



Determinants of public trust in government: Empirical evidence from urban China

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Abstract

Several studies suggest that public trust in government in China remains high and without any trend of decline despite the fact that public trust in government has declined dramatically in developed countries. This article analyses public trust in government in contemporary urban China with a comprehensive representative survey and tests the factors associated with public trust in government. Trust in government in China is found to be much lower than previous studies have indicated. Furthermore, the variables of citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services, general democracy, participation in government and the transparency of government are positively associated with public trust in government in China at both the city and central level. In addition, this research also finds that citizens who are younger, more highly educated and well-paid have a lower probability of trust in government in China. These findings suggest that maintaining political trust will be a challenge for the Chinese government.

Points for practitioners

The findings in this study suggest that public managers and policymakers in China should pay full attention to the challenge posed by maintaining public trust in government, and need to consider formulating specific and feasible measures to enhance public trust based on the determinants of public trust in government. Moreover, in terms of the fact that the determinants that make public trust in government decline in developed countries also affect public trust in government in China, such public managers and policymakers need to strengthen communication with developed countries to improve the handling of the common challenge of maintaining public trust in government.

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central government, critical citizens, democracy, local government, participation, transparency

Introduction

Public trust is widely seen as an important factor promoting good government in any political system (Clark and Lee, 2001). Governments enjoying greater public trust can function more smoothly and effectively than those with less public trust (Chen and Shi, 2001). Over the past three decades, public trust in government has declined dramatically in the US (Cooper et al., 2008; Lipset, 1987; Van de Walle et al., 2008). Public trust has also suffered a severe breakdown across developed countries, such as Canada, Japan and European countries (Hetherington, 1999; Kim, 2010; Miller and Listhaug, 1998; Young, 2008). Reversing the decline in public trust in government based on analysing the related factors connected with decline in public trust has been the focus of a great deal of theory and research in the US and other developed countries (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Nye et al., 1997).

In addition, several studies suggest that public trust in China remains high and without any trend of decline.¹ As they discuss the various factors that are associated with public trust in government, these studies have laid a good foundation for further research on public trust in China. However, most of these studies are limited to public trust in rural China (Li, 2004; Manion, 2006) or public trust influenced by one certain factor, such as the media (Chen and Shi, 2001; Shi, 2001). The only study on the topic of public trust in urban China (Chen, 2004; Chen et al., 1997) is difficult to generalize to all of urban China due to the fact that it utilized data only from Beijing, which is the capital and political centre of China (Nathan, 2005).

Most of the aforementioned surveys on public trust in China were conducted more than 10 years ago. Almost all aspects of China have been changed dramatically due to miraculous economic growth. Several scholars (Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 1999) argue that long-term economic development can change political culture and public trust. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out research on public trust in contemporary China in urban areas; in particular, using a comprehensive representative survey. The objective of this research is to learn more about public trust in government in urban China, to compare findings with previous studies on public trust in China and to analyse and verify whether the determinants that make public trust in government decline in developed countries also affect public trust in government in China.

Literature review and hypotheses

Trust in government is often referred to as confidence in government, or political trust (Anderson, 2010). According to Thomas (1998), public trust in government

can be assessed by the extent to which citizens have confidence in the government to operate in the best interests of society. Hetherington (1999) defined public trust as a basic evaluative orientation towards the government founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations. Miller and Listhaug (1998) defined trust in government as an evaluation of whether or not the government is performing in accordance with normative expectations held by the public. The measurements of citizen trust in government in previous studies are summarized in Table A1 in Appendix 1. 'Serving the people heart and soul' is the mission statement and political slogan of the ruling Communist Party of China and the Chinese government at all levels. The definition provided by Thomas (1998) is therefore utilized in this research as the definition of public trust in government in China.

Most research on public trust has focused on trust in national government (Cooper et al., 2008; Miller, 1974). However, there are also several studies that concentrated on trust in local government. Kim (2010) analysed the factors associated with trust in central government and local government, respectively, based on the practice of determining which factors were potentially associated. The previous studies on public trust in China also analysed the factors associated with trust in the central government and local government, respectively (Li, 2004; Shi, 2001). Therefore, this research discusses the determinants of public trust in government at both the local and central levels in order to compare findings with previous studies on public trust in China.

Satisfaction with the quality of public services and trust in government

Satisfaction with the quality of public services, which is also known as citizen satisfaction with public service delivery, can be defined as citizens' perception of the quality of the goods and services that are delivered by the government, such as primary education and public health (Akinboade et al., 2012; Morgan and Pelissero, 1979; Van Ryzin, 2004). Several scholars (Devereux and Weisbrod, 2006; Diagne et al., 2012; Maxwell, 2010) have also explicated the definitions and measurements of satisfaction with the quality of public services. The measurements of satisfaction with the quality of public services in previous studies show that the core element of the definition is citizens' perception of the specific public services that are delivered by the government, as well as the specific public services that often vary between countries or regions (see Table A1 in Appendix 1). Therefore, the definition of satisfaction with the quality of public services in China can be interpreted as Chinese citizens' perceptions of the specific public services delivered by the local and central governments in China. The specific items of public service delivery are considered based on China's realities.

Van de Walle and Bouckaert (2003) maintain that the causal relationship between satisfaction with the quality of public services and trust in government is contested. However, many more scholars (Citrin and Green, 1986; Lawrence, 1997; Mishler and Rose, 2001) demonstrate that citizen satisfaction with the quality

of public services is a key determinant of citizen trust in government. A number of scholars in the US (Chanley et al., 2000; Nye et al., 1997; Thomas, 1998) maintain that low government performance, such as the poor quality of public services, is the dominant reason for the decline of public trust in government over the past three decades. Bovens and Wille (2008) argue that the most obvious and dominant explanation for the sudden decline of trust in government in the Netherlands is an equally sudden deterioration in the performance of government, including the quality of public services.

In addition, other scholars (Campbell, 2003; Christensen and Lægveid, 2005; Espinal et al., 2006; Kampen et al., 2006; Kim, 2010; Rockers et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2009) demonstrate that citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services is positively associated with citizen trust in government. This study tests the following hypothesis:

H₁: Citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services is positively associated with trust in city government in China (H_{1a}), and trust in the central government of China (H_{1b}).

Satisfaction with general democracy and the condition of democratic rights and trust in government

In industrialized countries, democratic rights include the right to vote, to participate in government affairs, to gather and demonstrate, to criticize the government, to know government information, and to have freedom of speech (Wong et al., 2009). Given the Chinese governance context, this study focuses on the literature regarding citizen satisfaction with general democracy, as well as the democratic right to participate in government affairs and the right to know government information.

Citizen satisfaction with general democracy can be interpreted as a perception that the political process actually works according to generally accepted democratic norms and principles (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007). Several scholars (Ariely, 2013; Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011; Norris, 1999) have also introduced definitions and measurements of citizen satisfaction with general democracy. The summarized measurements of citizen satisfaction with general democracy in previous studies are shown in Table A1 in Appendix 1. Due to the fact that the definitions in the previous studies are basically accordant, the definition provided by Grönlund and Setälä (2007) is utilized in this research as the definition of citizen satisfaction with general democracy in China.

Several scholars (Linde and Ekman, 2003; Norris, 1999) point out that cross-national comparisons show varied levels of satisfaction with how democracy functions in practice. Using data from the 2006 Asian Barometer Survey, Wong et al. (2009) confirm that citizen satisfaction with general democracy is positively associated with public trust in government in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Several studies also suggest that citizen satisfaction with democracy has a strong effect on trust in government (Ariely, 2013; Cho, 2012; Christensen and Læg Reid, 2005; Grönlund and Setälä, 2007; Norris, 1999; Ulbig, 2008). For example, based on a mass survey conducted among 2,297 respondents in Norway in 2001, Christensen and Læg Reid (2003) found that general attitudes towards how democracy works in Norway have the strongest overall effect on variations in citizens' trust in government.

Although Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) maintain that transparency has a subdued and sometimes negative effect on trust in government in the Netherlands and South Korea, many more studies suggest that citizen perception of the condition of democratic rights, including whether individuals feel that they can influence government affairs or the political system, is positively associated with citizens' trust in government (Citrin and Green, 1986; Hood, 1991; Lawrence, 1997; Piotrowski and Van Ryzin, 2007). Attmore (2011) further maintains that transparency is the best communication policy to enhance public trust in government, and equipping people with several necessary tools to allow them to engage in meaningful discussion and decision-making about government affairs is an essential step to improving public trust in government. Furthermore, scholars (Kim, 2010; Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005) argue that citizen perception of the condition of democratic rights, such as transparency of the government, participation in government affairs and e-government utilization, is positively associated with trust in government. Torres (2005) confirms the positive relationship between trust in government and the transparency of government through the introduction of the experiences of service charters in Spain. The following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H₂: Citizen satisfaction with general democracy is positively associated with trust in city government in China (H_{2a}), and trust in the central government of China (H_{2b}). Citizen satisfaction with participation in government is positively associated with trust in city government in China (H_{2c}), and trust in the central government of China (H_{2d}). Citizen satisfaction with the transparency of government is positively associated with trust in city government in China (H_{2e}), and trust in the central government of China (H_{2f}).

Individual demography and trust in government

Several scholars argue that the impact of the demographic variable on public trust in government is weak or non-existent (Li, 2004; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Shi, 2001; Turner and Martz, 1997). However, many more scholars maintain that the demographic variable is one of the major determinants of trust in government (Christensen and Læg Reid, 2005; Kim, 2010; Maxwell, 2010; Wenzel, 2006; Wong et al., 2009). For example, Christensen and Læg Reid (2005) argue that citizens with a higher education level have more probability of trust in government, while other

scholars (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007; Kim, 2010; Norris, 1999) maintain that citizens with higher education have less probability of trust in government, based on the theory that knowledge produces a more critical attitude towards government. Some studies suggest that men have higher trust in government in Japan and the US (Kim, 2010; Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006). Christensen and Læg Reid (2005) argue that age has an effect on public trust in government, specifically that older people generally have more trust in government than younger people for the reason that older people tend to be more collectively oriented. Other studies suggest that migrant people have a higher probability of trust in government than natives because most migrant people endure conscious sacrifices to migrate and are therefore predisposed to view the host society as an improvement for their lives (Maxwell, 2010; Michelson, 2003). Scholars (Anderson, 2010; Price, 2012) also argue that citizens with a higher income have a higher probability of trust in government in the US. As discussed, we can deduce that citizens' demographic variables may be associated with public trust in government; however, the detailed information on those associations is not yet clear. The following hypothesis will be tested in this article:

H₃: Gender (H_{3a}), age (H_{3b}), education (H_{3c}), income (H_{3d}) and household registration (H_{3e}) are associated with public trust in city government in China; gender (H_{3f}), age (H_{3g}), education (H_{3h}), income (H_{3i}) and household registration (H_{3j}) are associated with public trust in the central government of China.

Data and questionnaire

Data

This research uses data from a digit-dialled telephone survey through computer-assisted telephone interviewing conducted between May and July 2012. The survey applied a multistage stratified random sampling method to select respondents, who are more than 18 years old in 34 Chinese metropolitan cities.² The sampling number of respondents who agreed to be enrolled in the survey was 700 in each city. We deleted cases where data were missing and thereby obtained a total of 21,570 respondents (the valid rate was 90.6%). The characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. The distribution of the demographic variables of the respondents in this study are generally representative of data from the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics and relevant demographic studies in Chinese metropolitan cities (Yusuf and Brooks, 2010; Zhao et al., 2011).

Questionnaire

The dependent variable of this study is public trust in government in China. It was measured by the following question: 'Please indicate to what extent you trust the

Table 1. Description of dependent and demographic variables

Variable	Percentage (%)	Variable	Percentage (%)
Trust in central government		Gender	
Strongly disagree	1.0	Male	58.2
Disagree	15.3	Female	41.8
Not agree or disagree	25.9	Age (year)	
Agree	54.4	18–29	36.6
Strongly agree	3.4	30–39	34.7
Trust in city government		40–49	17.3
Strongly disagree	1.1	50–76	11.4
Disagree	19.6	Income (RMB)	
Not agree or disagree	33.8	0	21.2
Agree	43.7	1–19,999	14.8
Strongly agree	1.7	20,000–39,999	27.8
Education		40,000–59,999	16.5
Middle school and below	15.1	60,000–99,999	10.6
High school	26.3	100,000 and above	9.1
Junior college	23.8	Household registration	
Bachelor degree and above	34.8	Out of the current city	50.6
		In the current city	49.4

public institution [the city government, the central government] to always do the right thing for the people on a scale from 1 (strongly against) to 5 (strongly in favour)'.

The first independent variable of trust in government at both the city level and central level is citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services. It was measured by the following question:

Generally speaking, what score can you give to evaluate the quality of the public services including public education, public hospitals, stable housing price, social security, environment protection, public safety, urban infrastructure, recreational and sports facility, and public transportation in your city, on a scale from 0 (very bad) to 10 (very good)?

The two variables of citizen satisfaction with the transparency of city government and citizen satisfaction with participation in city government affairs are the independent variables of public trust in government. In terms of these two variables, respondents were asked to what degree they agreed with the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): 'Your city government always actively provides government information, such as expenditures, to the

people by means of a website or other methods'; 'When your city sets up public policy, it always solicits the citizens' suggestions and advice through symposiums or hearings'. The variable of citizen satisfaction with general democracy is also the independent variable of public trust in government. It was measured by the following question: 'What score would you use to evaluate the general democracy of China on a scale from 0 (very bad) to 10 (very good)?' The measurements of the dependent and independent variables in this study are shown in Table A2 in Appendix 2.

The demographic variables (gender, age, education, income and household registration) were also included as independent variables of trust in government at both the city level and central level. In terms of the dichotomous variables, they were measured as either 1 (male, household registration in current city) or 2. Age was measured on a scale from 1 (18–29 years) to 4 (50–76 years). Education level was measured from 1 (middle school and below) to 5 (bachelor degree and above). Furthermore, income level per year was measured from 1 (RMB0) to 6 (RMB100,000 and above, or about USD16,000).

Two separate regression models were utilized to analyse the factors associated with public trust in city government and central government. Because both dependent variables in this study are ordinal and measured on five-point scales, we used ordinal logistic regressions to estimate the two models. The equation of each model achieves statistical significance at $p < 0.001$.

Results

This study finds that the scores for citizen trust in government at the central level (mean scores: 3.439) are relatively higher than for those of the city level (mean scores: 3.254). The results in Table 1 also show that 57.8% of the respondents express 'in favour' or 'strongly in favour' of trust in the central government, while 45.4% of the respondents show the same perception of trust in city government. The description of citizen trust in government is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

The results of the ordinal regression analyses show that citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services ($p < 0.001$), citizen satisfaction with general democracy ($p < 0.001$), citizen satisfaction with the transparency of government ($p < 0.001$) and citizen satisfaction with participation in government affairs ($p < 0.001$) are positively associated with public trust in government at both the city and central levels (see Table 3). For example, compared with citizens who had a relatively low satisfaction with the quality of public services, those who had high satisfaction with the quality of public services had a higher probability of trust in government at both the city ($OR = 5.3$) and central ($OR = 3.8$) levels; compared with citizens who had relatively low satisfaction with general democracy, those who had high satisfaction with general democracy also had a higher probability of trust in government at both the city ($OR = 4.5$) and central ($OR = 4.2$) levels.

Table 2. Description of major variables

Variable	Mean	Std dev.	Min.	Max.
Trust in central government	3.439	0.824	1	5
Trust in city government	3.254	0.825	1	5
Quality of public services	7.681	1.529	1	10
Participation in city government	3.323	0.916	1	5
Transparency of city government	3.070	1.005	1	5
General democracy	5.927	2.246	0	10

Table 3. Ordinal logistic regression results predicting trust in government

Variable	Coefficient (SE)	
	Trust in city government	Trust in central government
Quality of public services	0.188 (0.020)***	0.260 (0.080)***
General democracy	0.222 (0.014)***	0.236 (0.014)***
Participation in government	0.250 (0.033)***	0.200 (0.034)***
Transparency of government	0.310 (0.030)***	0.186 (0.031)***
Gender	-0.200 (0.058)**	-0.376 (0.059)***
Age	0.100 (0.030)**	0.227 (0.031)***
Education	-0.046 (0.027)	-0.180 (0.028)***
Income	-0.003 (0.018)	-0.047 (0.019)*
Household registration	-0.057 (0.057)	-0.083 (0.058)
Number of observations	21,570	21,570
Adjusted R ²	0.208	0.172
Prob. Chi square	0.000	0.000

Notes: Significance: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. All tests are two-tailed tests.

To learn more about the substantive impact of the factors mentioned earlier upon public trust, we computed the probability of being in favour or strongly in favour of trust in government at both the central level and local level, and against or strongly against trust in government at both the central level and city level, for different levels of public trust, while controlling other variables at the sampling means. The predicted probabilities for trust in government are shown in Table 4. The results demonstrate that each independent variable regarding satisfaction with the quality of public services, general democracy, the transparency of government and participation in government affairs has a substantive impact on trust in government at both the city and central level, as well as being statistically significant. For example, the probability of expressing or strongly expressing trust in city

Table 4. Predicted probabilities for trust in government by major independent variables

Variable	Trust in central government		Trust in city government	
	In favour or strongly in favour	Against or strongly against	In favour or strongly in favour	Against or strongly against
Quality of public services				
1	0.214	0.183	0.174	0.561
2	0.190	0.202	0.170	0.563
3	0.183	0.214	0.165	0.570
4	0.244	0.177	0.213	0.511
5	0.223	0.181	0.244	0.466
6	0.251	0.163	0.326	0.423
7	0.284	0.152	0.405	0.404
8	0.292	0.129	0.457	0.369
9	0.326	0.103	0.589	0.245
10	0.363	0.096	0.686	0.208
General democracy				
0	0.221	0.512	0.085	0.292
1	0.232	0.486	0.089	0.284
2	0.336	0.413	0.102	0.271
3	0.407	0.406	0.125	0.238
4	0.445	0.381	0.157	0.223
5	0.512	0.323	0.191	0.204
6	0.591	0.264	0.221	0.188
7	0.622	0.215	0.268	0.147
8	0.719	0.188	0.302	0.119
9	0.785	0.180	0.338	0.096
10	0.821	0.176	0.370	0.088
Participation in government				
1 = Strongly disagree	0.167	0.220	0.093	0.284
2 = Disagree	0.218	0.188	0.142	0.226
3 = Neither agree nor disagree	0.285	0.153	0.214	0.191
4 = Agree	0.315	0.116	0.268	0.143
5 = Strongly agree	0.361	0.098	0.325	0.114
Transparency of government				
1 = Strongly disagree	0.182	0.215	0.093	0.281
2 = Disagree	0.221	0.183	0.162	0.223
3 = Neither agree nor disagree	0.288	0.126	0.225	0.183
4 = Agree	0.322	0.109	0.291	0.136
5 = Strongly agree	0.350	0.100	0.320	0.118

Table 5. Effect of demographic features on trust in government

Variable	Coefficient (SE)	
	Trust in city government	Trust in central government
Gender	-0.054 (0.056)	-0.259 (0.058)***
Age	0.078 (0.029)**	0.202 (0.030)***
Education	-0.190 (0.026)***	-0.289 (0.027)***
Income	-0.037 (0.018)*	-0.076 (0.018)***
Household registration	0.015 (0.055)	-0.042 (0.057)
R ²	0.019	0.058

Notes: Significance: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. R²: Nagelkerke R-Square. All tests are two-tailed tests.

government increases from 17.4% to 68.6% as we move from the lowest level to the highest level of satisfaction with the quality of public services. By contrast, the probability of expressing or strongly expressing trust in the central government changes from 21.4% to 36.3% as we move from the lowest level to the highest level of satisfaction with the quality of public services; however, the increase in the first half of the satisfaction with the quality of public services is not linear. Through the comparisons of these predicted probabilities for trust in government, it is easy to recognize which independent variable has a more substantive impact on trust in city and central governments.

The study finds that gender and age are associated with public trust in government at both the city level and central level. Male respondents and older respondents have a higher probability of trust in the government at both the city level and central level. Furthermore, the study finds that education and income level are associated with public trust in central government. The respondents who are less educated and have lower incomes have a higher probability of trust in central government. However, the study does not find a significant relationship between education or income level and trust in city government, and between household registration and trust in government. The results in Table 5 show that demographic variables explain 1.9% of the total variance of trust in city government and 5.8% of the total variance of trust in the central government. Therefore, the demographic variable has a much greater impact on trust in the central government than trust in city government.

In summary, the results of the regression analyses support the hypotheses of H₁ and H₂. The results partly support the third hypotheses regarding the significant relationship between demographic variables such as gender (H_{3a}, H_{3g}) and age (H_{3f}, H_{3g}) with public trust in government at both the city and central levels.

Discussion

This study finds that the scores for citizen trust in government at the city and central levels in China are, respectively, lower than the scores for trust in local

and central government in South Korea and Japan (Kim, 2010). The percentage of public trust in city government in China is also lower than the percentage of public trust in government in Hong Kong (58.8%) (Wong et al., 2009). In addition, the percentage of respondents expressing or strongly expressing trust in government at the central level and city level is, respectively, much lower than the percentage of respondents expressing the same perception of the central level (80.7%) and provincial level (71.6%) in rural China in 2001 (Li, 2004).³ Chen et al. (1997) found that the percentage of public respect for political institutions was 93% in Beijing in 1995.⁴ Although some international surveys, such as the Edelman Trust Barometer, are optimistic about public trust in the government in China,⁵ and despite the fact that we have no time-series data to demonstrate a decline in political trust in China, we claim that public trust in the government poses a tremendous challenge for China.

The results of the study show that the percentage of public trust is higher for central government. This result is different from that of the literature in Western countries; however, it is accordant with previous studies in rural China and in other Asian countries. Several studies suggest that trust in government in the US is higher for state governments than the central ('federal') government, and highest at the local level (Bowler and Donovan, 2002; Hetherington and Nugent, 2001; Rahn and Rudolph, 2002). Scholars in the US also argue that the reason for higher trust in government at local levels is that citizens have more contact with their local government officials and generally identify more closely with smaller governments (Box and Musso, 2004). Studies suggest that trust in central government is higher than trust in local government in Asian countries (Kim, 2010). In addition, previous studies from China demonstrate the phenomenon of higher trust in government at the central level (Li, 2004). As for the reasons for higher trust in the central government, Li (2004) argued that the Chinese villagers' higher trust in central government seems to derive in part from the Confucian tradition of loyalty to the central government; although most people do not know what the central government is doing, they nonetheless assume that whatever it is must be in their best interests. Several scholars (Lingle, 1996; Wong et al., 2009) also argue that the Confucian culture, with its promotion of loyalty to authority and the hierarchy of the central government, has an important impact on trust in government in Asian countries. We claim that the higher percentage of Chinese citizens' trust in government at the central level in this study can be partly attributed to the cultural values of loyalty to the central government.

Besides confirming the first and second hypotheses, this study also finds some interesting results regarding the relationship between citizens' satisfaction with the quality of public services and trust in government, and satisfaction with general democracy and trust in government. First, the variable 'satisfaction with the quality of public services' has a much more substantive impact on public trust in city government than in the central government. As for the reason, it may be related to the fact that public services are mostly supplied by local government in metropolitan areas. Second, the variable 'satisfaction with the quality of public services' has a more substantive impact on public trust in city government than other

independent variables. Therefore, we deduce that satisfaction with the quality of public services is the key factor determining trust in city government. In contemporary China, anecdotes of the poor quality of public services, such as the use of fake or low-quality medicines supplied by public hospitals, have been a common refrain for the Chinese people (Hu et al., 2008). As mentioned, when people watching the news see the poor quality of public services, they more often attribute this to the city government than to the central government. Therefore, this may be another reason for the lower trust in government at the city level. We claim that improving satisfaction with the quality of public services will be the most important measure to enhance trust in city government. Third, the variable 'satisfaction with general democracy' has a much more substantive impact on trust in the central government than the other variables. Therefore, for the Chinese central government, to promote national democracy is more important than to supply further public services for enhancing public trust in the central government.

The results of the study reveal that the demographic variables are significant determinants of public trust in the central government in China. The findings are very different from previous studies on political trust in China. For example, Shi (2001) argued that the level of political trust of the Chinese people did not significantly correlate with demographic variables. Li (2004) also argued that respondents' age, sex and education explained less than 3% of the total variance in trust for Chinese central or local government in 2001. Through comparison with previous studies in China, we find that the demographic variables' effect on trust in local government has not changed; however, its impact on trust in central government has changed dramatically. The finding that younger citizens with higher education and higher income have less trust in central government is accordant with the literature in developed countries (Kim, 2010; Norris, 1999). Several scholars have named 'critical citizens' as people who are younger, more highly educated and better paid. Norris (1999) also argued that long-term economic development has produced critical citizens who have higher expectations for government performance, are less deferential to government authority and are increasingly ready to challenge the government. Furthermore, Wang (2010) predicted that Chinese economic development will have the immediate effect of enhancing public support for the government, but that, in the long run, it will also lead to value changes that produce critical citizens. Therefore, we claim that critical citizens who have less trust in central government are found in urban China.

This study contributes to a better understanding of public trust in government in China primarily by being the first comprehensive quantitative survey on a nationwide level in China. So far, research on public trust in government in China has been mainly descriptive rather than analytical. More specially, this study is the first to confirm that the determinants of declining public trust in government in developed countries also affect public trust in government in China.

The research has provided some reflections on the practical implications. Public managers and policymakers in China should pay full attention to the challenges posed by public trust in the government, and need to consider formulating specific and feasible measures to enhance public trust based on the determinants of public

trust in government. Moreover, it will be valuable for them to recognize that the determinants of public trust in government in China are quite similar to developed countries, and consequently for them to strengthen communications with developed countries in order to improve the handling of the common challenge of maintaining public trust in government. Additionally, such managers and policy-makers need to understand the differences in the determinants of public trust in government in China between the central and city levels. For example, to promote general democracy is more effective for enhancing trust in the central government than city governments, and to improve satisfaction with public services is more effective for enhancing trust in city governments than the central government.

Important limitations of this study should be noted. First, as this research is a cross-sectional survey, it cannot confirm whether trust in government in China has declined and cannot fully observe the extent of factors associated with public trust in government. Second, because the data used here are perceptual rather than objective, a more complete study requires additional objective measures. Third, this survey was limited to urban areas, and it is therefore unsuitable for the results of the research to be extrapolated to the whole of China due to the fact that there are tremendous differences in the patterns of economic and social development. Going forward, we will continuously update and repeat our nationwide survey, and complement the data, in order to provide meaningful insights into the trends and dynamics of public trust in the government of China.

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Notes

1. One survey conducted by a Chinese institution shows that trust in government in China has been steadily increasing each year since 2006. To see the full information, visit: <http://asiancorrespondent.com/88826/china-says-trust-in-government-is-rising-but-shaky/> See also note 5.
2. The mainland of China has 36 metropolitan cities, which includes 27 capital cities of the 22 provinces and five autonomous regions, four directly controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing), and five vice provincial cities (Qingdao, Dalian, Ningbo, Shenzhen and Xiamen). The sampling respondents in this research cover 34 cities, except Lhasa (capital of Tibet) and Urumqi (capital of Xinjiang).
3. Li (2004) did not show data relating to trust in city government due to the study being in rural China. According to China's political system, the Chinese government level is classified into the central, provincial, city, county, township and village level. In addition, the author concluded in this article that the higher government level has higher public trust.

According to the results of this study, both the provincial level (71.6%) and the county level (53.1%) are higher than the percentage of trust in city government.

4. Chen et al. (1997) did not discuss the percentage of trust in city and central government in Beijing in 1995. The dependent variable was measured by the question: 'What extent do you respect the political institutions in China today?'
5. To see the information of trust in government in China from the survey of the Edelman Trust Barometer in 2011, visit: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7274613.html>

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Appendix I

Table A1. Measurements of major variables in the literature.

Variable	Authors	Measurements	Scale
Public trust in government	Tolbert and Mossberger (2006)	Do you trust the federal/state government?	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
	Cooper et al. (2008)	How much of the time do you think you can trust the local/state/federal government to do what is right?	1 = none of the time to 4 = all of the time

(continued)

Continued

Variable	Authors	Measurements	Scale
Satisfaction with the quality of public services	Kim (2010)	Please indicate to what extent you trust the public institution to operate the best interests of the society	1 = trust a lot to 4 don't trust at all
	Maxwell (2010)	How much do you trust Parliament/local council?	0 = not at all to 3 = a lot
	Van Ryzin (2004)	Considering all of your recent experiences, how would you rate the overall quality of government services?	1 = very low to 7 = very high
	Devereux and Weisbrod (2006)	Are you satisfied with the government services, including garbage collection, street services, police services and parks?	1 = very satisfied to 4 = very dissatisfied
	Maxwell (2010)	What extent do you rate the satisfaction in local schools, public housing . . . ?	0 = very dissatisfied to 4 = very satisfied
	Akinboade et al. (2012)	What extent do you rate the overall satisfaction with the following nine items such as health care services, housing . . . ?	1 = completely dissatisfied to 7 = completely satisfied
	Diagne et al. (2012)	Are you satisfied with the overall quality of the public service delivery, such as traffic police . . . ?	1 = very bad to 5 = very good
Satisfaction with general democracy	Christensen and Læg Reid (2005)	Are you generally satisfied with the way democracy functions in Norway?	1 = very satisfied to 4 = not at all satisfied
	Grönlund and Setälä (2007)	Are you satisfied with the way in which democracy is functioning in your country?	0 = not at all to 10 = completely
	Askvik (2010)	How democratically is this country being governed today?	1 = not at all to 10 = completely
	Ezrow and Xezonakis (2011)	On the whole, are you satisfied with the way democracy works in our country?	1 = very satisfied to 4 = not at all
	Ariely (2013)	How well does democracy work in the country today?	1 = very poorly to 10 = very well

Appendix 2

Table A2. Measurements of the variables in the study.

Variable	Measurements	Scale
Public trust in government	Please indicate to what extent you trust the public institution [the city government, the central government] to always do the right thing for the people	1 = not at all 5 = completely
Satisfaction with the quality of public services	Generally speaking, what score can you give to evaluate the quality of the public services, including public education, public hospitals, stable housing price, social security, environment protection, public safety, urban infrastructure, recreational and sports facility, and public transportation in your city?	0 = very bad to 10 = very good
Satisfaction with general democracy	What score would you use to evaluate the general democracy of China?	0 = very bad to 10 = very good
Satisfaction with the transparency of city government	Your city government always actively provides government information, such as expenditures, to the people by means of a website or other methods	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Satisfaction with participation in city government affairs	When your city sets up public policy, it always solicits the citizens' suggestions and advice through symposiums or hearings	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree