

Research on the Public Perception of the Power List System in China

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Abstract. The public perception of public policy directly affects the effect of policy implementation. In this paper, a semi-structured interview and questionnaire survey were used to investigate the public perception of the Power List System among 1254 samples from 18 cities. The results show that most of the samples didn't understand about Power List System, some people had not even heard of the name. Only about 34% of the samples have searched Power Lists at least once. Most of the samples that have used Power Lists think that the search is convenient. And some samples also reflect that there are some problems such as web errors and search difficulties. The public who used Power Lists have made a positive appraisal of the system. But the awareness rate and usage rate of the Power Lists are low, which has affected the achievement of policy objectives to a certain extent. To bring into full play the role of the Power List System, the government needs to strengthen policy publicity, to improve the convenience of using the power lists, and to accelerate the implementation of the Power List System in grass-roots governments.

1. Introduction

In 2004, the case of You-can Li, deputy director of the Hebei Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Department, huge corruption and bribery, triggered a heated discussion on the openness, transparency and supervision of government power. In February 2005, the Hebei Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection and the provincial Supervision Office issued the "Opinions on carrying out the pilot work of promoting the open and transparent operation of administrative power". In May 2005, Handan took the lead in making public "Mayor Power List", which has opened the practical exploration of the administrative power reform in local governments. From 2009 to 2010, the CCDI and the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee conducted pilot programs for the open exercise of power in 72 county party committees around the country. In 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee pointed out that Power List System is an important measure to accelerate the transformation of government functions, to build a law-based government and a service-oriented government, to realize the openness and transparency of government administrative power. In February 2014, The State Council disclosed to the public the list of items for administrative examination and approval currently retained by various departments, which was the first time that the central government "disclosed" the list of powers. In March 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and The General Office of the State Council asked provincial governments to

make Power Lists including in the various administrative powers and their basis, executive subject, operation processes, corresponding responsibilities, supervisory call, etc, to open to the public, to accepted social supervision before the end of 2015. And city or county governments and public institutions that undertake administrative functions according to law basically complete the publication of Power Lists before the end of 2016. In 2018, the Central Compilation Office and the Legal Affairs Office required governments at all levels to combine the Power List System with the "three fixed", and strengthen the construction of standardization, supervision and dynamic adjustment on the basis of consolidating the results achieved in the previous stage.

The Power Lists refer to series of publicly available files that listed every power executed by the government departments including in its basis, execution flows, the materials needed, complaints call etc. Local government sectors in China are the institutions that serve the people. In fact, the powers of local governments in China, especially the grass-roots government, are to handle a variety of services items. "Power Lists" of local governments, essentially, are the lists of services. The Power List System refers to a series of supporting mechanisms in the whole process of making and running the Power Lists including a series of work rules such as the formulation, publicity, adjustment, supervision, etc. The Power Lists available to the public are one of the important results of the implementation of the Power List System by government departments at all levels.

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The Power List System has changed from the active practice of local governments to the comprehensive promotion around the country through 17 years. So far, this government-led self-revolution of power within administrative agencies^[1] has basically completed the establishment of the system form and entered the stage of dynamic adjustment and system improvement^[2].

The original intention of the Power List System is to actively accept public supervision through the open and transparent operation of government administrative power, to prevent power corruption, to promote the construction of a law-based and service-oriented government. So, do the public understand the Power Lists System? Have they used Power Lists? How do they evaluate this system? These are the most important basis for judging the effectiveness of the policy. However, most of the existing studies on the Power List System focus on Legal thinking^[3], the Functions and effects^[4], implementation Logic and interpretation Framework^[5], problems and countermeasures in the implementation^[6], etc. In the existing research literature, there is little investigation of public perception and evaluation of the Power List System.

The key to the dynamic adjustment and the improvement of the Power Lists is to establish an evaluation mechanism on policy effect. Generally, the goals of public policy are a collection of multiple values. It is difficult to evaluate intangible and untouchable values in objective indicators^[7]. So, it is very necessary to understand the public perception of the policy effects^[8]. The public perception refers to the public understanding, attitude and opinion on a specific event and policy^[9-10]. This study attempts to investigate the public perception of the Power List System. The research finding may provide some reference to improve the Power List System.

2. Research methods and processes

This study adopts the methods of individual interviews and questionnaires to understand the public perception on Power List System.

Firstly, based on the grounded theory, 46 ordinary citizens by saturation sampling method were interviewed in Feb 2023. They are from Guangzhou in eastern China, Zhengzhou in central China and Chengdu in western China. The interview mainly focused on three aspects: (1) The public's understanding of the Power List System, including whether they know the Power Lists? How to know? Are they willing to understand its contents? (2) The use of the Power Lists, including in when and why to use them? Is it convenient to use? (3) Evaluation of the Power List System, including in the impact of the Power List System on the government and on the public.

Secondly, collating the interview data and designing the questionnaire. The key questions and options were extracted from the interview data by content analysis methods, and a preliminary questionnaire was constructed.

Thirdly, pre-investigation, the reliability and validity test of the questionnaire. In April 2023, 100 questionnaires were distributed in Chengdu through street encounters and convenient online samples. 95 valid questionnaires were recovered. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire

were tested in SPSS25.0. The results of the reliability test showed the cronbach coefficient corresponding to the variable is above 0.70. This indicates that the questionnaire has good consistency and high reliability. Validity test results showed the KMO value is greater than 0.8 and the P-value of Bartlett test is less than 0.05. It indicates that the questionnaire has good validity. After the pretest, the formal questionnaire for study is formed.

Fourthly, data collection and collation. Formal questionnaires are collected with the method of convenience sampling. A total of 1282 questionnaires are distributed in 8 cities across the country, among which 1254 are valid. The samples included ordinary citizens aged 25-70 in a variety of occupations and levels of education.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Public awareness of Power lists

The results of the questionnaire survey show that most of the public don't understand Power List System. Some people had not even heard of the name. Among 1254 samples from 18 cities, only 34.45% have known and actually used Power Lists at least once (as shown in the figure 1). Our survey shows respondents living in urban areas have a higher level of awareness of the Power List System than those living in rural areas. The respondents with higher education level generally have a higher cognition level of the Power Lists than those with lower education level, which also conforms to the social cognition theory that the public's own quality, knowledge level and policy accomplishment will affect their cognition level of a certain thing. The cognition level of civil servants to the Power List System is obviously higher than that of other professionals. This may be related to their works' nature. Most of them are the staff of government agencies and the main executors of the Power List System.

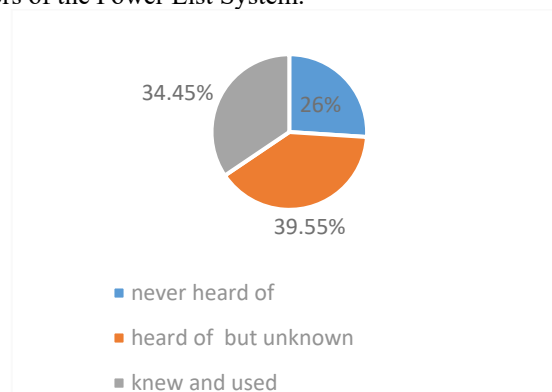


Fig. 1. Public knowledge of Power Lists

3.1.1. Willingness of the public understanding Power Lists

Among 326 samples who did not know Power Lists, 16.3% of them had no intention of knowing it; 29.98% of them said that they would know about it by the way if they saw it on the Internet; 45.17% of them said they would learn about it if it is needed in the future. Only 10.13% of them

are willing to know actively because it is an important policy of the government.

3.1.2. Channels for the public knowing Power Lists

Our investigation reveals there are multiple channels for the public to know Power Lists. Among them, the Internet, television, government propaganda and organization learning are the most important ways.(as shown in the figure 2).

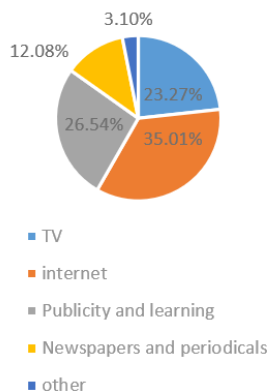


Fig. 2. Channels for the public know the Power Lists

3.1.3. The reasons that the public don't know Power Lists

The reasons that the public don't know Power Lists are manifold.11.11% of them were not interested, 17.17% of them thought it was not their business, 21.46% of them did not know where to search, and 50.25% of them said they did not need. This shows that the implementation of the Power List System should be combined with public oriented services.

3.2 Public use of Power Lists

3.2.1. When and why to use

Among 432 samples who have used Power Lists, 86.22% said when they or their relatives want to handle affairs, they can search the location, work procedure, required material by Power Lists. 38.11% said when they were not satisfied with the behavior and attitude of the government staff, they would search the Power Lists to know the complaint call. Only 5.32% said when the interests of their own or their relatives were harmed in reality, they would consult Power Lists to know whether the staff of these departments abused their power. Only 0.69% will use Power Lists to understand and supervise the power operation of the government departments. This shows the majority of the public will only consult and use Power Lists when it concerns their own interests or those of their relatives.

3.2.2. Search ways

The analysis of 432 samples who used Power Lists found that the top three search methods are: government affairs

disclosure website (67.4%), service hall bulletin board or pamphlet (62.7%), consulting staff in government office window (40.3%). The on-site consultation remains an important way. Only 15.2% samples would consult the acquaintances. This shows that the traditional situation of resorting to acquaintances has changed a lot when something happens in China.

3.2.3. Convenience of using the Power Lists

Among 432 samples that have used Power Lists, 58.32% samples think that it is convenient and easy to search, 18.53% respondents found sometimes the website error. 17.13% respondents said they did not see the corresponding billboards or brochures in the service hall. And 7.41% samples said they could not get timely help from the on-site staff sometimes.

3.3 Evaluation of the effects of the Power List System

The most of samples that have used Power Lists thought the Power List System has positive effects on both the government and the public.

3.3.1. The influence of the Power List System on government departments

Among 432 samples have used the Power Lists, 57.65% samples believe the Power List System has promoted the openness and transparency of governments' powers. 64.78% samples believe it has improved the efficiency of the government.57.23% samples believe it has facilitated the transformation of government functions. 51.36% samples believe it has reduced official corruption. 50.52% samples believe it has made the powers and responsibilities between government departments clearer.39.83% believe it has reduced the bucking phenomenon among government departments. 26% believe it has improved the service attitude of government staff. But 10.27% samples also think it increases the burden of government workers. And 6.29% samples think it is just some form, without any real effect. It can be seen that most of the public think that the implementation of the Power List System has a positive impact on government departments.

3.3.2. The influence of the Power List System on the public

Most respondents who have used the Power Lists believe that the implementation of the policy has a positive impact on the public. Among 432 samples have used the Power Lists,68.34% of them believe it has improved the convenience of handling affairs. 61.43% of them believe it has facilitated public scrutiny of the government. 47.38% of them believe it has protected the public interest.45.28% believe it has deepened the public's understanding of the government actions. But 11.53% believe it has no real effects on the people.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

4.1. Conclusion

The Power List System is a self-revolution within administrative agencies in China. Its fundamental purpose is to improve the governments' the ability and level of service for the people. Therefore, public perception of this system is the key to the success. Our survey results show the awareness rate and usage rate of the Power Lists are low, which affects its function to a certain extent. But the most of the people who have used Power Lists have made a positive appraisal of the system. Although there are still some deficiencies in the implementation of the Power List System, it has basically reached the policy objectives that put forward by the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee.

4.2. Suggestion

To bring into full play the role of the Power List System, improvements should be made in the following aspects in the future.

4.2.1. Strengthen the advocacy of the Power List System.

Policy publicity is the most direct way to promote the public perception level of policies. Firstly, the policy advocacy has to meet the public's different preferences in information receiving, the variety of feature, fashion, propaganda and form should be stressed. Secondly, the channels of policy publicity should be diversified. In addition to traditional media and government websites, policy publicity can also be carried out on other Internet platforms visible to the public such as TikTok, Baidu. Thirdly, policy advocacy can take more lively and interesting forms such as animations and case stories.

4.2.2. Make it easier for the public to use.

Firstly, government departments should continuously improve the contents of Power Lists from the perspective of convenient use by the public. Secondly, maintain government affairs disclosure websites regularly to ensure its smooth operation. Thirdly, strengthen offline publicity and service to protect the rights and interests of the public who are unfamiliar with Internet.

4.2.3. Accelerate the implementation of the Power List System in towns and sub-districts.

The government sectors in the townships and *sub-districts* are the most grass-roots organizations that provide services directly to the public. The quality of their services directly affects the public's satisfaction with the government. It is also directly related to the realization of the objectives of the Power List System. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the implementation of the Power List System in towns and sub-districts. At first, summarize the

experience of the implementation of the power list system in the early stage, and formulate the implementation plan according to the characteristics of towns and sub-districts. At second, strengthen the training civil servants in towns and sub-districts, and improve their cognition level to the Power List System and the implement ability. At third, the implementation of the Power List System can be included in the annual assessment objectives in order to improve the enthusiasm of government sectors in township or sub-districts to implement policies.

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