The Internet, Political Participation, and Governance Reform in China

Steven J. Balla
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Fourth Plenum

• transparency and public participation

• citizen feedback on draft policies

• good news for US companies and government officials?
Government consultation and citizen feedback

• on the Chinese Internet

• case of health system reform

• draw out general lessons and apply across ministries and provinces
Online consultation

• opportunities to offer feedback on draft laws and regulations

• relatively new phenomenon

• Chinese government will “make use of the Internet as a standard method of inviting public opinion on draft laws and regulations”
Health system reform

- Uninsurance rates have skyrocketed
- Household savings rates among the highest in the world
《关于深化医药卫生体制改革的意见（征求意见稿）》 公开征求意见

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全文阅读

新闻意见

公告

《关于深化医药卫生体制改革的意见（征求意见稿）》 公开征求意见

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公开征求意见活动已结束

请查看意见

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关于深化医药卫生体制改革的意见（征求意见稿）
中华人民共和国国家发展和改革委员会
National Development and Reform Commission

深化医药卫生体制改革意见征集 意见浏览

主要部分：

1. 主要部分
2. 第二部分
3. 第三部分
4. 第四部分
5. 第五部分
6. 第六部分
7. 结合

背景介绍：

背景介绍

前言

本文基于国家政策及行业发展

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备注：

2008-11-15

附录

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专题时间：2008-11-15
Q1 您是哪一年出生的？

Q2 您的性别：

1、男  2、女

Q3 您接受教育的程度：

1、高中以下  2、高中毕业  3、大学未毕业
4、大学毕业  5、大学以上

Q4 您现在居住在什么地方：

1、城市  2、小城镇  3、农村

Q5 您有医疗保险吗？（包括社会医疗保险和商业医疗保险）

1、有  2、没有  88、不知道
中华人民共和国国家发展和改革委员会
National Development and Reform Commission

深化医药卫生体制改革意见征求 意见浏览

内容太长，无法直接粘贴到此。
Content analysis of comments

• positive or negative sentiment toward proposal

• substantive focus

• nature of arguments and evidence
Three questions about citizen feedback

• characteristics of participants

• political and substantive content of comments

• importance of demographic characteristics and subjective motivations in determining substantive engagement of comments
Who were participants?

• more than 80% males
• median age of 36
• nearly 90% with university degrees
• professional, white collar
• medical and health industry

• elite group of participants
Motivations for participation

• express concerns with proposal

• influence health system reform

• *not simply cheering government on*
Negative opinions in comments

• “The plan is too technical to understand. I suggest making it more readable for someone like me, a college student who is not in medical school.”

• “This plan basically cheats us. If the government cannot provide us with a plan that satisfies the majority of people, we will be forced to use our power to make you bureaucrats pay.”
Substantive knowledge in comments

• “According to the World Health Report 2005, the percentage of national health care expenditures covered by governments was between 80-90 percent in developed European countries, 45.6 percent in the United States, and 56.3 percent in Thailand. Many poorer countries, such as India, Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Vanuatu, Myanmar, and Burundi, have implemented universal health care systems. The Chinese government, however, covers only 17 percent of health care expenditures, the fourth lowest of any country in the world. Furthermore, 80 percent of this paltry 17 percent is used to cover the medical expenses of a relatively small number of elites, namely, party members and government cadres.”
Variations across comments

• do differences in demographic characteristics and subjective motivations matter?

• are such differences associated with substantive engagement of comments?
Research on Chinese political participation

• demographic characteristics and subjective motivations as markers of underlying nature of participatory forum

• if participants are internally efficacious and democratically oriented, then evidence of markers of authenticity
Results of statistical analysis

• participants high in internal efficacy and democratic orientation more substantively engaged

• *participation in health system reform beyond commenting*
• *participants seeking to influence the direction of reform*
• *participants open to idea that online consultation might increase fairness and responsiveness in policymaking*
Inferential Leaps

• such patterns are consistent with authentic participation that is more than ratifying government decisions

• cautiously, tentatively optimistic about online consultation as a governance reform
Online consultation across ministries and provinces

• website-by-website searches

• variation in online consultation practices

• conditions under which online consultation is implemented and information is disclosed?
A new opportunity?

• Fourth Plenum provides an opening for transparency and public participation

• middle-level bureaucrats have room to quietly make progress on these aspects of governance reform
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