goals to social goals. Grassroots governments and quasi-governments tend to start from acquaintance relations, guard one side of the home, protect one side of the clean land, and build an anti-epidemic action community with a communal emotional community.

#### *4.2 Experience and Enlightenment 2*

Based on the above action logic, we can summarize several rules in the government's anti-epidemic action. First, the government's value judgment determines its action. Upper-level governments need to grasp the subjective and objective conditions comprehensively and accurately for their judgment and response. At the same time, middle-level governments also need to convey instructions from the upper-level to the lower-level government after judging the situation. It is even a practical test for the grassroots government to coordinate the tension and fear among farmers by making specific arrangements for anti-epidemic measures based on their own judgment, combined with instructions from the upper and middle levels of government. Second, the fragmentation of information during the time gap. The epidemic is sudden and sporadic, and the early information is mainly presented on individual accounts, which is characterized by fragmentation and incoherence, causing a certain amount of panic, and deepening public suspicion. When official information is temporarily absent, it will promote the spread of rumors in a reverse way. Third, the authority of the government and the sense of distance between the government and the farmers directly affect the political trust of the farmers in the government. The essence of the distance between the government and the people is psychological distance, that is, the degree of difference in cognition, emotion, and attitude of the people towards the government. The higher the degree of trust, the smaller the psychological distance between the government and the public. On the contrary, the lower the level of trust, the greater the psychological distance. Under the unified command of the central government, local governments and organizations should carry out the implementation according to the actual situation of each locality. Grassroots governments

had been in direct contact with the people during the epidemic and helped them overcome difficulties. Thanks to the correct guidance of the central government and unremitting efforts at the grassroots level, China has won a strategic victory in the epidemic prevention war. People naturally attribute these achievements to the correct leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the hard work and practice at the grassroots level.

Therefore, we suggest that upper-level governments should actively build institutional mechanisms to respond to health emergencies, smooth effective information transmission channels, and organize and guide multilateral forces to jointly respond to public crisis events. Middle-level governments should actively go on, actively carry out basic research and visits, increase contact with the people, understand the needs of the people promptly, uphold the work idea of serving the people, eliminate formalism phenomenon, simplify the working process form, avoid administrative inefficiencies caused by downshifting useless work to the grassroots government. The grassroots government should devote all its energy to serving the people, instead of wasting time on meaningless formalistic work such as filling out a lot of forms and long meetings, providing more diversified, precise and high-quality services to the people, and actively building a fish-water relationship (cannot be separated from each other) between the government and the masses. The grassroots government should work in strives for realism the innovation based on the system and mechanism, promote appropriate and effective enforcement mechanisms, establish a sound and play to the dominant position of the people in the social development, arouse the governance of endogenous power, guide the multivariate main body participation, open access to information channels, to ensure the information communication mechanism effect into full play.

In the rapidly changing modern society, governments at all levels will face more severe tests of development. How to give a better answer to political trust is an urgent problem to be solved at present. Undoubtedly, building an excellent political relationship bridge with the people, adhering to the mass line, going deep among the people, caring for the people's thoughts, and

serving the people sincerely are the magic weapons for governments at all levels to overcome the test.

At the same time, the change of political trust showing U-shaped structure is not only a major breakthrough to the differential structure of the normal political trust differential structure of strong central government and weak local government, but also a cross-domain improvement of the overall political trust. As a temporary stopover in development, U-shaped changes will continue to occur in the future with the construction of a modern governance system and the improvement of modern capacity of governance, which are closely related to our society and worthy of our efforts.

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