

PUBLIC POLICY SATISFACTION IN URBAN CHINA

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Executive Summary

1. Public evaluation of government policies reflects public mood, an indicator of social and political stability. A 2013 public opinion survey in China revealed the top five most dissatisfied policy issues were food safety; consumer price stability; social equality and housing provision; income and clean governance; and environmental protection and government responsiveness.
2. The top five most satisfied items were (1) ethnic harmony; (2) national security and foreign policy; (3) freedom of speech; (4) crime prevention and employment opportunity (tied); and (5) college entrance examination.
3. The overall level of urban residents' satisfaction with public policy in 2013 improved significantly from the low levels of the Tiananmen protests in May 1989. This is evident even in the case of some of the least satisfied policy issues in 2013, such as consumer price stability, social equality and clean governance.
4. Across cities, Guangzhou ranked the lowest in average satisfaction and Chongqing ranked the highest. This was probably related to the municipal governments' varying capabilities in communicating with their residents; Chongqing seemed more capable than Guangzhou in providing policy information.
5. The media had significant influence over people's satisfaction with public policy. Television and the Internet showed totally different effects. Watching TV news improved audiences' satisfaction with public policy, while getting news from the Internet worsened one's dissatisfaction. Such contrast is related to the tighter control of TV news content than the Internet.
6. Members of the Chinese Communist Party and the high-income earners were more satisfied with public policy. The migrant population without local household registration indicated stronger satisfaction than people with local household registration.

7. High levels of education reduced people's satisfaction. People with longer working hours and the ethnic minorities were less satisfied than those with fewer working hours and the Han majority.
8. Policy satisfaction aside, Chinese urban residents showed strong tendency of political activism. Many respondents said that they would take confrontational actions if they felt unfairly treated. Such findings suggest the unstable nature of the mood of the Chinese public and the volatility of state-society relationship.
9. In the long run, China needs to establish institutional channels, including legal institutions, well-functioning bureaucratic agencies, and the commonly accepted rules and regulations, to maintain its governance and to face the challenges to social stability.