

The Impact of Political Trust on Grassroots Social Stability and Its Enhancement Pathways

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Abstract: The level of political trust directly affects the stability of grassroots social order and influences the effectiveness of grassroots governance. This paper analyzes the positive impact of political trust on grassroots social stability, elaborating on its effects from three dimensions: reducing conflicts and friction, facilitating the smooth implementation of policies, and enhancing governance resilience. Building on this, the paper proposes five specific pathways—regulating the exercise of administrative power, improving the quality of public services, broadening channels for public expression, strengthening the management of the cadre corps, and improving the rule of law at the grassroots level—to enhance political trust in grassroots society, with the aim of providing a theoretical reference for grassroots governance practices.

Keywords: Political trust; Grassroots society; Enhancement pathways

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1. Introduction

Social stability at the grassroots level is the foundation of national governance. Political trust, as the bond linking the government and the people, profoundly influences the effectiveness of policy implementation. Currently, grassroots governance faces the challenge of increasingly diverse public demands, and continuously strengthening political trust is of significant importance for maintaining long-term stability and peace at the grassroots level. This paper analyzes the positive impact of political trust on grassroots social stability and explores effective pathways for enhancing political trust at the grassroots level, which is of great significance for maintaining grassroots social stability.

2. The impact of political trust on social stability at the grassroots level

2.1. Reducing conflicts and tensions

The public's trust in the government determines the effectiveness of grassroots governance and the likelihood of friction between the government and the public in that context. When the public believes that government

policies are formulated with the public interest in mind, many everyday disputes can be resolved through grassroots mediation. Political trust creates space for the negotiated resolution of conflicts among citizens, reduces the waste of judicial resources, and consequently eases the burden on petitioning channels. As unfounded skepticism toward officials' performance of their duties diminishes and the efficiency of public service counters improves, citizens will also voluntarily comply with various administrative requirements. Therefore, political trust acts as a lubricant for grassroots order, transforming rigid institutional constraints into internal codes of conduct for citizens, thereby reducing conflicts and friction among grassroots residents and enhancing the stability of grassroots society.

2.2. Successful implementation of the policy

Generally speaking, local governance is constrained by limited human and material resources. If every policy requires repeated explanation and mobilization, administrative costs will remain high. When public political trust is high, the public embraces reform measures without resistance. Resistance to the implementation of new policies is reduced, making it easier to promote and implement them. Public cooperation increases spontaneously, and citizens participate more actively in public affairs. Therefore, political trust is an indispensable condition in the policy implementation process. Public political trust in policies lays the foundation for their smooth implementation and ensures that laws and regulations designed to benefit the people take solid effect at the grassroots level.

2.3. Enhancing governance resilience

The authority of grassroots Party and government institutions stems not only from legal authorization but also from the cumulative daily experiences of the people. When the public has sufficient political trust in grassroots government institutions, the work of grassroots officials proceeds more smoothly, and organizational capacity is correspondingly strengthened. For example, in flood control and drought relief efforts, the public responds more quickly and participates more actively. Young professionals are increasingly willing to return to their villages to take up positions, strengthening the reserve pool for grassroots work and thereby improving the efficiency of grassroots governance. During periods of economic volatility, the public demonstrates a high degree of tolerance for regulatory measures, public sentiment remains stable, the spread of misinformation is curtailed, and authoritative announcements take center stage. Therefore, political trust is the result of long-term accumulation between grassroots governments and the public; it endows grassroots work systems with practical power, enabling the grassroots level to maintain stability in the face of various challenges, enhance the resilience of grassroots governance, and strengthen the stability of grassroots society.

3. Effective approaches to enhance social and political trust at the grassroots level

3.1. Regulating the exercise of administrative power

Enhancing social and political trust at the grassroots level requires regulating the exercise of administrative power, and implementing a system of power lists at the grassroots level is the foundation for such regulation. First, township governments and subdistrict offices must, in accordance with laws and regulations, catalog their administrative powers, categorize different matters, and compile power lists in a standardized format. The content of the list should include five fixed elements: the name of the power, the implementing entity, the legal basis, the processing time frame, and the supervision method; each matter should be assigned a

unique code for retrieval purposes. Once a draft list is prepared, it must first be reviewed at a joint meeting of the township Party and government leadership, then submitted to the county-level judicial administration department for a legality review. After passing the review, the township must publish the full text of the list on its government affairs bulletin board. The list operates under a dynamic adjustment mechanism: in the event of a transfer of institutional functions, the responsible department must submit proposed amendments within thirty working days; following review through the same procedure, the list will be updated and republished.

Second, relevant departments need to refine the benchmarks for administrative discretion based on the list of powers. For matters involving penalties, grassroots law enforcement agencies should distinguish among the varying degrees of social harm caused by violations and divide the statutory penalty ranges into three to five tiers, with each tier corresponding to clearly defined circumstances for application. The tier classification plan must be discussed at an expanded meeting of the township Party committee and finalized after hearing the opinions of village and community representatives. The final discretionary benchmark table must specify the specific penalty measures corresponding to each category of circumstances, with a footnote at the bottom of the table explaining the procedures for handling exceptional cases. As the discretionary benchmark document serves as the basis for law enforcement officers' daily case handling, the case review process must verify whether the applicable tier is accurate; any deviation from the benchmark must be accompanied by a written statement of reasons in the case file ^[1].

Finally, relevant agencies must simultaneously establish a system for documenting the exercise of authority. Each law enforcement department at the township level must be equipped with body-worn cameras, which must be kept recording audio and video throughout the entire duration of field enforcement operations, with the recordings covering all stages of law enforcement. Audio and video files must be transferred daily to dedicated storage devices, cataloged by case number, and retained for a period consistent with the retention period for case files. For matters handled at administrative licensing service counters, a case acceptance notice system shall be implemented; at each processing stage, applicants shall be issued a written receipt bearing the official seal, and the receipt stub shall be filed together with the processing records. At the end of each quarter, the township discipline inspection commission shall lead a random selection of law enforcement case files and verify them item by item against the list of powers; the verification results shall be circulated internally within the agency. By the end of the year, an annual report on the exercise of powers shall be prepared, accompanied by a statistical table of verification data, and submitted to the county-level discipline inspection and supervision authorities for the record.

3.2. Improving the quality of public services

First, improving the quality of public services requires relevant agencies to establish service counters at grassroots-level convenience service centers and to standardize services by following uniform procedures. An information desk should be set up at the entrance to the service hall, staffed by personnel on rotation to guide visitors through the process; information racks should be placed on the service counters, with the front of each sheet listing the required application materials and the back printed with frequently asked questions; each service station should be equipped with a dual-screen monitor, with the main screen for staff operations and the secondary screen facing the public to display real-time processing progress; a self-service area should be designated within the hall, featuring tables with sample forms for filling out documents, with black

ballpoint pens available next to the tables.

Second, public services follow a business process that combines front-office comprehensive intake with back-office categorized processing. When members of the public submit an application at the service window, staff must immediately verify the completeness of the materials. If the materials are complete, a receipt of acceptance is issued on the spot, specifying the promised completion deadline; if materials are missing, the public must be notified in writing in a single notice of the required corrections, with the notice listing the names of the missing materials item by item ^[2]; Documents accepted at the service counter are scanned to create electronic files, which are then forwarded to the back office for approval; approval officers must complete the review within the specified time frame. Completed documents are issued uniformly through the service counter, and members of the public may collect them upon presentation of the receipt of acceptance; at the time of pickup, counter staff must verify the recipient's identity information. For matters that cannot be processed at the township level, the service counter provides a collection and forwarding service, with documents sealed and delivered via internal transfer channels.

Finally, relevant agencies can establish a service quality tracking and feedback mechanism, with a focus on collecting genuine feedback from the public. Feedback terminals should be set up at the exits of service halls, with evaluation results uploaded in real time to the county-level government service management platform. At the end of each month, the township Party and government offices should compile the evaluation data and follow up on each unsatisfactory evaluation to verify the details. For negative evaluations resulting from issues with service counter staff, the person in charge will conduct a formal interview with the responsible individual, and the incident will be recorded in the quarterly performance evaluation file. The person in charge must also organize unannounced service quality inspections, in which inspectors—posing as ordinary members of the public—handle designated matters, document their experience, and submit an inspection report to the township's top leadership. The departments responsible for the issues identified in the report must submit rectification plans, and the status of these rectifications will be included as a reference factor in the preparation of the department's budget for the following year.

3.3. Expanding channels for public expression

First, townships and sub-districts establish fixed public reception days. Members of the Party and government leadership teams take turns on a fixed schedule; the reception schedule is posted on the government affairs bulletin board and simultaneously shared in village and community WeChat groups. The reception location is set up in the mediation room of the township's Comprehensive Social Governance Center, which is equipped with audio and video recording devices to record the entire conversation. Visitors first register the category of their request at the service counter of the Comprehensive Social Governance Center. Staff then direct them to the appropriate office based on the nature of the request, with different types of requests directed to the offices of the respective leaders in charge. During the reception, leaders inquire about the facts and circumstances of each request item by item and review the written materials submitted by the public. For matters that can be resolved on the spot, they immediately provide verbal feedback on the proposed resolution; for matters that cannot be resolved immediately, they issue a written notice of acceptance specifying a deadline for resolution. Before the deadline expires, the responsible department provides the visitor with an update on the progress.

Second, relevant agencies establish a public opinion collection network based on the existing

organizational structure. Each administrative village designates a public affairs liaison, a role served by a member of the Village Affairs Supervision Committee. The liaison visits permanent households without a predetermined agenda, using casual conversation to understand villagers' recent concerns and maintaining a public affairs log. The liaison regularly takes photos of the log and sends them to the designated email address of the township Party and government office; urgent matters are reported by phone within two hours. Each month, the township Party and government offices categorize and summarize the information reported by each village, compile a monthly analysis report on the petition situation by category, and submit it to senior leaders for review. Issues of the same nature that recur three or more times are designated as key concerns, triggering a specialized assessment procedure^[3].

Finally, relevant agencies have established an online petition platform. The menu bar of township WeChat official accounts features a permanent "Direct Public Feedback" entry; clicking it redirects users to a form-filling page, and after submission, the public can check the processing status at any time. Platform administrators follow a workday on-duty system; newly submitted petitions must be acknowledged within four hours and forwarded to the responsible department. The responsible department must complete a preliminary review within three business days and notify the petitioner of the results via the platform's messaging function. Once a matter is resolved, the petitioner confirms it online; if confirmation is not received by the deadline, the system automatically marks the case as closed and archives it. The platform automatically generates a monthly report on the timeliness of response to complaints, and the data is pushed to the work terminals of the principal Party and government officials at the township level.

3.4. Strengthening the management of the cadre corps

First, the administrative agency conducts on-the-job training for grassroots cadres in batches. Each year, the township Party building office formulates a training plan for the current year, with the training covering key township cadres. The curriculum is divided into three modules: policies and regulations, operational procedures, and mass work. The policies and regulations module primarily focuses on policies and regulations relevant to grassroots work; the operational procedures module focuses on how to improve the level of service provided to the public at the grassroots level; and the mass work module focuses primarily on methods for mediating conflicts. Each training session consists of at least three days of intensive instruction, with instructors invited from institutions such as county-level Party schools. A closed-book exam is administered at the conclusion of the training; exam scores are recorded in the cadres' personal files. Those who fail must participate in remedial training and retake the exam. A summary report on the year's training activities is compiled in early January of the following year.

Second, the daily code of conduct for officials must specify prohibited actions in the form of a checklist. The township discipline inspection commissions have developed a checklist of duties for grassroots officials, which lists eight categories of prohibited behaviors. The first category prohibits accepting gifts or cash from those under their management or service; the second prohibits using one's authority to interfere with the awarding of construction project contracts; the third prohibits showing favoritism toward relatives and friends in the distribution of agricultural subsidy funds; the fourth prohibits treating the public in a rude or high-handed manner; the fifth prohibits leaving one's post without authorization during working hours; the sixth prohibits participation in gambling activities and entry into unsavory entertainment venues; the seventh prohibits spreading remarks that violate policies or disseminating false information; and the eighth prohibits

using the organization of weddings, funerals, or other celebratory events as an opportunity to amass wealth without approval ^[2]. The list is distributed to each cadre for signature confirmation, with the original copy archived for reference. Cadres who violate the provisions listed in the checklist will be subject to disciplinary actions commensurate with the severity of the offense, thereby strengthening the day-to-day management of the cadre corps.

Finally, the results of the public evaluation are directly linked to the performance appraisal of officials. In mid-December of each year, townships organize annual performance reviews for officials, which include a public evaluation component. On the day of the evaluation, the township dispatches working groups carrying sealed evaluation forms to each village and residential community. The groups convene representatives of villagers, Party members, and local organizations to fill out the forms collectively. The forms are collected and sealed on the spot, then taken back to the township by the working groups. There, under the supervision of the Commission for Discipline Inspection, they are unsealed and tallied. The results are factored into the officials' annual performance evaluation scores. Officials who rank last in public satisfaction for two consecutive years are summoned for a discussion with the Party Committee Secretary, and the record of this discussion is filed in their integrity records.

3.5. Strengthening the rule of law at the grassroots level

First, each year, the judicial office compiles a legal education plan for the township based on the key tasks set by the county-level legal education authority, breaking down the specific activities by month. Each village designates one legal education officer, who participates in specialized training organized by the judicial office every quarter. The training focuses on four common legal issues in rural areas: marriage and family, neighborhood disputes, land contracts, and support and inheritance. After the training, the legal education officers deliver group presentations during Party member activity days. Township schools schedule rule-of-law courses, with lesson plans provided by the judicial office; the content focuses primarily on the protection of minors and the prevention of school bullying ^[4].

Second, public legal service sites implement a system of regular lawyer on-site duty. Relevant agencies have established township public legal service stations staffed by practicing lawyers who provide free legal consultations. For members of the public who meet the eligibility criteria for legal aid, lawyers provide on-the-spot guidance on completing the application form, which the station then submits to the county-level legal aid center for approval within two days. Legal service contact points in each village and residential community display lawyer information boards bearing contact details to facilitate public inquiries. Each quarter, judicial offices compile data on consultation sessions and analyze the most frequently asked legal questions, using this information as the basis for adjusting the focus of legal education efforts for the following quarter.

Finally, relevant agencies have established grassroots dispute mediation offices. Once a dispute is accepted by the mediation office, the mediator will contact both parties within three business days to schedule a time and place for mediation. If the mediation is successful, a mediation agreement is signed on the spot; if the agreement includes provisions regarding monetary payments, the parties may jointly apply to the local court for judicial confirmation. If mediation is unsuccessful, the mediator will issue a notice of termination of mediation and inform the parties that they may file a lawsuit in accordance with the law.

4. Conclusion

In summary, political trust serves as a crucial pillar of stability at the grassroots level. Therefore, this paper examines the positive impact of political trust on grassroots social stability from three perspectives—conflict resolution, policy implementation, and governance resilience—and proposes pathways to enhance political trust, including regulating the exercise of administrative power, improving the quality of public services, broadening channels for public expression, strengthening the management of the cadre corps, and improving legal safeguards at the grassroots level. These measures will effectively build up a reserve of public trust and lay a solid psychological foundation for long-term stability at the grassroots level.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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