

HOW MUCH DO THE CHINESE TRUST THEIR GOVERNMENT?

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Executive Summary

1. With no insulation from the global financial crisis, the Chinese government is faced with the serious challenge of massive retrenchment and rising unemployment.
2. During this difficult and capricious period, whether the Chinese government is able to maintain political and social stability depends largely on the trust it garners from its people. Political trust is a crucial component of political support that gives the government room to maneuver when it encounters difficulties or crises.
3. A nationwide survey in 2008 asked Chinese respondents how much trust the citizens have of their government. The data show that the level of trust is generally high.
4. Chinese citizens view the central government more favorably than local governments and ordinary officials. People in the less-developed western and central provinces trust the government more than people from the industrial east.
5. Rural people have the highest level of trust, followed by rural migrant workers and urban residents.
6. People who were born after 1980 or received a college degree are inclined to be more skeptical about the government. Members of the Chinese Communist Party have less confidence in the government than non-members. Increasing income generally produces higher levels of trust, but the richest group tends to be less trustful.
7. Ethnic minorities do not trust the government as much as the Han people, and religious believers hold a more negative view of the government than non-believers.

8. People's past experience in local community elections has an impact on their political trust. Fairer elections generate higher levels of trust. People who participated in collective protests in the past hold a significantly lower level of trust than people without such experience.
9. Overall, the current central government in China still receives considerable support from the people. This provides the Chinese leadership with much space to select policies to tackle the economic downturn while remaining politically and socially stable.
10. The long-term stability of the Chinese government largely depends on how the leadership improves the public image of its local governments and officials, and earns the support of younger, better educated and more urbanized citizens.
11. The government also has some way to go in improving relations with ethnic minorities, religious followers, and protesters. An effective way to increase public trust is to provide citizens with institutionalized ways to participating in public affairs, for example, local elections.