

# Analysis of the Government Credibility: From the Perspective of Perception and Expectation

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Government credibility is a very important issue in today's society. It seems to have a great relationship with the administrative efficiency of the government. At present, the credibility of the government in the world has generally declined. In this article, I first described the factors affecting the government's credibility and took the gap between people's expectations and perception of the government as the main reason for the decline of the government's credibility. Secondly, I analyze the relationship between credibility and political legitimacy and believe that credibility is the main source of political legitimacy. Finally, based on the actions of governments to improve political legitimacy through various means, I explain their impact on government credibility from the perspectives of expectation and perception. I find that most of these actions will get the opposite of what one wants, increasing the risk of credibility collapse. (Only a single government is taken into account. International relations are not included in this article.)

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## Introduction

In recent years, with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world, governments have been facing challenges in various comprehensive capabilities. One of the important indicators is the credibility of the government. Whether the people are willing to believe and cooperate with the government's pandemic prevention policy largely determines the effect of pandemic control. For example, when the government launches the vaccine, but people are unwilling to vaccinate, the probability of infection will be hard to control. Ancient Rome once put forward the concept of the "Tacitus trap", believing that if the government loses its credibility, no matter how it speaks or does anything, the society will give it a negative evaluation and will not believe it. Therefore, the credibility of the government is an urgent issue to be discussed. The reasons for the decline of credibility and its consequences, and how to treat the credibility of the government will be discussed in this article.

## What Is the Government Credibility

The government credibility is the power that citizens potentially infer the internal reliability of political agents and political decision-making according to the external symbols with low information cost, and give up the questioning of the deep-seated information of political behavior and maintain the necessary silence and cautious indifference to the essential discretion of the government.

Scholars Bouckaert and Van De Walle (2001) once proposed an analytical framework to analyze the reasons for people's distrust of the government from four different aspects: management, public administration, society, and economy.

The research has analyzed the reasons for the poor government performance. But we can see that government credibility includes the public and the government. The reasons for the change of government credibility should be analyzed from the two dimensions of the public and the government.

Miller and Listhaug (1990) believe that the government credibility is the basic public evaluation of how the government operates based on public expectations. Some scholars also believe that trust comes from the expectation of reciprocity. In this sense, citizens who give trust will oblige the government to return the same political products of "essential or economic value" in return (Thomas & Streib, 2003).

The generation of credibility can be divided into two steps. The first step is that the people give trust and hope to be rewarded by the government. And the second step is that the government will give back and make the people willing to give trust again. In this cycle, credibility is gradually formed and consolidated.

In this article, people's willingness to give trust is called the expectation of the government. And the people's actual return is called the perception of the government. It can be seen that the government credibility is positively related to the perception and negatively related to the expectation. In other words, the government credibility will decline when people expect highly of their government while it turns out that the government is doing less than they expected.

Political trust is a kind of mutual trust between citizens and the political system. It involves the specific relationship between citizens, political system, and specific values based on rational thinking, practical perception, psychological expectation, etc. The trust in policy and the behavior of public officials is a historical one and is a dynamic process of adjustment, repair, and development (Liu, 2009).

Generally speaking, expectations and perceptions will adjust themselves so that social credibility will always be maintained at the same level. If the social credibility is too high, the expectations will continue to improve and the social credibility will decline; if the social credibility is too low, the expectations will continue to decline and the social credibility will rise.

### **Factors Affect Public Perception and Expectation of the Government.**

#### **Perception**

Easton divides the forms of the government credibility into two forms: The former refers to the public's satisfaction with the output of the government's political products and the overall performance of the political authority; the latter refers to the public's attitude towards the "political object" and "political symbol" at the political power level, regardless of performance.

Taking China as an example, the Chinese government has gained 90% trust in the political trust survey held by the United States. There are many reasons for it. One of them is the satisfaction with the government's performance. In the past few decades, China's economy has developed greatly, and the government's economic performance is commendable; the second reason is the attitude towards political symbols. Socialist ideology is considered "a more advanced" ideology compared to the capitalist system. It preaches that the people are equal and there is no privileged class, and stipulates that the government treats the people equally, which makes the Chinese people trust their government very much

Whether the distribution of social wealth is fair is considered to be one of the important factors affecting the perception of the government. The more equal the distribution of wealth in a society, the higher the level of perception. Glasure and Lee (2002) used the South Korean data of the 1995 World Values Survey. They found that the equal distribution and fair treatment of wealth are significant for the formation of South Korea's political attitude. If Koreans think they are not treated fairly, they may form a negative attitude towards the political system.

### **Expectation**

The public expectation of the public can be divided into two aspects: The first aspect is the people's desire or needs for government public policies and services, that is, subjectively, what public services the people want to be provided. However, the desire to obtain something does not mean that the government is expected to realize these desires. Therefore, another aspect of public expectation is the calculation, that is, to estimate the probability of the government realizing its expectations (Li, 2007).

It is worth mentioning that the decline in the social trust will increase expectations. Individuals who generally distrust other persons have a stronger taste for the regulation from the government, while people with high interpersonal trust are in favor of less strict regulatory control (Pitlik & Kouba, 2015). For example, if an incident of women trafficking has been discovered recently, it will remind people that there may be human traffickers around them, making people unwilling to trust the people around them, so people may ask the government to manage it more, so they increase their expectation of the government.

Education is the main reason for this. A study pointed out that

on the one hand, the level of education to some extent represents the level of human capital and wealth; on the other hand, education affects the level of social participation. Therefore, the higher the level of education, the greater the possibility of being expected to keep promises. Especially for the current Chinese people, people have higher expectations for education, and have higher trust in people with high education level than those with low education level (Zhang & Ke, 2002, p. 13).

The regional imbalance of economic development makes the regional distribution of education unequal and the trust of people in different regions uneven. Large numbers of people from economically underdeveloped areas pour into developed areas to work, which will lead to a decline in social trust and an increase in expectation.

## **The Relationship Between Credibility and Political Legitimacy**

The government credibility is highly related to "legitimacy", which is the base where a government can exist. If losing it, there might be some grave consequences.

### **Definition of Legitimacy**

Legitimacy, the widespread public belief that the society's governing institutions and political authorities are worthy of support, is commonly held to be a precondition for political stability in advanced capitalist democracies (Suchman, 1995). It can be seen that legitimacy comes from the people's support and recognition of the government and their spontaneous feelings that they should abide by and support the government's decision-making. This feeling plays an important role in today's society. Legitimacy is an important resource of the government credibility, and the government credibility is the necessary condition of legitimacy. Generally speaking, if a government wants to get legitimacy, the first thing to do is to get credibility.

Politically, with the dissolution of political legitimacy, the ruling class will no longer be trusted and supported by the people, and the social and political order will be out of control. The ensuing may be political turmoil, the loss of the ruler's power, or even the disintegration and collapse of the political system.

### **Factors That Affect the Legitimacy**

Previous research has studied the factors that affect legitimacy, considering that there are three categories of legitimacy: pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

If a government can satisfy the people on the material level, then the government has pragmatic legislation. It is generally believed that if a political system that does not have legitimacy at first can meet the needs and interests of its members for a long time, it can also win the legitimacy of rule; however, if a political system with complete ruling legitimacy is incompetent for a long time, it will slowly lose and exhaust its ruling legitimacy.

In contrast, moral legislation depends on whether the government does the right thing, regardless of the level of material development. Judging whether what a government does is right or not includes four aspects: whether the government has established universal values; whether the rules or laws are consistent with the value; whether the government exercises its power in strict accordance with the established legal procedures; the moral performance of political elites.

Cognitive legitimacy refers to the people's will to identify with the government. Generally speaking, it is divided into two categories. The first is the belief in the ideology of the authorities. Douglas North makes an incisive analysis of the legalization function of ideology from the perspective of economics: A successful ideology can overcome the problem of free-riding, produce a significant trust, and make members take action instead of simple, hedonic individual cost-benefit calculation to inject vitality into the group (Zhang & Xi, 2007); the second is the worship of a political figure, who is able enough to be a leader of the people and lead them to a better life. Marx Weber called it "charisma type" legitimacy.

### **Political Behaviors Affecting Expectation and Perception**

"Legitimacy is a perception or assumption in that it represents a reaction of observers to the organization as they see it; thus, legitimacy is possessed objectively, yet created subjectively" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Undoubtedly, in order to maintain legitimacy, the regimes of various countries have changed the people's subjective views on the government through various means.

For example, the content reported by some countries' media will be controlled by the government departments. The government created a media system that serves the interests of the country's political and economic elite, and suppresses and marginalizes objective and alternative voice at the same time (Zhao, 2004).

By intervening in the media's coverage of current events and controlling the dissemination of adverse news to the government, the government created an illusion of calm and stability in the crisis, as if the people's demands had been met. This has increased the government's pragmatic legislation.

From the perspective of expectation, under the influence of the government, the society reported by the media is so trustworthy that people's expectations of the government will be higher.

From the perspective of perception, it will cause information opaque, which leads to a higher chance of corruption (Coicaud, 2002). Even if we claim that officials are public servants of the people, we cannot deny that, like other members of society, officials are often—though not entirely—driven by their own interests.

Generally speaking, officials have a variety of goals, including power, income, privilege, security, convenience, loyalty, a sense of job superiority, and a desire to serve the public interest... But no matter what goals they pursue, every official is mainly driven by his own interests (Downs, 1967). Therefore, the government has a kind of confidentiality. In the absence of legal rules and public supervision, the bureaucratic system and government officials have an impulse to resist administrative openness; bureaucrats and government officials often refuse to disclose some information that the public could have known by virtue of their professional knowledge, expertise, and special status, causing the public to fall into a state of "ignorance". Therefore, in the political principal-agent relationship, the political principal always seems to be in an information inferior position. In fact, there is the problem of information asymmetry. Political agents are often driven by their own interests and pursue personal interests (Zhang & Xi, 2007).

The importance of supervision by public opinion was mentioned in the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China by President Hu, meaning that the media accountability system has become an important way in for the people to supervise the government (Lu, 2013). The premise of accountability is the openness and transparency of government affairs. Being responsible to the people and their representative organs first means that the people and their representative organs must be informed of everything that happens in the country's political life. If the people and their representative organs are unaware of the operation of power, they cannot know whether the power executor has assumed the responsibility to the people, and the official accountability will become empty talk (Zhang, 2005).

Moreover, if we look at Germany at the time of interwar, we can see that Hitler made his regime obtain "charisma type" legislation with his inflammatory speech level and paranoid will. When the social crisis becomes intolerably serious, it incited the petty bourgeoisie to fanaticism with clear goals. And ensure the Aryan people benefit. Then fascism had become the main ideology of Germany by that time and it was escorted by the media.

If so, on a larger level, such as ideological issues, there are higher requirements for the country. However, with the and social progress, the legalization potential of ideology is gradually "devalued", and people are increasingly examining the government from a rational perspective (Zhang & Xi, 2007). And with the development of the Internet, people can get access to opinions inconsistent without the government's propaganda. People will become able to better understand the meaning of the content publicized by the government and realize the gap between the current situation and the ideal.

It can be seen that the control of public opinion, on the one hand, reduces the possibility of the government to improve better services, and on the other hand, increases the people's expectation of the government. In short term, the government credibility is currently high, but it does not rule out the possibility of a sudden decline one day. Various acts aimed at increasing legitimacy are actually at the cost of government credibility. Most of these actions will get the opposite of what one wants, increasing the risk of credibility collapse.

### **Conclusions**

The government credibility is positively related to the perception, the people's actual return from the government, and negatively related to the expectation, the people's willingness to give trust to the government. The government credibility is the necessary condition of legitimacy, which is the base where a government can exist. There are three categories of legitimacy: pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy. In order to maintain legitimacy, the regimes of various countries have changed the people's

subjective views on the government through various means. By analyzing the actions taken by the government, I found that most of these actions will get the opposite of what one wants, increasing the risk of credibility collapse.

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