

Analysis of the Main Problems and Causes of Citizens' Participation in Public Policy Making in China

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Abstract:

Citizens' participation in the formulation of government public policies is an important way for citizens to participate in decision-making. The article examines citizen participation in the process of public policy making in China, pointing out the new trend of citizen participation and identifying some problems of citizen participation, such as insufficient motivation of citizen participation and the prevalence of extra-institutional participation. The reasons for these problems are analyzed in depth and countermeasures are proposed, such as improving the relevant legal system and increasing the supervision and feedback of the policy-making process.

Key Words: public policy making; citizen participation; open government; Public Agenda

In modern society, with the rapid development of the Internet and information technology, citizens can more easily access government work information, which provides the possibility to further participate in public affairs management. As of December 2021, China has 1.032 billion Internet users, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 73%. The Internet has increasingly become an important way for citizens to obtain government information and express their interests. In the process of government decision-making, citizens' participation is also increasing.

1. The subject status of citizen participation is not clear, and the motivation for participation is insufficient

When formulating public policies, the Chinese government adopts a decision-making mode with elites as the main body, rather than citizens as the main body. In the decision-making process, elites, especially important leaders, often integrate personal values with public policies, while the government's policy formulation is dominated by elites, and the interaction with society is not sufficient. Especially in the process of citizen participation in decision-making, there are many forms of citizen participation, while the actual participation is ignored. In the decision-making process, the procedure and scope of public participation are determined by the government. In many cases, when decisions are made and citizens participate, that is to go through the motions and take forms. This form of citizen participation will lead to the lack of efficiency of citizen participation and affect citizens' enthusiasm and motivation for participation

2. The participation mode outside the system prevails

Citizen participation can be divided into institutionalized participation and participation outside the system. Institutionalized citizen participation is a way for citizens to participate in the process of government public

policy formulation under the constraint of laws and in accordance with certain systems and standards. China has established a law on citizens' political participation. Under the restriction of the law, citizens can participate in the management of social affairs in legal ways and means. In theory, citizens can protect their legitimate rights and interests by means of administrative reconsideration, litigation and other means in accordance with the law, and take the government to court. However, in practice, the system is not so perfect. For example, Article 2 of Chapter I of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China clearly stipulates that "the people manage state affairs, economic and cultural undertakings and social affairs through various channels and methods in accordance with the law".

However, the current laws and regulations are limited to the requirements in principle, and there are no clear procedural rules. For example, there are no clear provisions on the scope, way, way and guarantee of citizens' participation in China. Many citizens fail to achieve their desired results through legal means. At this time, citizens will use participation methods outside the system. For example, citizens will demonstrate to the government through petition, protest, demonstration and other political participation methods to disrupt the normal working order of the government, so as to gain the support of public opinion and the attention of the government, and to solve problems.

3. The way of citizen participation is symbolic, and the effectiveness of participation is poor

The effectiveness of citizens' participation in public policy making means that the policy suggestions provided by citizens can be effectively responded by the government and have a substantial impact on public policies. The main way of citizen participation in China is still at the stage of symbolic participation, and the traditional model of citizen participation cannot widely and effectively listen to the opinions and requirements of citizens. In many government departments, decision-makers will only blindly seek the support of the people to meet their preferences. Therefore, a large number of people's participation does not mean the effective participation of citizens. In addition to the traditional social hearing system, petition system and other participation methods, new forms such as mayor's hotline and mayor's mailbox have emerged. Although the participation methods have expanded, the effectiveness of citizen participation in the process of public policy formulation is not satisfactory.

In essence, the policy recommendations sought by the government are more similar to the announcement of the solicitation of opinions, while the suggestions of citizens have little practical effect on policy decisions. Even when the government intends to let the public participate in the process of formulating public policies, the government will not solicit opinions from citizens in a wide range. It often opens a telephone or several mailboxes, holds limited hearings, and allows citizen representatives to participate in public policy formulation. However, these citizen representatives are not really representatives elected by citizens, but some citizens designated by the government, in order to get the information the government wants, And then formulate public policies, but the actual effect of this kind of soliciting citizens' opinions is not high.

4. Weak participation of social non-governmental organizations

The lack of non-governmental organizations representing the interests of citizens, especially with the advent of the Internet era, most citizens participate in political activities in the form of individuals. In addition, the network management system is not perfect, and the consequences of citizens' online participation are relatively small, making citizens more free to express their opinions, making management more difficult. In addition, citizens with different education levels and lower education levels are difficult to distinguish the true from the false in the face of complicated and mixed information, which is easy to be used by people with ulterior motives. They express wrong views impulsively, guide public opinion, and form a big obstacle for the government to effectively solve problems.

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