

Public Policy Satisfaction in Urban China

TANG Wenfang and Erico YU Dong*

Based on a public opinion survey in 10 major cities in 2013, this study analyses the relationships between satisfaction of public policy and various geographic, demographic and social factors. It shows that urban Chinese citizens are generally satisfied with national policies, and less satisfied with local and life-related policies. The Chinese government needs to focus on Chinese urban residents' political activism and establish better formal institutions to improve its governance and deal with social instability.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF public mood is particularly important in an authoritarian country like China where there are no competitive elections at the national level. In theory, democracy should be more responsive to public opinion

*TANG Wenfang is Visiting Research Professor at the East Asian Institute, National Singapore University and Stanley Hua Hsia Professor of Political Science and International Studies, University of Iowa. Erico Yu Dong is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Iowa.

than autocracy because politicians in democracies have to represent the opinion of their constituencies in order to win elections. Yet leaders in a democracy only need to respond to enough public opinion in order to win elections by getting majority vote.

In an authoritarian society like China where the government claims to represent the interest of most of the people, there is no yardstick (elections) to verify government legitimacy. Consequently, the need to gain political legitimacy drives the government to be sensitive to public opinion and respond to public demand quickly.

While authoritarian governments will not hesitate to arrest dissidents and put them in prison, they spend an equal if not more time and energy tracking and responding to public opinion. Researchers have found that authoritarian governments are often paranoid about a few protesters and tend to respond to their demand quickly in order to appear to be legitimate.¹

This study draws data from the Public Policy Satisfaction Survey in Urban China. It was carried out in October 2013 by the Research Centre for Contemporary China at Peking University under the leadership of Tang Tang at the University of Iowa and Zheng Yongnian at the National University of Singapore, with the financial support by the University of Iowa and the Institute of Public Policy, South China University of Technology. This survey repeated some of the same questions in the national-wide surveys conducted by the China Social Survey System of the Economic System Reform Institute of China (ESRIC) between 1987 and 1992.² These surveys provide unique and precious data to recount the historical change of urban Chinese public opinion in the past 26 years from 1987 to 2013.

The 2013 urban telephone survey was conducted in 10 major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chongqing, Kunming, Urumqi, Shenyang, Wuhan and Xi'an. The selection of the 10 cities was based on both their political, economic and cultural importance and the representativeness of their geographic locations. For each city, 200 residents were randomly drawn from a pool of cellphone numbers. Because the survey respondents tended to be educated young males, a correction to the sample bias towards such a demographic group must be made to ensure the survey is more representative of the urban population in the 10 cities. Thus we weighted the survey results with information on gender and age distributions in the Sixth China Population Census in 2010.

¹ See Tang, Wenfang. 2015. *Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Shirk, Susan. 2011. *Changing Media, Changing China* (Oxford University Press).

² Wenfang Tang and William Parish, *Chinese Urban Life under Reform: The Changing Social Contract*, Cambridge University Press, 2000; Wenfang Tang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China*, Stanford University Press, 2005; Chen Yizi, *Chen Yizi Memoir*, Chapter 7, New Century Press, 2013.

Distribution of Public Policy Satisfaction

People's satisfaction with public policy is assessed through two questions: (1) "What is your level of satisfaction (very satisfied, satisfied, not satisfied, or very dissatisfied) with the following policies: environmental protection, social equality, clean governance, poverty relief, the college entrance examination system, freedom of speech, ethnic harmony, government's response to public need, civil rights protection, and national security and foreign policy?" (2) "What is your level of satisfaction with the following issues in the city where you live: seeing a doctor, housing provision, pension insurance, employment opportunity, unemployment benefits, income, consumer price stability, food safety, crime prevention, and governmental efficiency?"

For each question, "very satisfied" is coded as 3, "satisfied" is 2, "dissatisfied" is 1, and "very dissatisfied" is 0. With this coding scheme, an average score for each policy item based on the answers of the 2,000 respondents in the sample was calculated. After a division of the average score by 3, we create an index ranging between 0 and 1. To convey more intuitive information of public attitude towards a policy, we divide the average score by 3 and create a new policy satisfaction index ranging between 0 and 1. This rescaled index is better in explaining the survey result. For example, an original average score of 1.8 is difficult to be interpreted. After rescaling, the index of satisfaction becomes 0.6 (dividing 1.8 by 3), and it could be interpreted as a percentage, meaning that the sample's satisfaction with a policy is 60%.

The Five Least Satisfied Policies

Table 1 shows the average satisfaction level with each policy item (in bold) in the sample. Among them, the five least satisfied were (1) food safety (38%); (2) consumer price stability (42%); (3) social equality and housing provision (both were 44%); (4) income /clean governance (both were 45%); and (5) environmental protection and government responsiveness (both at 46%). The public outrage was understandable given the frequent food safety incidents and pollution problems in recent years. The two issues were closely related to people's everyday life and finding a solution to these problems to calm public anger has become imperative.

In the phone interviews, many respondents said that the term "very dissatisfied" was not even strong enough to express their discontent with food safety and environmental protection. Some said: "I wanna curse (those government officials)!"

Consumer price, public housing and income were three related issues. In general, income level had been increasing in recent years, but it could not keep up with the growth of commodity and housing prices, resulting in people's dissatisfaction with their income.

By the end of 2013, it seemed that neither the government's regulations on consumer price nor its investment and construction of affordable public housing had improved public satisfaction. When asked about the satisfaction with consumer price stability, some respondents satirised that "price is stable at the high level".

TABLE 1 PUBLIC POLICY SATISFACTION INDEX BY CHINESE CITIES (N = 2,000, MAXIMUM = 1, WEIGHTED)

	Sample	Guang-zhou	Bei-jing	Kun-ming	Shang-hai	Shen-zhen	Shen-yang	Urum-qi	Wu-han	Xian	Chong-qing
Food Safety	0.38	0.28	0.40	0.39	0.38	0.35	0.40	0.40	0.38	0.40	0.43
Consumer price Stability	0.42	0.37	0.47	0.43	0.42	0.41	0.49	0.35	0.40	0.42	0.46
Social Equality	0.44	0.38	0.40	0.44	0.47	0.41	0.40	0.46	0.43	0.48	0.50
Housing provision	0.44	0.38	0.40	0.43	0.45	0.43	0.48	0.44	0.43	0.47	0.52
Income	0.45	0.43	0.45	0.43	0.51	0.48	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.45	0.48
Clean governance	0.45	0.41	0.46	0.42	0.47	0.42	0.49	0.44	0.44	0.50	0.50
Environmental Protection	0.46	0.38	0.41	0.44	0.46	0.45	0.49	0.51	0.40	0.45	0.56
Government Responsiveness	0.46	0.39	0.47	0.48	0.49	0.45	0.45	0.48	0.45	0.48	0.49
Government Efficiency	0.47	0.41	0.47	0.49	0.51	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.43	0.49	0.48
Unemployment Benefits	0.48	0.45	0.46	0.47	0.52	0.48	0.49	0.47	0.44	0.47	0.52
Health Care	0.49	0.42	0.46	0.49	0.48	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.55
Poverty Relief	0.50	0.42	0.50	0.53	0.49	0.47	0.51	0.49	0.50	0.59	0.55
Pension Insurance	0.52	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.56	0.49	0.51	0.49	0.50	0.54	0.60
Civil Rights	0.54	0.48	0.53	0.55	0.58	0.52	0.53	0.56	0.50	0.54	0.60

College Entrance Examination	0.56	0.52	0.51	0.58	0.56	0.53	0.59	0.59	0.54	0.59	0.62
Employment opportunity	0.57	0.59	0.57	0.53	0.61	0.61	0.57	0.57	0.54	0.53	0.59
Crime control	0.57	0.56	0.60	0.52	0.62	0.58	0.61	0.53	0.55	0.58	0.58
Freedom of Speech	0.59	0.55	0.57	0.60	0.58	0.56	0.57	0.61	0.57	0.62	0.64
National Security	0.64	0.62	0.62	0.67	0.63	0.63	0.66	0.63	0.62	0.67	0.67
Ethnic Harmony	0.66	0.66	0.66	0.69	0.65	0.67	0.70	0.59	0.63	0.69	0.69
General Policy Satisfaction Index	0.49	0.44	0.48	0.49	0.51	0.48	0.50	0.48	0.47	0.51	0.54

Note: (1) Numbers in bold represent the average score of the sample of 10 cities; numbers in italics is the lowest among all cities; shaded numbers are the highest among all cities; (2) the respondents' effective answers to other policy issues were used to impute a small number of missing values in the data; (3) the General Policy Satisfaction Index is the result of the factor analysis that combined data of the 20 policy items; the minimum of the index is 0 and the maximum is 1. The results show that there exist strong positive correlations between each policy item and the general factor (not shown), meaning that the general index is a good reflection of the 20 policy items; (4) in regression analysis, the general policy satisfaction scores of Chongqing, Shanghai, Shenyang and Kunming are significantly higher than the other six cities (controlling for the respondents' media usage, ethnicity, political identity, age, education level, income, urbanisation, working hours, gender and marital status. See Table 2.

Source: Public Policy Satisfaction Survey, Institute of Public Policy, South China University of Technology, October 2013.

Social equality, clean governance and government responsiveness were another set of interrelated issues. Although none of the three policy items made it to the top of the least-satisfied policies, people showed a considerable level of discontent with them. This reflected a gap between public expectation and government's actual performance in spite of the efforts made to improve these policies after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

The Five Most Satisfied Policies

Table 1 also shows the five policy items with the highest satisfaction level (weighted) in the sample (in bold). These policies were (1) ethnic harmony (66%); (2) national security and foreign policy (64%); (3) freedom of speech (59%); (4) crime control/employment opportunity (tied for fourth and both were 57%); and (5) college entrance examination system (56%).

National security and foreign policy had a high level of satisfaction. The strengthening of China's state power, the leaps in national defence technology, the rapid expansion of China's international influence, and the tough stance of the government on the South China Sea dispute and against Japan all helped to improve people's satisfaction with the government's foreign policy.

Similarly, the high satisfaction with employment opportunity was not surprising. Through government funds, boosting of domestic demand and introduction of other state economic regulations, China has survived the international economic and financial crisis since 2008. Although economic growth slowed down in recent years, employment opportunity did not seem to suffer seriously. In the phone interviews, some respondents added their comments except answering that they were satisfied with job opportunities: "Jobs are everywhere. Take it or not is your decision."

As for opportunity of higher education, the emphasis on scores for Chinese college entrance examination system meant that students could only take the exam in the place of their household registration, etc. Despite these limitations, people still believe that the system provides a channel for them to ascend to a higher social stratum through individual endeavours. As a result, people were quite satisfied with the system.

The high level of satisfaction with crime prevention was unexpected. In the past several decades, China had experienced dramatic social changes and the accumulation of material wealth. The floating population has grown and materialistic values had become dominant in society. All these factors would likely contribute to the rise of crimes.

The high satisfaction with crime rate could be attributable to first, the government's effectiveness in devoting a large amount of resources to fight crimes and successfully keeping crimes under control. Second, as an indirect factor, the relatively abundant job opportunities and low unemployment rate reduced the incentive of young males, who were most likely to commit crimes, to resort to theft or robbery.

In fact, China's crime rates compared more favourably to South Africa, Brazil, Russia and India, the other BRICS countries at similar levels of economic development. For example, according to the 2013 Global Study on Homicide by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the homicide rate in China was 1.0 per 100,000 population in 2010, much lower than South Africa's 30.0, Brazil's 25.2, Russia's 9.2 and India's 3.5.

Considering China's state-sponsored affirmative ethnic policy, a high public satisfaction with ethnic harmony is expected. The government offered quota for ethnic minorities (especially those living in large cities) in education, employment, housing and other areas in order to help them integrate into Han-Chinese majority society.

To Western observers who were used to read the Western media's coverage of ethnic tensions and conflicts in China, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet, this high public satisfaction does not sync. Although the recent series of violent attacks in Kunming, Urumqi, Kashi, Guangzhou and Beijing in late 2013 and early 2014 may change public opinion on ethnic relations, most of the ordinary Chinese citizens had a positive attitude towards China's ethnic policy.

Since the official media framed ethnic tensions in Xinjiang and Tibet as atypical incidents or disturbance of ethnic harmony, most people who received governmental-censored information saw these events as terrorist activities conducted by a small number of extremists, the government policy on ethnic equality would not be affected.

Another unexpected result was the respondents' high satisfaction with freedom of speech. This runs in contrast to conventional view that China had many human rights problems, such as censorship of the Internet, repression of dissidents, control of house churches and limitations of Western journalists in reporting these problems. These problems gave the impression that freedom of speech in China was severely undermined. However, as the room to express personal opinion and the channel to criticise government were expanding, most people in the survey seemed satisfied with the current government's policy on freedom of speech. This reality was hugely different from the conventional impression on the lack of freedom of speech in China.

Historical Trend of Public Policy Satisfaction

The change in public policy satisfaction could be gauged from empirical data over the years. The earliest data available were collected in 1987.

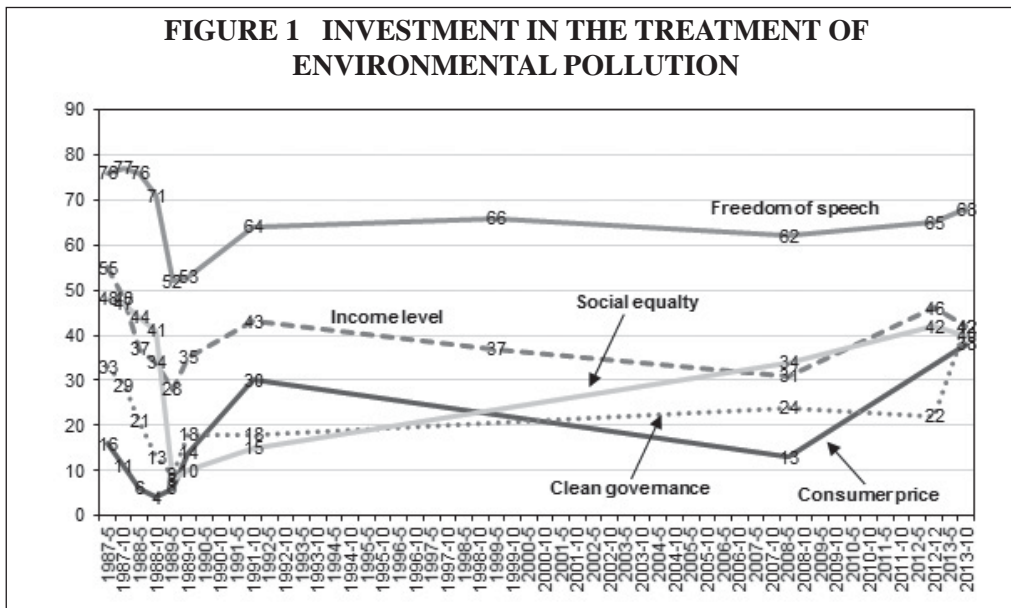
Five policies are selected for further discussion: social equality, income, clean governance, consumer price and freedom of speech. These policies represent issues related to people's economic well-being as well as political rights. Figure 1 shows the trends of the levels of satisfaction with the five policies from May 1987 to October 2013.

After a dramatic decline in May 1989, satisfaction with each policy issue rebounded dramatically. For example, in October 2013, satisfaction with freedom

of speech, income and social equality recovered rapidly since May 1989 and approached a record high in 1987. Satisfaction with consumer price stability and clean governance in 2013 not only returned to the pre-1989 level but even surpassed the highest level recorded in 1987.

The levels of satisfaction with other policies, such as environmental protection, employment opportunity, housing provision, health care, pension system, endowment insurance and social safety, also recovered significantly from the record low in 1989 (the results are not shown in Figure 1). Among these policy issues, satisfaction with employment opportunity and crime control in 2013 also surpassed the historically peak.

Although the levels of satisfaction with consumer price stability and clean governance ranked among the five lowest policy items in 2013 (Table 1), both of them had gradually improved in the past 26 years from 1987 to 2013, especially from 1989. If the fact that policy satisfaction was at its lowest level was one of the many reasons for the social unrest in 1989, the level of policy satisfaction in October 2013 seemed to give China's paranoid rulers some reassurance for political stability, at least for the time being.



Notes: (i) Satisfaction includes both “satisfied” and “very satisfied”. “Don’t know” answers are included in calculating the percentages.

(ii) It should be noted that the percentage of satisfaction in Figure 1 represented the sum of satisfaction score of “satisfied” and “very satisfied” for each policy, while the satisfaction levels in Table 1 consider the difference between “satisfied” and “very satisfied”. Thus the numbers in Figure 1 are greater, but those in Table 1 are more accurate. This is because in the early stage of the survey, respondents were only asked their satisfaction without identifying the extent of satisfaction. In order to compare it to the earlier data, it is necessary to combine the later data of “satisfied” and “very satisfied”.

Source: 40-City Survey 1987-1992.

In sum, public satisfaction was affected by how closely the policy issue was related to people's everyday life; the closer a policy is, the less satisfaction it will receive. These everyday issues included food safety, consumer price, housing, income and environment, etc.

The reverse is true of policies that are less relevant to the ordinary people. Examples are ethnic policy, national security and foreign policy, freedom of speech and higher education entrance examination. From a historical perspective, the levels of policy satisfaction had recovered gradually in October 2013 from the 1989 urban unrest. Public assessment was approaching a record high for some policies and even surpassing the highest historical level for some other issues.

Determinants of Public Satisfaction with Policy

Three factors affect public satisfaction with public policy: regional distribution, media effect and the respondents' socio-economic status.

Regional distribution

Table 1 shows not only the overall degree of satisfaction with each policy item, but also the results for each of the 10 survey cities as well. The numbers in bold stand for the minimum scores or the lowest levels of policy satisfaction among the 10 cities and the numbers in italics were the maximum or the highest levels. For example, for food safety, the average satisfaction level of the whole sample was 38% (in bold), the lowest was Guangzhou with only 28% (in italics) and the highest was in Chongqing (43%, shaded).

Such comparisons reveal several interesting differences between these cities. Beijing had the lowest satisfaction score for college entrance examination system among all cities. This was probably because it had many more immigrants than the other cities (53% of all respondents in Beijing). These immigrants were discontented because they (including their children) were excluded by the system and were not allowed to take the examination in Beijing.

Shanghai residents were the most satisfied with government efficiency, crime control and employment opportunities, suggesting a stronger government role in these areas in Shanghai than in other cities. Shenzhen tied the score in employment opportunity satisfaction with Shanghai. This may be the result of the rapid growth of its local economy. Both Kunming and Xi'an had the lowest satisfaction scores of employment opportunity, a likely result of the cities' relative lag in economic development among the 10 cities.

Urumqi citizens' satisfaction with ethnic harmony was the lowest, a sign of persistent local ethnic tension. Xi'an had the highest satisfaction score in poverty relief, suggesting greater public recognition of local government effort. Differences between cities aside, the most intriguing finding in Table 1 is the discrepancy between Guangzhou and Chongqing. The general policy satisfaction index of Guangzhou was only 44%, the lowest percentile among the 10 cities, while the score of Chongqing was the highest at 54% (the bottom column in Table 1).

For specific policies, of the 20 policy items, Chongqing residents had highest satisfaction scores for 14, while Guangzhou residents proved to be the least satisfied as they had 15 lowest scores of the 20 policy items.

The difference between Chongqing (the most satisfied) and Guangzhou (the least satisfied) may be related to the governing capacity of the two municipal governments. One way to measure governing capacity is by how each municipal government provides policy information to local residents. In that area, Chongqing was ahead of Guangzhou. One could find much more information on selected policy issues on the official website of the Chongqing municipal government (www.cq.gov.cn) than on the website of the Guangzhou government (www.gz.gov.cn).

For example, as at 28 December 2013, the keyword search on “food safety” on both official websites displayed 663 pieces of related information from the Chongqing website, while the Guangzhou website only showed 53; the search for “housing provision” produced 1,593 results from the Chongqing’s website, while Guangzhou’s website had only 29.

**... policy information
in Chongqing was
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than in Guangzhou,
indicating that the
Chongqing government
was much closer to the
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in terms of website
design and information
provision.**

Similarly for “environmental protection”, Chongqing’s website returned with 1,998 results, while Guangzhou’s website had 47; and for “consumer price”, Chongqing had 2,215 results, while Guangzhou had only 157.

In short, it is obvious that there is a huge gap between the two cities in government communication and transparency of public policy information, at least in the selected policy issues that were searched. However, this gap does not mean that the Guangzhou government did not make any effort and improvement in these policy issues; it may have devoted even more resources than Chongqing.

Yet from the perspective of a local citizen or Internet user, policy information in Chongqing was much more accessible than in Guangzhou, indicating that the Chongqing government was much closer to the needs of the public in terms of website design and information provision.

Interestingly, such a difference coincided with the high level of elite competition. Chongqing was governed under the “Chongqing Model” that advocated populism by the charismatic and flamboyant Party Secretary Bo Xilai, who was later charged with corruption. Guangzhou was under the leadership of Wang Yang, the then party chief of Guangdong province, who was seen as a technocrat in favour of the less populist but continued free market capitalism.

Even though Wang Yang emerged winner of the elite competition and was later promoted as the vice prime minister at the time of the survey, the low level of policy satisfaction in Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong, did not seem to add credibility to the former party secretary's resume. In contrast, even though Bo Xilai was the loser of such elite competition and serving a life sentence in prison, his legacy seemed to remain in Chongqing.

Media Effect

Media in China experienced a two-stage transformation in the previous three decades. The first stage was a rapid transition from traditional paper media and radio to television in the late 80s and early 90s.

After satellite TV signal successfully covered the entire country, the second transformation from TV to the Internet took place in the early 21st century. People in almost all parts of China could access the Internet. According to an announcement by China Telecom, by 2012, the coverage of 3G networks reached 97% of the urban area and 92% of the rural area.

By 2013, television and the Internet both gained importance in the mass media in China. However, despite the rapid development of the Internet, television was still the primary channel for people to obtain political and social news. A survey by the Texas A&M University shows that in 2008, about 73% of Chinese people learned of current events through the television, and only 10% acquired news information through the Internet.

In 2012, the World Value Survey shows that the number of people who relied on the Internet for news information doubled (22%), but the percentage of television users remained at roughly 71%. In the survey of residents in 10 cities in 2013, the percentage of people using the Internet as a source for news information was 55%, far higher than the national average, since the cost of accessing the Internet in these cities is much lower than in other regions and less developed areas. However, the percentage of Internet news users is still lower than the percentage of people relying on television for news, which was 65%.

The first two rows of Table 2 (upper half) show media's effect on the index of the overall policy satisfaction in the 10-city survey in October 2013. Based on the regression results, controlling for demographic factors (age, gender) and socio-economic status (education, political identity, income, and city of residency), media's effects on policy satisfaction were statistically significant: TV news and Internet news produced the opposite effects on respondents' satisfaction with public policy: acquiring political and social news through television significantly increased respondents' satisfaction, while reading Internet news has a negative effect.

The effects of television and the Internet were contradicting, yet not surprising. Television news reports were more strictly controlled by the government, usually covered positive information, and understandably increased the audience's satisfaction with the government and its public policies. The Internet is a platform

for netizens or Internet activists to express their anger and discontent. It even becomes a habitat for rumours and abuses, which may sometimes generate mob mentality.

Expectedly, reading “news” online could make people think of the real world as decadent and dark as it was often described online, leading them to become suspicious of and dissatisfied with the government and its policies. For the time being, China’s rulers could still count on the positive and stabilising effect of TV news since TV audience still outnumbered the Internet news consumers.

However, as the latter will definitely surpass the former in the future, the Chinese government will predictably be busy at censoring the Internet as well as filling it with pro-government information as shown on TV news.

Individual Characteristics

The analysis in Table 2 also contains the effects of individual socio-economic status (SES) on the respondents’ policy satisfaction. These SES factors include party membership, income, education level, local household registration, ethnicity, age, daily working hours, gender, marital status and the city where respondents lived.

The results show that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members and the high-income earners were more satisfied with public policy than non-party members and the low-income group: it is expected since the former two groups are the likely beneficiaries of the existing policies. Marital status and gender did not have statistically significant effects on policy satisfaction.

Interestingly, the migrant population without local household registration indicated stronger satisfaction than people with local household registration. This finding contradicts conventional impression that local urban residents should be more and not less satisfied because they were the beneficiaries of the public services of the city where they lived in. Local urban residents’ dissatisfaction could have been triggered by the pressure of the influx of migrant workers who compete for public services in the city.

As a contrast, migrants who usually come from small towns and rural villages are easily satisfied with the opportunities for cash income, urban lifestyle and the modern conveniences than the spoiled urban residents who took urban services for granted.

High levels of education reduced people’s satisfaction, confirming the findings by many other studies on this issues. With more education, people become more aware of individual rights. At the same time, they acquire more information, develop higher expectations and tend to be politically more critical.

What is different in China is that education in the previous decades contained many “pro-government” political contents and receiving education actually increased people’s agreement with public policy. Today, education in China seemed to converge with that of other countries and societies in accentuating information accumulation and strengthening analytical skills.

TABLE 2 MEDIA AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC STATUS ON POLICY SATISFACTION (OLS MULTI-LINEAR REGRESSION)	
	Policy Satisfaction (0-1)
Watch TV news	0.027***
Watch/Read Internet News	-0.071***
Party Membership	0.029***
Income Level (1-5)	0.027***
Non-local Household Registration	0.019**
Marital Status	0.003
Education Level (1-7)	-0.013***
Male	0.002
Ethnic Minority	-0.041***
Working Hours (0-3)	-0.008**
Age: 18-29 (control group)	
30-39	-0.033***
40-49	-0.030**
50-59	-0.007
60-89	-0.027*
Constant	0.554***
Sample	1,991
R-squared	0.112
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Note: (1) the average of independent variables can be found in Table 3; (2) cities are not shown in the results, but included in the regression operation. The satisfaction scores for Chongqing, Shanghai, Shenyang and Kunming were higher than those of other cities.
Data Source: China Public Policy Survey, Institute of Public Policy, South China University of Technology, October 2013

People with longer working hours and the ethnic minorities were less satisfied than those with fewer working hours and the Han majority. Longer working hours usually indicate more burden and higher pressure, thus make people feel depressed and dissatisfied. The low satisfaction among ethnic minorities may be attributed to multiple reasons. It may relate to the lack of governmental assistance to some disadvantaged minorities. Or as Ted Gurr argued, it may be the result of the “relative deprivation” of some minority groups who demanded more affirmative actions by the government.

The distribution of the age effect can be described as a U-shape: satisfaction at both ends (both young and old) of the curve were higher than the middle-aged, especially those in the age groups of 30-39 and 40-49. People in these two age groups were likely to endure greater pressure than the youth and the old in work, family and finance, and were thus less satisfied.

TABLE 3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES

Variables	Sample Size	Weighted	Average	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Communal government satisfaction	1,904	1,898	0.59	0.22	0	1
Municipal government satisfaction	1,904	1,898	0.59	0.20	0	1
Central government satisfaction	1,904	1,898	0.70	0.20	0	1
Policy Satisfaction Index (20 items)	1,996	1,992	0.49	0.16	0	1
Happiness	1,967	1,967	0.64	0.22	0	1
Radical actions	2,000	2,000	0.02	0.13	0	1
Petition and protest	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Judicial remedy through court	2,000	2,000	0.09	0.28	0	1
Use media for rights protection	2,000	2,000	0.13	0.33	0	1
Go to gov. bureaus	2,000	2,000	0.25	0.43	0	1
Online advocacy	2,000	2,000	0.08	0.27	0	1
Personal contact	2,000	2,000	0.03	0.16	0	1
Do nothing	2,000	2,000	0.21	0.41	0	1
Television news	2,000	2,000	0.65	0.38	0	1
Internet news	2,000	2,000	0.55	0.42	0	1
Social interaction	1,991	1,989	0.50	0.36	0	1
Interpersonal trust	2,000	2,000	0.57	0.49	0	1
Obeying bad law	1,901	1,870	0.57	0.30	0	1
Han Chinese	2,000	2,000	0.92	0.27	0	1
CCP member	2,000	2,000	0.20	0.40	0	1
Age: 18-29	2,000	2,000	0.24	0.43	0	1
30-39	2,000	2,000	0.24	0.43	0	1
40-49	2,000	2,000	0.22	0.41	0	1
50-59	2,000	2,000	0.16	0.36	0	1
60-89	2,000	2,000	0.14	0.34	0	1
Education	2,000	2,000	4.51	1.53	1	7
Local Household Registration	2,000	2,000	0.59	0.49	0	1
Income level	2,000	2,000	2.24	0.97	1	5
Working hours	1,995	1,993	1.73	1.06	0	3
Female	2,000	2,000	0.45	0.50	0	1
Married	2,000	2,000	0.74	0.44	0	1
Guangzhou	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Shenzhen	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Wuhan	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Beijing	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Urumqi	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Kunming	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Shenyang	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Xi'an	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Shanghai	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1
Chongqing	2,000	2,000	0.10	0.30	0	1

Policy Implications

The Chinese people are generally satisfied with government policies. The least satisfied policies were those related to people's livelihood, such as food safety, consumer price stability, public housing and income; on politically sensitive issues of regime stability, such as freedom of speech and civil rights, the public showed high levels of satisfaction.

While people still expressed dissatisfaction with the level of clean governance and personal income, the level of satisfaction was significantly higher in 2013 than the record low in May 1989. Moreover, satisfaction with various levels of government, especially with the central government, had been constantly high.

Although the rapid development of the Internet is a great challenge to the regulation of cyber space and the Internet has been increasingly used by people to express their discontent, the analysis did not show any evidence that the Internet has been effective in mobilising anti-regime collective political activity (results not shown). All these findings would be helpful in maintaining political stability in urban China.

There were however some worrisome trends. The survey found that Chinese urban residents showed strong tendency of political activism. Nearly 80% of the respondents said that they would do something to defend their rights when unfairly treated by the government; among these people, 12% said that they would engage in confrontational behaviour, such as group petition, demonstration and protest, or even more radical actions.

One reason for such extra-system actions is the failure of the normal problem solving channels, such as the ineffectiveness of the courts and the functional departments within the government. Such findings suggest the unstable nature of Chinese social and political life.

The CCP has come a long way in achieving inner-party democracy.³ Yet the key to maintaining its governance and facing the challenges to social stability is to promote institutional development in the rule of law and public supervision of policy making and implementation, and redirect the public obsession with expressing discontent and defending individual rights to institutional channels instead of through extra-system means.

To achieve this goal, China needs the political will and the necessary resources to establish such institutional channels, including legal institutions, well-functioning bureaucratic agencies and the commonly accepted rules and regulations. It would do well to rely less on traditional "fire extinguishing" contingency plans and dismissing a few problematic officials. Long-term political stability can only be achieved through institution building. ■

³ Zheng Yongnian, 2010, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor*, Routledge.