

# *Political Trust in Rural China*

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*This article shows that while some Chinese villagers see the state as monolithic, more believe that there are substantial differences between the central and local governments. Among those who perceive a divided state, most appear to have more trust in higher levels than in lower levels and distinguish between the intent and the capacity of the central government ("the Center"). They trust that the Center's intent is beneficent but distrust its capacity to ensure faithful implementation of its policies. The article concludes that the central state has some breathing space because dissatisfaction with lower levels does not immediately generate demands for fundamental political reforms; in addition, the combination of trust in the Center's intent and distrust in its capacity may encourage villagers to defy local officials in the name of the Center. If villagers' rightful resistance fails, total disillusionment with the Center may set in, resulting in cynicism or radicalism.*

**Keywords:** *Political trust; peasant; protest*

A number of scholars have discussed the extent to which Chinese villagers trust their rulers. Kevin O'Brien and I, for example, have identified two broad perspectives on the current regime. Compliant and recalcitrant villagers see state authorities as unified, while rightful resisters distinguish between a benevolent central government (called "the Center" in the following discussion) and predatory grassroots

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*AUTHOR'S NOTE: For generous financial support, I would like to thank the Asia Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Baptist University. I would also like to acknowledge a grant from the Research and Writing Initiative of the Program on Global Security and Sustainability of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. I am grateful to Keith Markus, Jason Newsom, and Edward Rigdon for advice on methodology. For helpful comments on earlier drafts, I thank Joseph Fewsmith, Xiaoguang Kang, Elizabeth Perry, Tianjian Shi, Alvin So, Patricia Thornton, Yongnian Zheng, David Zweig, three anonymous referees, and especially Kevin O'Brien.*

MODERN CHINA, Vol. 30 No. 2, April 2004 228-258

DOI: 10.1177/0097700403261824

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cadres (O'Brien, 1996; Li and O'Brien, 1996). Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lü similarly observe that some villagers believe that central authorities side with them in seeking to limit excessive levies imposed by local officials. Their findings imply that some rural people trust the system as a whole, despite a relationship with the state's local representatives that is fraught with tension (Bernstein and Lü, 2000; Lü, 1997). Drawing on a national survey, Tianjian Shi (2001) also argues that Chinese citizens who do not trust local governments may nonetheless trust the central government. Patricia Thornton (1999), in contrast, finds that peasants in the post-Mao era are more likely than those in the Republican period to regard local oppressors as "imperial envoys" and hence tend not to trust the central government any more than they trust local authorities.

Students of contemporary rural China, however, have yet to address the following three questions: How common is it among villagers to believe that the Center is more trustworthy than local governments? How do villagers who have this pattern of trust reconcile their faith in Beijing with their distrust of local officialdom? What are the political implications when a significant portion of the population has more trust in higher levels than in lower levels of government?

Using interviews and survey data from four Chinese counties, this article aims to answer these questions. Surveys I conducted from 1999 to 2001 show that while some villagers see a unified state that is either trustworthy or untrustworthy, more believe that there are substantial differences between higher and lower levels of government. Among those who perceive the state as divided, most appear to feel that higher levels, particularly the Center, are more trustworthy than lower levels. My interviews then flesh out the reasoning behind these findings. In particular, they indicate that villagers who have more trust in "higher levels" sharply distinguish between the Center's intentions (believed to be good) and its capacity (believed to be lacking) to make local officials implement potentially beneficial policies. This pattern has several important implications. First, the trust in the central state felt by many villagers suggests that the regime still has some breathing space because dissatisfaction with lower levels has not yet generated demands for far-reaching political reforms. Second, the combination of trust in the Center's intentions and doubts about its capacity may encourage villagers to defy local officials in the name of the Center.

Last, if aggrieved villagers repeatedly fail to get the help they expect from Beijing, disillusionment with the Center may set in, resulting in either radicalism or cynicism.

#### *TRUST IN FIVE LEVELS OF PARTY COMMITTEES*

Political trust is usually defined as citizens' belief or confidence that the government or political system will work to produce outcomes consistent with their expectations (e.g., Easton, 1965; Miller, 1974; Citrin, 1974; Hetherington, 1998). As a multidimensional political sentiment, such trust may be incumbent based, regime based, or system based (Craig, Niemi, and Silver, 1990; Craig, 1993). It is an essential component of "political support," which constitutes the basis of a political system's legitimacy (Easton, 1965: 273; 1975). People who trust the government are more likely to comply with laws, support government initiatives, and follow political leadership without needing to be coerced (Warren, 1999). High levels of trust are also associated with less engagement in mobilized modes of participation (Seligson, 1980). In contrast, low trust helps to create a political environment in which it is more difficult for leaders to succeed (Hetherington, 1998) and reduces support for government action to address a range of domestic policy concerns (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn, 2000). Lack of trust in government has also been associated with participation in riots (Paige, 1971) and in other political activities aimed against the existing system (Muller, Jukam, and Seligson, 1982). Moreover, long-term absence of popular trust in government can lead to a breakdown of trust for the regime and its founding principles (Nye, 1997).

To the extent that trust is independent of immediate policy outcomes, it is always an advantage to have a reserve of trust: such a reserve gives a political regime extra room to maneuver when it encounters difficulties in performing its more immediate political tasks (Patterson, Wahlke, and Boynton, 1970). A regime that enjoys a high level of popular trust is therefore more resilient in the aftermath of policy mistakes and administrative blunders. For the Chinese state, which has been groping its way toward reforming its economic and

political systems, high levels of popular trust are particularly valuable as they allow a period of trial and error. Whether China's vast rural population trusts the state thus has considerable implications for the stability and adaptability of the present regime.

My interviews suggest that Chinese villagers have remarkably different levels of trust in the state. Some outspoken villagers seem to have no trust in the regime, apparently believing that all levels of government are corrupt. A villager from Shandong, for instance, said that what he most wanted to see was for "every level of government, from the Center to the grassroots, to eliminate corruption completely" (interviewee 1). A villager from Hunan was even more direct: "From the Center to the grassroots, every level of government is corrupt" (interviewee 2). A villager from Jiangxi agreed: "In my opinion, up to the Center, down to the village, officials protect each other" (interviewee 3). Such villagers may acknowledge that some central policies look good, but they insist that the Center does not mean what it says. A former village cadre from Jiangxi, for instance, argued that the Center's condemnation of local officials who violated central policies was nothing but a hypocritical gesture. "There is," in his words, "a tacit agreement (*moqi*) between central leaders and local officials. Local officials bear the blame for violating central policies. In return, the Center turns a blind eye to their corruption" (interviewee 4). According to these villagers, the state is united and untrustworthy.

In contrast, some villagers appear to be happy with both the Center and local governments. They attribute many positive outcomes to beneficial central policies, and they are satisfied that local officials dutifully carry out those policies. For instance, a 50-year-old man from Anhui said that thanks to good central policies, "my life is much better than that of my grandfather, who was a landlord" (interviewee 5). A villager from Shandong praised local officials for faithfully carrying out the good central policy of developing the economy: "Thanks to our village cadres, we don't have any burdens" (interviewee 6). Such villagers also view the state as united—but as trustworthy.

More villagers, however, do not believe the Chinese state to be a monolithic entity with a single face. They instead "disaggregate" the state (Perry, 1994; O'Brien and Li, 1995: 782; O'Brien, 1996: 31-33; Diamant, 2001: 453, 473) into a trustworthy Center and

untrustworthy grassroots authorities or, more broadly, into trustworthy “higher levels” (*shangji* or *shangmian*) and untrustworthy “lower levels” (*xiaji* or *xiamian*). This attitude is displayed in an often-heard remark: “Central policies are very good, but they are all distorted when they reach lower levels” (Cao Jinqing, 2000; Lü, 1997; Li and O’Brien, 1996; interviewees 7-9). In particular, my interviewees frequently noted that although the Center had repeatedly ordered local governments to reduce peasant burdens, “every level of local government violates central policy and increases fees” (interviewees 10, 11).

In the eyes of these villagers, the Center is qualitatively different from, and even directly antagonistic to, lower levels. As a villager from Jiangxi put it, “Policies from higher levels are upright (*zheng*); policies from lower levels are crooked (*wai*). The [goal of] central policies [is to] make us rich, [while the goal of] local policies [is to] make us poor” (interviewee 12). A villager from Hebei was even more blunt: “Township officials have all become bloodsuckers and village cadres do their bidding. If the situation continues, central policies are useless no matter how good they are” (interviewee 13). Although such villagers seem to still have considerable trust in the Center, they have little confidence in local governments. A holistic concept of political trust does not apply well to them because their trust is layered and divided.

To examine Chinese villagers’ trust in the state more systematically, I conducted a survey of 1,600 villagers in four counties in three provinces between October 1999 and July 2001 (see Appendix B for a note on sampling and data collection). Respondents were asked to rate the level of popular trust enjoyed by five levels of Party committees—the Center, province, county, township, and village—on a 5-point scale: 1 = *very high*, 2 = *relatively high*, 3 = *so-so*, 4 = *relatively low*, and 5 = *very low* (see questions 1-5 in Appendix C).<sup>1</sup>

The survey confirmed the field observation discussed above. Two interesting patterns of trust emerged. First, of 1,259 respondents who gave valid responses to all five questions, 24.8% (312) gave exactly the same rating to all five levels of the Party committee. Among them, 122 rated the level of trust in all levels as very high, 82 as relatively high, 96 as so-so, 5 as relatively low, and 7 as very low. These villagers did not see much difference between different levels. For them, the state is indeed monolithic and is either trustworthy or untrustworthy.

But three-fourths of the respondents (947) did not see a unified state, giving different ratings to different levels. Within this group, 795 (83.9%) viewed higher levels of the Party committee more favorably. In other words, they gave lower ratings to village and township Party committees and higher ratings to county, provincial, and central Party committees. For instance, a villager from Fujian thought that the popular trust in the village Party branch was very low, trust for the township relatively low, trust for the county so-so, trust for the province relatively high, and trust for the Center very high.

Among the other 152 respondents, 56 gave higher ratings to the village Party branch and township Party committee and lower ratings to county, provincial, and central Party committees. For instance, a 46-year-old man from Jiangxi thought that popular trust for the village Party branch was very high, trust for township, county, and provincial Party committees was so-so, and trust for the Center was very low. The ratings of the remaining 96 respondents showed no consistent pattern.

The pattern of higher levels enjoying more popular trust than lower levels is clearly displayed in Table 1. Here we see that, almost invariably, more respondents gave higher ratings to higher levels than to lower levels. Of particular interest is that villagers seemed to believe that there was a wide gap between the Center and province on the high side and township and village on the low side. For instance, while respectively 53.5% and 42.4% of the 1,259 respondents thought that the Center and the province enjoyed a very high level of trust, only 16.1% and 12.7% thought that the township and village had a very high level of trust. On the other hand, only 1.4% and 2.1% of the respondents thought that popular trust for the Center and the province was very low, while 11.0% and 13.7% thought that the level of trust for the township and village was very low.

Factor analysis demonstrates that, overall, Chinese villagers tend to “bifurcate” (Guo, 2001) the state: one part is the more trustworthy higher levels; the other, the less trustworthy lower levels. The factor loadings show that their trust in higher levels (the Center, province, and county) and their trust in lower levels (county, township, and village) constitute two distinct factors. In other words, they see higher levels as qualitatively different from lower levels in terms of trustworthiness.<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Ratings of Level of Popular Trust in Five Levels of Party Committees (%)**

<i>Level of Trust</i>	<i>Center</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Township</i>	<i>Village</i>
Very low	1.4	2.1	3.7	11.0	13.7
Relatively low	2.1	3.4	7.7	14.8	12.0
So-so	15.7	22.9	35.6	35.9	37.2
Relatively high	27.2	29.2	27.4	22.2	24.5
Very high	53.5	42.4	25.7	16.1	12.7

NOTE:  $n = 1,259$ . Because of rounding errors, columns may not total 100.

### *SOURCES OF TRUST AND DISTRUST*

Political scientists have suggested a number of factors that may affect the level of political trust. Some scholars argue that political trust derives exclusively from citizens' evaluation of the government's economic and political performances. Positive experiences with policy outcomes, the competency and morality of political actors, and the political process lead to a higher level of trust, while negative experiences result in a lower level of trust or in mistrust (e.g., Easton, 1965; Miller, 1974; Hart, 1978; Craig, 1993; Barber, 1983; Jackman and Miller, 1996; Mishler and Rose, 1997, 2001). Other scholars argue that political culture has an effect on the formation of trust independent of political actors' calculations of material interests (e.g., Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993; Shi, 2001).

My interviews with villagers suggest that both of these processes are at work as villagers' trust and mistrust take shape. On one hand, Chinese villagers are usually well aware of the job performance of village cadres and township officials, and they tend to show higher levels of trust in these two levels if they are satisfied with local economic development and social order. On the other hand, villagers' trust in higher level authorities, particularly the Center, seems to derive in part from the Confucian tradition of ascribing moral virtue to the emperor and blaming wicked and shrewd court officials for things that go wrong (Pye, 1996). Most villagers do not seem to know how, in fact, the Center is doing, and many are not entirely clear about what policies the Center has set forth, but they nonetheless assume that it must

be working to serve their interests. In a letter addressed to CCTV's popular Focus/Interview (Jiaodian fangtan) program, for instance, a villager wrote, "I just don't believe that our wise and great central Party leaders do not do things according to law" (Jing Yidan, 1998: 36).

Scholars have also found that the mass media significantly affect the rise and fall of political trust (e.g., Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring, 1979; Chan, 1997; Moy and Scheufele, 2000). In China, oddly enough, it is perhaps the lack of free media that enhances villagers' trust in Beijing. Unlike in Western democracies, where political scandals involving the high and mighty are favorite topics of investigative journalists, in China, people hear about misdeeds of central leaders only if they are disgraced or purged. The Center, in effect, runs a nonstop campaign for public support with its gigantic propaganda machinery, and one tactic for boosting public confidence in it is to occasionally condemn local officials for disobeying the Center and mistreating the people. Villagers hear many beautiful promises from central leaders; it is no wonder that many of them come to believe in the Center and its policies.

Empirical studies of political trust in Western democracies suggest that demographic characteristics also have an independent effect (e.g., Cole, 1973; Abramson, 1983; Kanter and Mirvis, 1989). It has been observed, for instance, that the elderly are the least trusting of political authority (Agger, Goldstein, and Pearl, 1961; Milbrath, 1965), that lower-income people have less trust in the government (Lineberry and Sharkansky, 1971), and that the better educated have more political trust than the less educated (Agger, Goldstein, and Pearl, 1961). Yet Tianjian Shi's 1993 national survey shows that the level of political trust of Chinese citizens does not significantly correlate with demographic factors (Shi, 2001). My survey partly corroborates Shi's finding. As we see in Table 2, respondents' age, sex, level of education, and Party membership explain less than 3% of the total variance in trust for any given level of Party committee. Neither age nor Party membership has any significant effect on the level of trust when the effects of the other three demographic predictors are controlled. Men appear to be more distrustful than women but to a degree significant only on the level of trust for the county, township, and village. This

TABLE 2: Effect of Demographic Features on Political Trust

Variable	Center	Province	County	Township	Village	H-Levels	L-Levels
Age <sup>a</sup>	.05 (.03)	.04 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.03 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Sex <sup>b</sup>	-.05 (.07)	.11 (.07)	-.24 (.06)***	-.20 (.06)***	-.20 (.06)***	-.07 (.05)	-.22 (.06)***
Education <sup>c</sup>	-.03 (.01)**	-.03 (.01)**	-.02 (.01)*	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.02 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)
Chinese Communist Party member <sup>d</sup>	.07 (.12)	-.07 (.11)	-.09 (.10)	-.11 (.09)	.13 (.09)	-.05 (.07)	-.08 (.09)
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.03	.02	.03	.03	.03	.03

NOTE:  $n = 1,150$ . Entries for the five individual levels of Party committees are unstandardized maximum likelihood estimates; entries for H-levels (i.e., higher levels) and L-levels (i.e., lower levels) are unstandardized ordinary least squares estimates; numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Levels of trust in higher levels and lower levels are measured by latent scales, ranging from low to high.

a. Coded as a five-level ordinal variable, where 1 through 5 stand respectively for 18-27, 28-37, 38-47, 48-57, and 58 and older.

b. Coded 1 if male, 0 if female.

c. Measured by number of years of schooling, ranging from 0 to 15.

d. Coded 1 if a Party member; 0 otherwise.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

pattern may well reflect the tendency of men in China to be more outspoken than women in expressing their lack of trust in these three levels.

What is more notable is that, in contrast to what has been observed in the United States (Agger, Goldstein, and Pearl, 1961), better educated villagers tend to have less trust in all levels of Party committees than do the less educated, and the effect of education on trust in the Center, province, and county remains statistically significant when the effects of age, sex, and Party membership are controlled. This finding corroborates the field observation that better educated villagers tend to be more critical of the central government (Yu Jianrong, 2000; Duan Xianju, Tan Jian, and Chen Bin, 2000). It also suggests that, contrary to the Communist Party's ideology of literacy (Peterson, 1994), the development of education may reduce the amount of popular trust in the regime.

Income has an interesting effect on trust.<sup>3</sup> Both respondents who reported very low annual household incomes and those who reported very high incomes demonstrated lower levels of trust in the Center and the province than those of median income. It seems that villagers with very low income may not regard central policies as particularly beneficial. In addition, the survey shows that the average income of respondents who had engaged in economic activities other than farming (e.g., those who had been migrant workers, peddlers, providers of transportation, or construction workers) was higher than that of those who only farmed. Since villagers who venture into cities are often harassed and exploited by representatives of higher levels of governments (Zhao Shukai, 1999; Solinger, 1999), they may have developed more distrust in the regime.

#### *THE IMPLICATIONS OF HAVING MORE TRUST IN HIGHER LEVELS*

At first blush, it seems inconsistent to have more trust in higher levels than in lower levels of a unitary authoritarian state. How can villagers distrust local governments but trust the Center when they most certainly know that local governments are, in the final analysis, appointed by the Center? Interview data supply one possible answer:

many villagers distinguish between the intent and capacity of the Center. When they say they believe in the Center, what they mean is that they trust its good intentions. But they may well doubt that the Center can enforce its preferences.

Quite a number of villagers do not believe that the Center is able to reliably find out what goes on in the countryside. My interviewees, for instance, often invoked the age-old saying, "The mountains are high and the emperor is far away" (*shan gao huangdi yuan*), to express their frustration with the Center's inability to monitor the behavior of local officials. A college student reported after a field trip to his home village, "'If central decision makers knew the real situation in the countryside, they would be too frightened to sleep. They must have absolutely no idea about how central policies are actually being carried out at local levels.' This is the view held by most villagers I interviewed" (Tong Weijun, 1999: 34). Such villagers do not much doubt that the Center wants its policies implemented, nor do they attribute the Center's ignorance to disinterest. What they do question is the Center's ability to know what is really happening. Such doubt is often expressed by condemning local officials for "cheating higher levels" (interviewee 14). In such denunciations, villagers put the blame squarely on local officials, but at the same time, they also fault the Center's inability to gather information through its disloyal agents.

Some villagers go a step further. They maintain that the Center has good intentions but argue that it must know what is going on because even the government-run news media sometimes report policy violations by local governments. For them, the real problem is that the Center is unable to make local officials do its bidding. The Center's ineffectiveness is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in its failure to reduce peasant burdens. As a villager from Hunan put it, "The Center has issued thousands of injunctions and directives, but burdens are getting heavier every year" (interviewee 15). A villager from Zhejiang was even more pointed in his criticism: "There are so many social problems, some of which I am afraid the Center just cannot handle. For instance, what can the Center do about those officials who have embezzled ten or twenty thousand yuan? What can the Center do about officials whose expenditures do not match their incomes?" (interviewee 16).

The significance of distinguishing between intent and capacity is twofold. On one hand, it allows villagers to condemn local officials while retaining some trust in the Center. This gives the central leadership some extra latitude. As long as villagers trust the Center's intent, they are less apt to challenge its authority to make policies; they are also less apt to demand fundamental political reforms. My interviews indicate that villagers who lack trust in the Center are more likely, for example, to think that the state chairman (*guojia zhuxi*) should be directly elected by the people. Thus, the young Hunan villager who complained that "from the Center to the grassroots, every level of government is corrupt" thought that leaders at all levels of government, including the state chairman, should be directly elected. He even suggested that a multiparty system be introduced, noting that direct election was currently impossible because "one-party rule is incompatible with (*paichi*) multiparty rule" (interviewee 2).

The survey results also suggest that respondents who have more trust in the Center are less likely to think that the state chairman should be directly elected. However, the level of trust in lower levels has no significant impact on villagers' attitudes on this issue. When asked, "Do you think that the state chairman should be directly elected by the people?" (question 6 in Appendix C), 37.4% of the 1,600 respondents answered "should not," 9.8% said "should but at present conditions are not ripe," and 6.1% said "should and can be done now"; the other 46.8% declined to answer, gave other responses, or said they did not know. For simplicity's sake, I placed all of those who agreed that the state chairman should be directly elected into one category. A multivariate logit analysis shows that the lower a respondent's rating of the level of trust in the Center, the more likely it was that he or she thought the chairman should be popularly elected and vice versa (see Table 3). More specifically, compared to those who thought that the level of trust in the Center was very high, those who thought that the level of trust in the Center was relatively high were more likely to think that the state chairman should be popularly elected (odds ratio = 1.33).<sup>4</sup> At the two extremes, respondents who rated the level of trust in the Center very low were more than three times as likely as those who rated it very high to espouse the idea of direct election (odds ratio = 3.10).

**TABLE 3: Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Attitude Toward Popular Direct Election of the State Chairman**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)</i>
Intercept	-.81 (.59)
Age	-.92 (.82)
Sex	.15 (.19)
Education	.07 (.03)*
Annual household income <sup>a</sup>	.17 (.05)***
Party membership	-.02 (.29)
Trust in the center <sup>b</sup>	-.28 (.09)**
Trust in lower levels <sup>c</sup>	.05 (.09)
Beginning -2 log likelihood	813.40
Ending -2 log likelihood	769.69
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.09

NOTE:  $n = 658$ . Entries are unstandardized maximum likelihood estimates.

a. Numbers 1 through 9 stand respectively for below 500 yuan, 501-1,000 yuan, 1,001-2,000 yuan, 2,001-4,000 yuan, 4,001-6,000 yuan, 6,001-10,000 yuan, 10,001-15,000 yuan, 15,001-20,000 yuan, and above 20,001 yuan.

b. Measured by a five-level index, ranging from *very low* to *very high*.

c. Measured by respondents' scores on the factor representing the level of trust in lower levels.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p = .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

In contrast, villagers' level of trust in lower levels has no significant effect on their views regarding direct election of the state chairman. It is also noteworthy that, much as the arguments of modernization theory suggest (e.g., Lipset, 1959; Deutsch, 1961; Lerner, [1958] 1964), respondents with higher incomes and higher levels of education tend to be more supportive of having a popular election for the top national leader. Compared to those respondents whose annual household income was below 500 yuan, those whose annual household income was above 20,001 yuan were nearly four times as likely to think that the state chairman should be popularly elected (odds ratio = 3.81); compared to those respondents who had no formal education, respondents with fifteen years of schooling were nearly three times as likely to think that the state chairman should be popularly elected (odds ratio = 2.84). Among the three significant predictors, income turned out to be the most powerful (standardized logit = .184), followed by the level of trust in the Center (standardized logit = .144) and the level of education (standardized logit = .122).

But the distinction between intent and capacity does not simply insulate the Center from popular demands for fundamental political reforms. It can also encourage villagers to engage in what O'Brien calls "rightful resistance"—a form of partly institutionalized, partly legitimate contention that entails the innovative use of laws, policies, and other officially promoted values to defy "disloyal" political elites (O'Brien, 1996; Li and O'Brien, 1996). Above all, the distinction may reinforce some villagers' belief that there is serious and exploitable antagonism between the Center and local authorities, which may in turn encourage them to challenge local officials who violate "legal rights and interests" (*hefa quan yi*) that the Center has guaranteed. As a "frame" of contention, this distinction helps to "provide shorthand interpretations of the world, to locate blame, and to suggest lines of action" (Zald, 1999: 269).

More specifically, distinguishing between intent and capacity may foster a rhetoric of change in a number of ways (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 286). First, belief in the Center's good intentions may heighten a sense of urgency to stop local officials' misimplementation of central policies. Compared to those who think that "all crows under the heaven are equally black," villagers who believe in the Center's goodwill may feel even more aggrieved when faced with local violation of beneficial central policies. For them, the sharp contrast between what the Center promises and what local officials deliver may be particularly agonizing. A villager in Anhui, for instance, remarked angrily,

Damn those sons of bitches [township and village cadres]! The Center lets us ordinary people have good lives; all central policies are very good. But these policies are all changed when they reach lower levels. It's entirely their fault. They do nothing good, spending the whole day wining and dining. The only thing they don't forget is to collect money. When they come to collect money from me, I have to offer them good meals. If they don't like the food, they won't even take my money!  
[Zhu Anshun, 1999: 284]

Such villagers may well become more eager to stop local officials from violating central policies.

Second, lack of confidence in the Center's capacity to monitor and control local officials may boost villagers' sense of agency. Villagers

who doubt the Center's capacity are more likely to feel that they can help the Center in some way. Quite a number of villagers argued that the Center needed the help of ordinary people to understand the real situation (O'Brien and Li, 1999a, 1999b; Edin, 2003). They felt that the Center was left in the dark because it was out of touch with ordinary villagers. In their opinion, the Center alone cannot see through the schemes of deceptive local officials. To learn about "the social reality in the countryside," central leaders or their loyal envoys should come down to meet with villagers, "wearing plain clothes and bypassing local governments" (interviewees 5, 9). A villager from Jiangxi said, "I wish that the higher level leaders would come down to investigate. But they should not alert local officials, who otherwise will put on a big show" (interviewee 8). A villager from Hebei sounded even more proactive, suggesting that "the Center should set up an investigation office which directly receives peasants, so that peasants can express their opinions directly to the Center" (interviewee 9). Another villager agreed that "letters of complaints from the masses should reach the Center directly. The Center then should direct local governments to do investigations. The Center should also offer absolute protection of complainants' identities" (interviewee 17).

Some villagers go further, attributing the Center's partial loss of control over local officials to its failure to depend on the masses. In their opinion, reaching out to the masses directly is the only reliable way of knowing what is happening, and the only sure method of maintaining effective control over local officials requires the help of ordinary people (O'Brien and Li, 1999a). This opinion is most clearly reflected in villagers' support for Mao-style anticorruption mass campaigns. As a scholar from Shanghai observed in Henan, "They [villagers] say that mass supervision is the most effective form of supervision, but by mass supervision they mean Mao Zedong's favorite 'mass campaigns' and 'the four big freedoms.' In their words, mass campaigns should not be conducted yearly and monthly, but neither should they be terminated; 'the four big freedoms' should not be abused, but neither should they be abandoned" (Cao Jinqing, 2000: 660). Nostalgia for anticorruption campaigns such as the "Four Cleanups" can also be observed in other parts of China (O'Brien and Li, 1999a; Li, 2001).

Finally, belief in the Center's good intentions offers a possible way to resolve the problem of misimplemented policy. A Shandong villager said, "The Center cares quite a bit about the life of peasants, but water far away cannot quench thirst nearby" (interviewee 6). For more assertive villagers, however, as long as there is water, there is hope. If local officials stop the flow, it makes better sense to go out and fetch the water than to die of thirst. If the problem is that the Center is unable to carry out its own policies, it makes better sense to aid the Center than to suffer passively. The strategy of helping themselves by helping the Center sounds not only appealing but also feasible to these villagers. Villagers understand that local officials will crack down on them, but they may try to protect themselves by actively seeking the intervention of the Center (Li and O'Brien, 1996; O'Brien, 1996; Guo, 2001). Indeed, they seem to believe that the Center will welcome villagers who volunteer to help. In the eyes of such villagers, the Center is both a potential ally and a "guarantor against repression" (Tarrow, 1994: 88). Seemingly echoing Daniel Field's "rebels in the name of the tsar" (Field, 1989), a leader of tax resistance in Henan told his followers, "As long as I keep in line with the masses and with the central Party leadership, I'm not afraid of anyone. Grassroots government officials are all rogues, don't listen to them; I'll take full responsibility if anything happens" (Li Junde, 2000: 14). For such villagers, the risks of challenging local authorities on behalf of the Center are not forbiddingly high, the payoff of successful contention is significant, and the likelihood of success looks good.

That villagers who have more trust in higher levels than lower levels are more likely to contend with local officials is supported by the survey data. Among 1,600 respondents, 40 (2.5%) said they had written letters of complaint to government departments; 14 (0.9%) had written letters of complaint to radio stations, newspapers and magazines, or TV stations; 27 (1.5%) had lodged complaints at higher levels of government by themselves; 24 (1.5%) had participated in lodging collective complaints; 12 (0.8%) had organized collective complaints; and 12 (0.8%) had joined others from neighboring villages to lodge complaints (see question 7 in Appendix C). Of the 1,088 villagers who gave valid responses to these six questions as well as to other relevant questions, 76 (7.0%) had engaged in one or more of these six activities.

**TABLE 4: Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Engagement in Rightful Resistance**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Parameter Estimate (Standard Error)</i>
Intercept	-3.72 (.56)****
Age	.05 (.09)
Sex	.59 (.30)**
Education	.05 (.05)
Annual household income	.02 (.07)
Party membership	.45 (.36)
PLA veteran <sup>a</sup>	1.02 (.42)**
More trust in higher levels <sup>b</sup>	.18 (.10)*
Beginning -2 log likelihood	619.77
Ending -2 log likelihood	523.89
Nagelkerke $R^2$	.06

NOTE:  $n = 1,088$ . Entries are unstandardized maximum likelihood estimates. The dependent variable is a dummy variable. *Has engaged* is coded as 1, *has not* as 0.

a. Coded 1 if a People's Liberation Army (PLA) veteran, 0 otherwise.

b. Measured by the difference between respondents' scores on the factor representing the level of trust in "higher levels" and their scores on the factor representing the level of trust in "lower levels."

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p = .05$ . \*\*\* $p = .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

As we see in Table 4, the larger the difference between a respondent's trust in higher levels and his or her trust in lower levels, the more likely he or she was to have engaged in one or more contentious acts. The analysis also reconfirms the observation that men are more likely than women to engage in rightful resistance (odds ratio = 1.79) and that People's Liberation Army (PLA) veterans are more likely to defy local officials than are villagers who had never joined the army (odds ratio = 2.76) (O'Brien and Li, 1995; Bernstein and Lü, 2000; Yu Jianrong, 2000: 73). For participation in contentious activities, sex turns out to be the most powerful predictor (standardized logit = .159), followed by whether the villager was a PLA veteran (standardized logit = .114) and the difference between trust in higher levels and trust in lower levels (standardized logit = .112).

#### *DYNAMICS OF CHANGE*

The villagers may well be misguided or flatly incorrect to believe that the Center's intent is good and to see the only problem as its

inability to ensure the faithful implementation of its policies. Although I have no longitudinal survey data to make a more definitive argument, my interviews suggest that this view can be self-correcting. When villagers take part in rightful resistance against local governments, they learn more about the Center. Successful protests are likely to strengthen their trust in the Center. Failure, on the other hand, may weaken their faith.

Chinese villagers usually commence popular action by lodging complaints at higher levels (O'Brien, 2002: 142; Guo, 2001), but such efforts are often frustrated. Local officials use all sorts of coercive measures to stop villagers from going to higher levels, especially to Beijing. In Dangshan County, Anhui Province, for instance, grass-roots leaders plastered their village's walls with posters announcing, "It is illegal to instigate the masses to lodge a complaint" (Zhang Cuiling, 2002: 4). Local officials in Henan similarly put up big-character posters that declared, "Bypassing levels when lodging complaints is to be severely punished" (Wang Zirui and Wang Songmiao, 2001: 31). And when complainants manage to make it to the capital, what awaits them more often than not is disappointment. Although perhaps anticipating friendly representatives of a benign Center, they are instead typically received by long-faced, ill-tempered bureaucrats. A villager from Hebei said, "In 1997, 37 villagers from my village went to the Office of Letters and Visits of the Center; the official whose tag number was 111 was beastly rude" (interviewee 9).

Those who have better luck in Beijing may expect a quick and just resolution of their problem, but they too are often disappointed (Guo, 2001; Luehrmann, forthcoming). Once they arrive in the capital, villagers often find the Center to be very elusive. There seem to be many open doors—the Central Party Committee, the Central Party Disciplinary Inspection Commission, the National People's Congress, and some ministries of the State Council all have an Office of Letters and Visits. In addition, TV stations and major newspapers such as the *People's Daily* and *Farmers' Daily*, which are considered agents of the Center, also have such offices. In most cases, however, these offices simply refer complainants to other offices. When villagers finally reach the right department, they may be told that their cases can be handled only by the local authorities. Letters of complaints commonly end up with the very officials who are charged with various misdeeds

(Guo, 2001; Luehrmann, forthcoming). The existence of numerous venues in Beijing may long extend the hopes of complainants, but the process often intensifies their frustration as they finally realize that they are stuck in a cycle of endless buck-passing.

For instance, in 1991, four villagers from a Henan village began making regular trips to Beijing to lodge complaints on behalf of the whole village against the county government, which had illegally used their land to build a road without offering any compensation. But by the time I met up with them in late 1999, their demand for compensation was still unmet. One of the four complainants said he was no longer certain about the Center's commitment to uphold justice for villagers: "We have been to Beijing at least a dozen times. Even deaf men should have heard our cries. How come our lawful demands always go unanswered? Can't the Center simply order the county to compensate us for our losses?" (interviewee 18). He clearly was not far from questioning whether the Center really wanted to help villagers like him.

Two villagers from Hebei were even more pointed in their disenchantment with the Center. After visiting the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, one lamented that he could not find "the Communist Party" (Wang Wanfu, 1992). Another concluded, "The Communist Party is corrupt. Lodging complaints is useless. It's not only a waste of time, energy, and money, but is also subject to repression" (interviewee 19). Admittedly, only a small number of villagers travel to Beijing to lodge complaints, but since most of those who do so are "petitioners' representatives" (*shangfang daibiao*), their changes in attitude may well affect the views of their constituents. The remark of a senior policy researcher in Beijing in 1999 is thus hardly surprising: "Lodging complaints in Beijing could easily become a training school for future opposition Party leaders. Many villagers may lose their trust in the Center in this process" (interviewee 20).

While lodging complaints educates villagers about higher levels, particularly the Center, township officials and village cadres are just as effective in damping down villagers' hopes about the Center. Not a few grassroots officials argued that many policies of the central government were attractive but impractical (Cao Jinqing, 2000: 557; interviewee 21). Such officials often tell villagers that they should not take such policies at face value. A township Party secretary in Henan,

for instance, advised villagers “not to be superstitious (*mixin*) about the Center” (interviewee 18). When a villager asked the accountant of a township granary, “The Center said that no IOUs should be issued to villagers, how come you issue IOUs every year?” the accountant answered, “The Center has said a lot of things. If you want cash, go to the Center” (Jing Yidan, 1998: 22; on IOUs, see Wedeman, 1997). Village cadres are often highly cynical about the Center. In Shandong, a village Party secretary challenged those attending a village meeting: “Some of you want to lodge complaints against me. Wherever you go, I have friends there. If you want to lodge a complaint at the Party Center, I’ll cover your travel expenses” (qtd. in Liu Weihua, 1999: 22).

Loss of confidence in the Center’s desire to help may engender cynicism and despair. The Hebei villager who complained about the beastly official in Beijing said, “When we returned to Laishui, seven of us were detained for a few weeks. It’s useless to seek justice. Opposing graft and corruption means time in prison. There is no place to look for justice. I know you mean to help us by doing surveys, but I don’t think your investigation is useful” (interviewee 9).

But desperation may also generate demands for change. Some villagers in Hunan have already made “saving the nation” (*jiuguo*) one of their objectives (interviewee 22). In a letter addressed to the general offices of the Central Party Committee, the State Council, and the National People’s Congress as well as to Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, and Li Peng, a Henan villager who had organized many unsuccessful collective complaints wrote, “If we do not get the expected response in a given period of time, then we will go all out to mobilize the masses to struggle for peasants’ right to life and democratic rights by starting a democratic revolutionary movement” (personal communication, 26 February 2002). Some villagers even sound ready for violence. A villager in Hunan told me that lodging complaints was useless: “When I act, I’ll lead people to attack the county police and take their guns. I’ll also have people make cannons, with which we’ll level the county government compound to the ground” (interviewee 23). A scholar based in Shanghai recorded the words of a villager in Henan: “Sooner or later these officials will drive people into rebellion. At that time I will take the lead in attacking the county and township government. I will kill all these corrupt officials” (qtd. in Cao Jinqing, 2000: 253).

Such revolutionary rhetoric will probably never turn into action, but it does indicate the dire consequences that may arise if the rural population loses confidence in the good intentions of the Center. In places where popular discontent with the local government runs extremely deep, acts of desperation by a few could easily draw huge crowds of supporters. The scenario of individual acts of rage sparking collective violence has played out in many places. In Hebei, for instance, a village where no resident had lodged any complaints for nearly a decade, was considered to be quite stable. But when township leaders failed to meet with villagers who came to demand a reduction of fees, a peaceful act of petitioning quickly turned into an angry protest. Villagers from neighboring villages came to join the protestors, and a riot broke out when a few villages began to smash the windows of government offices. In the end, furious villagers set the township government building on fire (Yang Shouyong and Wang Jintao, 2001).

#### *DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS*

This article identifies three patterns of trust in the Chinese state. It shows that some villagers find that the state is unified and trustworthy, while others deem it unified but untrustworthy. However, the largest group of all sees a layered and divided state and believes that higher levels are more trustworthy than lower levels. It argues that undergirding the “higher levels”/“lower levels” divide is a distinction between the Center’s intent and capacity: many villagers seem to think that the Center has good intentions but lacks the capacity to enforce its will on disloyal local officials (O’Brien, 2002: 153-54; Unger, 2002: 215). That many villagers are still willing to extend the benefit of the doubt to the Center suggests that the regime still has a considerable reserve of legitimacy. As long as villagers retain a modicum of confidence in central authorities, they are unlikely to organize activities against the regime. But popular faith in the beneficence of the Center may decline if aggrieved villagers repeatedly fail to get what they hope for from it.

I cannot accurately estimate whether villagers’ trust in the Center has been growing or declining because I have no longitudinal data.

But indirect evidence suggests that villagers' confidence in the capacity of the Center began declining in the 1990s. According to a popular rhyme of the late 1980s, "The Center is our benefactor, the province is our relative, the county is a good person, the township is an evil person, and the village is our enemy" (qtd. in Li and O'Brien, 1996: 28). By the late 1990s, the equivalent rhyme had changed: "There are blue skies at the Center, clouds are gathering at the province, it's pouring at the county, people are being drowned at the township level, and commoners are crying for help" (Yang Hao, 2000: 29). If these two sayings are representative of evolving popular feelings, it seems that villagers' belief in the Center's ability to maintain effective control over the province and county is now fading. Such a decline in confidence would be very disconcerting news for leaders in Zhongnanhai. Layers of local government that were previously "firewalls" (*fang huo qiang*) (Ma Yinlu, 2002) that protected the Center from popular indignation and kept the people hopeful may be collapsing one by one, narrowing the Center's margin of safety markedly.

Indirect evidence of the decline of popular confidence in the Center's capacity is offered by the growing tendency for villagers to bypass levels of authority when lodging complaints. Most grassroots grievances involve village cadres and township officials. If complainants are confident that the Center maintains effective control over the county and higher levels of government, then they may first go to the county, followed by the city or prefecture, the province, and ultimately the capital. In the absence of such confidence, they are more likely to skip the intermediate levels, which they suspect are disloyal to the Center. Evidence from the field indicates that many villagers these days prefer to go directly to the province or even the Center. A villager from Hebei, for instance, said that villagers "should lodge complaints at higher level (central and provincial) governments" (interviewee 13). Some villagers do not even trust the province. A villager from Zhejiang said, "I would go to the Center if I could. I don't have much confidence in middle and grassroots levels of governments" (interviewee 16). Official statistics of the Bureau of Letters and Visits of the General Office of the State Council show that the number of ordinary citizens lodging complaints at the county level and higher increased rapidly from 1995 to 1999, with many

complainants omitting one or more levels of government (Zhou Zhanshun, 1999; on skipping levels during the Qing, see Ocko, 1988).

Escalating popular protests also suggest that villagers' confidence in the Center's capacity is declining. Villagers in some provinces no longer bother to inform the Center about the misdeeds of local officials, attempting instead to enforce central policies by themselves. In Hunan, for instance, a group of "peasant leaders" sought to publicly condemn local governments by convening "a ten-thousand-person meeting on reducing burdens and combating corruption" in the middle of a township government compound (Duan Xianju, Tan Jian, and Chen Bin, 2000: 8; also see Yu Jianrong, 2000). Similarly, in one Sichuan county, four villagers set up a "County Command Center for Speaking Up for Peasants" (*quanxian wei nongmin shuohua zhihui zhongxin*). They met every ten days to "stir up the masses to resist the Party and government," and they attempted to call a mass meeting to "study" central documents concerning peasant burdens (Jiang Zuoping and Yang Sanjun, 1999: 16). Instead of sounding fire alarms (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984; O'Brien and Li, 1999b), some villagers now attempt to extinguish fires themselves.

Although limited popular protests are unlikely to trigger the downfall of the regime in the foreseeable future (Bernstein and Lü, 2002; Unger, 2002; O'Brien, 2002), they may generate additional pressure for political reform. While popular demands for the faithful implementation of central policies appear to be a controlled form of contention, they are in fact transgressive (McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow, 2001) or boundary spanning (O'Brien, 2003) because the Center cannot possibly keep all its promises. So long as the Center does not reverse its policies that benefit the masses, tension between villagers and local officials will continue to grow. As a result, escalating rural unrest may force the Center to acquiesce to local officials' coercion of peasant protesters. When this happens, it may not take long for protesters to realize that the Center does not truly want to have all its beneficial policies implemented. The resulting loss of confidence in the Center may increase apathy—or it may lead to demands for fundamental political changes, such as direct election of national leaders and the end of one-party rule. Disillusioned villagers may continue to frame their claims within the rubric of policy implementation, but the specific "policy" they have in mind may include constitutional principles, especially

those of popular sovereignty, rule of law, and democracy. Rightful resistance will then become full-blown political dissent.

APPENDIX A  
Interviewee List

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1. Villager: Shandong, September 1997.
  2. Villager: Hunan, February 1999.
  3. Villager: Jiangxi, November 1999.
  4. Former village cadre: Jiangxi, September 1997.
  5. Villager: Anhui, October 1997.
  6. Villager: Shandong, September 1997.
  7. Villager: Anhui, September 1997.
  8. Villager: Jiangxi, September 1997.
  9. Villager: Hebei, December 1997.
  10. Villager: Jiangxi, September 1997.
  11. Villager: Anhui, September 1997.
  12. Villager: Jiangxi, November 1999.
  13. Villager: Hebei, February 1999.
  14. Villager: Shandong, September 1997.
  15. Villager: Hunan, November 1999.
  16. Villager: Zhejiang, November 1999.
  17. Villager: Hebei, September 1994.
  18. Villager from Henan: Beijing, September 1999.
  19. Villager from Hebei: Beijing, September 1999.
  20. Senior rural researcher: Beijing, September 1999.
  21. Township official: Hebei, July 1995.
  22. Policy researcher: Hunan, April 2000.
  23. Villager: Hunan, April 2000.
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APPENDIX B  
A Note on Sampling and Data Collection

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This research is based on surveys of 1,600 villagers from Taihe County and Chongren County of Jiangxi Province, Taicang County of Jiangsu Province, and Shouning County of Fujian Province. These four counties were selected because my collaborators had good working relations with local leaders and could sample and interview residents without constraints. Sampling in each county was done in three stages. First, five townships were selected. Second, four administrative villages were selected from each township. Sam-

ples of townships and villages were based on the principle of probabilities proportionate to size such that all townships in a county and all villages in a township had an equal probability of being chosen regardless of their population sizes. Within each village, a simple random sample of 40 individuals older than age eighteen was drawn on the basis of household registration records. The random sample was then randomly divided into a base group and a backup group. If a selected villager in the base group was not available or turned down the request for an interview, then a villager with similar demographic background in the backup group would be approached. Twenty individuals from each village were interviewed in their homes, regardless of the village population size. Since villagers from smaller villages had a higher probability of being selected, this is not a perfect local probability sample. Each respondent was paid an honorarium of 20 yuan (approximately \$2.50). Rates of nonresponse to attitudinal questions varied according to the political sensitivity of the questions. In general, women and the elderly were more likely to give invalid responses and nonresponses. Interested readers may request the survey data (stored in SPSS format) and the questionnaire (in Chinese) from the author.

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APPENDIX C  
Selected Survey Questions

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In questions 1 through 5, the possible responses are as follows:

- (1) Very high (*hen gao*)
  - (2) Relatively high (*bijiao gao*)
  - (3) So-so (*yi ban*)
  - (4) Relatively low (*bijiao di*)
  - (5) Very low (*hen di*)
  - (7) Other (please specify) (*qita—qing shuoming*)
  - (9) [Do not read] no response (*[bu du] mei huida*)
1. What do you think the level of popular trust enjoyed by the Central Party Committee is in the countryside? (*Nin renwei dangzhongyang zai nongcun de weixin zenyang?*)
  2. What do you think the level of popular trust enjoyed by the provincial Party committee is in the countryside? (*Nin renwei shengwei zai nongcun de weixin zenyang?*)
  3. What do you think the level of popular trust enjoyed by the county Party committee is in the countryside? (*Nin renwei xianwei zai nongcun de weixin zenyang?*)

4. What do you think the level of popular trust enjoyed by the township Party committee is in the countryside? (*Nin renwei xiangzhen dangwei zai nongcun de weixin zenyang?*)
  5. What do you think the level of popular trust enjoyed by the village Party branch is in the countryside? (*Nin renwei cun dangzhibu zai nongcun de weixin zenyang?*)
  6. Do you think that the state chairman should be directly elected by the people? (*Nin renwei guojia zhuxi shibushi yinggai rang renmin zhijie xuanju?*)
    - (1) Should not (*bu yinggai*)
    - (2) Should but at present the conditions are not ripe (*yinggai dan muqian tiaojian haibu chengshu*)
    - (3) Should and can be held now (*yinggai erqie muqian jiu keyi shixing*)
    - (7) Other (please specify) (*qita—qing shuoming*)
    - (8) Do not know (*shuo bu qing*)
    - (9) [Do not read] no response ([*bu du*] *mei huida*)
  7. In which of the following activities have you participated? (*Xiamian lieju de huodong zhong, nin congshiguo naxie xiang?*) (The possible responses given for a through j are (1) no (*meizuoguo*), (2) yes (*zuoguo*), and (9) no answer (*buda*).)
    - a. Raised objections to village cadres face-to-face (*dangmian gei cunganbu tiyijian*)
    - b. Raised objections to township officials face-to-face (*dangmian gei xiangzhen ganbu tiyijian*)
    - c. Asked the village Party secretary to raise objections to the township (*yaoqiu cun dangzhibu shuji gei xiangzhen tiyijian*)
    - d. Asked the villagers' committee director to raise objections to the township (*yaoqiu cunweihui zhuren gei xiangzhen tiyijian*)
    - e. Wrote letters of complaint to government departments (*gei zhengfu bumen xiexin fanying yijian*)
    - f. Wrote letters of complaint to radio stations, newspapers and magazines, and TV stations (*gei diantai, baokan zazhi, dianshitai xiexin fanying yijian*)
    - g. Lodged complaints individually at higher levels of government by yourself (*geren shangfang*)
    - h. Participated in lodging collective complaints at higher levels of government (*canjia jiti shangfang*)
    - i. Organized collective complaints (*zuzhi jiti shangfang*)
    - j. Joined villagers from neighboring villages to lodge complaints at higher levels (*lianhe lincun de cunmin yiqi shangfang*)
    - k. Other (please specify) (*qi ta—qing shuoming*)
-

## NOTES

1. Chinese villagers usually do not distinguish between the government and the Party. Imitating the news media, they use *Party* and *government* in conjunction, in expressions such as *dang he zhengfu* (the Party and the government), *shengwei sheng zhengfu* (the provincial Party committee and the provincial government), and *xianwei xianzhengfu* (the county Party committee and county government). To maintain consistency of wording, I asked about five levels of Party committees rather than five levels of government. I noted during a pretest that some villagers were unfamiliar with the term *zhongyang zhengfu* (the central government), perhaps because the central government is usually referred to as *guowuyuan* (the state council). Moreover, there is no formal government body at the village level. Since trust in the government is a very sensitive issue, I made the questions sound more impersonal by not asking respondents directly how much trust they themselves had in various levels of Party committees.

2. Exploratory factor analysis (with varimax rotation) suggests that the five indicator questions about popular trust in five levels of Party committees measure two latent factors. Ratings of trust for the Center and province load strongly on factor 1 (factor loadings are respectively 0.920 and 0.924) and weakly on factor 2 (factor loadings are respectively 0.205 and 0.006), while ratings of trust for township and village governments load strongly on factor 2 (factor loadings are respectively 0.899 and 0.897) and weakly on factor 1 (factor loadings are respectively 0.187 and 0.032). Ratings of the level of trust in the county have moderate loadings on both factors (0.625 and 0.641, respectively). Confirmatory factor analysis shows that a model that assumes that all five questions about political trust measure one and the same latent factor—"overall level of trust in the state"—fits the data poorly and must be rejected ( $p < .001$ ; comparative fitness index [CFI] = 0.609; goodness of fit index [GFI] = 0.678; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.465). What fits the data much better is a two-factor model, with one factor reflecting villagers' trust in higher levels and the other reflecting trust in lower levels. In this model, ratings of the level of trust in the Center and province are allowed to load on the first factor, ratings of the level of trust in the township and village are allowed to load on the second factor, and ratings of the level of trust in the county are allowed to load on both factors. Although it is not an exact fit ( $p = .003$ ), this model has acceptable close-fit indices (CFI = 0.997; GFI = 0.995; RMSEA = 0.049). This two-factor model also shows that the latent level of trust in higher levels is only weakly correlated with the latent level of trust in lower levels ( $r = .202$ ), although the correlation is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). It is worth noting that in confirmatory factor analysis, the null hypothesis assumes that the model fits the data perfectly and is expected to be accepted. An insignificant chi-square ( $p > .05$ ) generally indicates that the model is an exact fit, while a significant chi-square ( $p < .05$ ) indicates an imperfect fit. The conventional cutoff criteria used here for the three approximation fit indices are RMSEA < 0.10, CFI > 0.95, and GFI > 0.95 (Bollen, 1989; Long and Bollen, 1993; Kline, 1998; Hu and Bentler, 1999). The results reported here are obtained with AMOS 4.0.

3. Respondents' income was measured by a nine-level index; 1 through 9 stand, respectively, for below 500 yuan, 501-1,000 yuan, 1,001-2,000 yuan, 2,001-4,000 yuan, 4,001-6,000 yuan, 6,001-10,000 yuan, 10,001-15,000 yuan, 15,001-20,000 yuan, and above 20,001 yuan. Income was not included in the regression model because its correlation with the level of trust for the Center and the province is curvilinear.

4. The odds of an event occurring are defined as the ratio of the probability that it will occur to the probability that it will not occur. In other words, when  $p$  is the probability of an outcome, the odds of the same outcome are  $p/(1-p)$ . The odds ratio is the ratio of the odds of an outcome when one particular predictor is, say, 1, compared with the odds of an outcome when that

predictor is, say, 0. The odds ratio, always predicated on a particular independent variable, is the increase (or decrease) in the odds of an outcome when that independent variable increases by 1 (Rudas, 1998).

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