

Research on Influencing Factors of College Students' Political Institutional Identity: Evidence from China

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Abstract: China has entered a critical period of reform and development and contemporary college students will become an important driving force. Under such circumstances, it is of great significance to consolidate their political institutional identity for maintaining political stability and promoting social progress. Based on the survey data of colleges and universities in central China, this paper, using ordinal logistic regression analysis model (ologit model), scientifically analyzes and accurately identifies the factors influencing the political institutional identity of college students. The empirical results show that, as far as the institution itself is concerned, its fairness, representation and performance have a positive and systematic on institutional identity. In terms of external factors, the cultivation of individual values has a significant positive impact on institutional identity, while multi-culture will lead to the deviation in institutional identity. On this basis, this paper puts forward some suggestions to promote the political institutional identity of college students from the aspects of institutional arrangement, ideological education and social environment.

Keywords: College Students, Political Institutional Identity, Institutional Arrangement, Individual Values, Multi-culture, Ologit Model

1. Introduction

Political institution is the basis for the operation of state power and a tool for social stability and development [9]. From the perspective of social psychology, an effective political institution must be supported by sufficient political identity consciousness of social members [16]. Otherwise, the institutional arrangement will become an invalid rule [5, 26]. At present, China has entered a critical period of reform and development. In contemporary China, the economic system, social structure and ideology are undergoing profound changes and the pattern of interests is undergoing profound adjustment [36]. As a result, social contradictions and conflicts become increasingly prominent. This social development situation can easily disrupt people's political identity and cause a political identity crisis [13, 29]. Under such circumstances, how to improve the level of institutional identity of college students, make them have a sense of belonging to the political community, and maximize social cohesion becomes an important issue for contemporary

China to maintain political stability and promote social progress [1].

Despite this importance, existing empirical researches on the influencing factors of contemporary college students' institutional identity are still lack and the degree of influence of each factor has not been fully clarified. This study takes college students in central China as the research subject and puts forward five theoretical hypotheses about influencing factors of political institutional identity. These factors involve institutional fairness, institutional representation, institutional performance, individual values and multi-culture. Questionnaires are used to obtain the analysis data, which are then fitted into ologit regression model to identify the significance of these factors. On the basis of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study puts forward some potential countermeasures to promote the political institutional identity of contemporary college students.

2. Literature Review

Institutional identity refers to a kind of trust and affirmation from the heart of citizens to the political institution [34]. It mainly includes two aspects: first, citizens' identity with institutional design; second, citizens' identity with institutional performance. Institutional identity is conducive to improving the consciousness and effectiveness of institutional implementation, and to promoting the consolidation and improvement of the political institution [11]. At the national level, political institutional identity is the premise and foundation for the ruling party to maintain political rule and avoid social unrest and national division. At the individual level, political institutional identity is an emotional tendency, psychological belonging and corresponding supportive behavior of citizens to the political community, which reflects the value orientation and interest demands of citizens in contemporary social and political life [39].

2.1. Influence of Institutional Design and Institutional Performance on Institutional Identity

First, Institutional fairness: The political institution is the rules and norms that must be observed by the behavioral agent participating in political activities. Its function is to regulate social conflicts and maintain social orders, and it is also channel to help citizens realize their own interests [17]. The political institution of a society must give its members a sense of fairness for receiving the greatest support from its citizens [4]. Only when the political institution of a society is impartial can it produce authority [25]. At this time, citizens will have the sense of identity and belonging to the institution, and then improve the consciousness of abiding by the institution [3]. It is likely that citizens have a relatively low level of institutional identity when encountering unequal social rights and obligations as well as unbalanced distribution of interests [14]. Based on this, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Institutional fairness presents positive and systematic effects on institutional identity.

Second, Institutional representation: The representation of institutional regulations originates from the process of institutional design and practice, which directly affects the degree of institutional identity [21]. Any society is composed of political, economic, and social interest groups of various scales, and each interest group has its own relatively independent interest demands [31]. The institution is the product of the game and struggle of different interest groups. In the process of institutional design and institutional practice, whether the demands of various classes and interest groups can be widely absorbed and whether the will of the majority of citizens can be reflected will directly affect citizens' institutional identity [18, 23]. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Institutional representation reveals positive and systematic effects on institutional identity.

Third, Institutional performance: Institutional performance refers to the effect and efficiency of institutional implementation, and is the material basis for political institutional identity. Performance identity is measured by the satisfaction degree of public interest and personal interest. Generally speaking, institutional performance mainly includes two aspects: economic performance and distribution efficiency, that is, the so-called "making the cake bigger" and "dividing the cake well". The better the economic performance, the greater the economic benefits that social members can receive as a whole. In addition, the fairness in the distribution of social development achievements can guarantee the benefit of each individual. It is expected that the good performance in both aspects will greatly enhance citizens' confidence and recognition of the political institution [27]. Obviously, institutional identity originates from social members' inner acceptance and recognition of institutional performance, and then they obey and abide by institutional rules [38]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H3: Institutional performance shows positive and systematic effects on institutional identity.

2.2. Influence of Ideological Education in Colleges and Universities on Institutional Identity

Contemporary college students are an outstanding group full of ideals and active ideas, with strong political sensitivity and social responsibility [35]. This group is at a critical stage of political socialization [19, 24]. Their lack of cognition of the core socialist values¹ is prone to deviations in value judgment standards. As an important channel for shaping mainstream values, the cultivation of individual values in colleges and universities plays an important guiding role in the political consciousness and value goals of college students [40]. As far as contemporary China is concerned, the core socialist value system is an important basis for its citizens' identity of political institution [47]. The cultivation of individual values in colleges, through the guidance of core socialist values, can make college students have value resonance, and then rationally identify with the contemporary political institution. Therefore, it is likely that the cultivation of individual values in colleges and universities has an important influence on the formation of college students' ideological concepts, behavioral orientation and moral characteristics [41]. Based on this, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Individual values reveals positive effects on institutional identity.

¹The core socialist values include three levels. They respectively refer to the value goals at the national level: prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony; the value orientation at the social level: freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law; and the value criterion at the individual level: patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship.

2.3. Influence of Social Environment on Institutional Identity

Contemporary China is at a crucial stage of profound economic and social transformation. It is undergoing interest differentiation, social stratification and cultural changes. Different individuals have differences in living environment, lifestyle, ideology and cultural traditions, and have different interest needs. As a result, multicultural society has emerged in recent years. These changes have increased social heterogeneity and triggered conflicts in systems, interests and values. Against this background, the mainstream ideology of Chinese society is eroded, leading to some prominent problems such as money worship, hedonism, and extreme individualism, which has had an impact on the value judgment and value goals of college students [43]. Under the influence of multiculturalism, some college students have blurred their ideals and beliefs, and distorted their value orientations to varying degrees [42, 32]. When the cognitive deviation of college students towards the mainstream ideology occurs, the crisis of institutional identity may occur [44]. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Multi-culture will lead to the deviation in political identity.

3. Empirical Analysis of the Identification Factors of Political Institution of College Students

3.1. Data Source

In this study, data were collected through an anonymous questionnaire in the "Questionnaire Net" platform. In order to ensure the representativeness of the survey data, nine universities in central China were selected in a targeted manner. These sample universities mainly included Wuhan University of Technology, Henan University, Henan University of Political Science and Law, Xinxiang Medical University, Xinke college etc., covering national universities, provincial universities and private universities (independent colleges). The subject category of the respondents involved literature and history, science and technology, agriculture and medicine, etc. A total of 3026 samples were received in this survey. Through the Bogus items set in the questionnaire, answer time and other screening measures, 40 invalid samples were screened out, and 2986 valid samples were obtained, with the effective rate of 98.68%. The specific sample distribution and its efficiency are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample distribution of questionnaires and their efficiency.

Categories of schools	Number of schools	Number of samples	Effective number of samples	Efficient
National universities	2	665	648	97.44%
Provincial universities	5	1691	1670	98.76%
Private universities	2	670	668	99.70%
Total	9	3026	2986	98.68%

3.2. Model Selection

In this study, Stata16.0 software was used for data statistical analysis. As explained variables and explanatory variables are multi-valued and ordered variables, the multivariate ordinal logistic (ologit) model was adopted in this study. This model is a cumulative distribution model evolved on the basis of binary logistic model [8]. Assuming that the explained variable is an ordinal value from 1 to j, the ordinal logit model with the explained variable not greater than j and greater than j can be expressed as:

$$l_j(x_j) = \ln \left[\frac{P_r(y_i \leq j | x_i)}{P_r(y_i > j | x_i)} \right] = \alpha_j + X\beta \quad (1)$$

In formula (1), X represents the explanatory variable matrix that affects the explained variable; β represents the coefficient matrix corresponding to X ; j represents the assignment of the explained variable, α_j is the intercept estimated by ologit when the identity level is $y = j$.

According to the above assumptions, the empirical equation of this paper is:

$$l_j(x_i) = \ln \left[\frac{P_r(y_i \leq j | x_i)}{P_r(y_i > j | x_i)} \right] = \alpha_j + \sum_{k=1}^{11} \beta_k x_{ik} + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

In formula (2), ε_i represents the estimation error of explanatory or control variable. In this study, there are 11

such variables involved in the model.

3.3. Variable Description and Descriptive Statistics

Explained variable: Political institutional identity is a subjective judgment made by citizens on the institution based on their own value standards. It is difficult for us to measure the degree of institutional identity in an objective way. In order to measure the degree of political institutional identity more scientifically, this paper analyzes it with the help of ordered classification variables. That is, the degree of institutional identity is assigned with values 1-9 equidistantly. The larger the value assigned, the higher the degree of institutional identification.

Explanatory variables: The explanatory variables are adjusted and improved through pre-investigation during the construction process. Finally, 5 specific variables (Institutional fairness, Institutional representation, Institutional performance, Individual values, and Multi-culture) are selected as explanatory variables from the institutional, school and social levels. On the basis of the previous literature review, this study used the Likert 9-level scale technique to develop a questionnaire on the "Influencing Factors of Contemporary College Students' Political Institutional Identity".

Control variables: According to the general practice of similar researches, this study takes gender, grade, subject

background and political status at the individual level as control variables. In addition, parental demonstrations at the family level and the average annual income level of the family have a certain impact on the political institutional identity of

college students [6]. Therefore, this study incorporated family level factors (Parental demonstration, Income level) into the control variables as well. Specific variable descriptions and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Variable descriptions and descriptive statistics ($n=2986$).

Category	Specific variable	Variable assignment rules	Mean	Std. Dev.
Individual level	Gender	Male 1 and female 2	1.365	0.482
	Grade	Freshman is 1, Sophomore is 2, Junior is 3, Senior is 4, University grade five is 5, and graduate is 6	2.091	1.087
	Subject background	Literature and history is 1, Science and technology is 2, Agriculture and medicine 3, and Other is 4	2.952	1.015
	Political status	The Communist Party members are 1, League members are 2, The democratic parties are 3, and the masses are 4	2.009	0.383
Institutional level	Institutional fairness	1, 2, 3...9 equidistant assignment	7.892	1.889
	Institutional representation	1, 2, 3...9 equidistant assignment	7.943	1.844
	Institutional performance	1, 2, 3...9 equidistant assignment	7.767	1.869
School level	Individual values	1, 2, 3...9 equidistant assignment	7.702	1.782
Social level	Multi-culture	1, 2, 3...9 equidistant assignment	5.468	3.065
	Parental demonstration	1, 2, 3...9 equidistant assignment	7.162	2.081
Family level	Income level	Less than 80,000 yuan is 1, 80,000-150,000 yuan is 2, 150,000-300,000 yuan is 3, and Over 300,000 yuan is 4	3.793	0.540

3.4. Reliability Test

In order to ensure the scientificity of the scale, the questionnaire was pre-tested. Through a pre-survey of 91 undergraduates from Henan Institute of Science and Technology, the questionnaire was improved based on the feedback from the testers. After the formal investigation, the internal consistency Alpha reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) is used to test the reliability of the sample. Through reliability analysis, the value of Cronbach's α based on standardized items is 0.743 ($\alpha > 0.7$). The result shows that the internal consistency of the question

items in the questionnaire is good.

3.5. Significance Test of the Model

The ologit model is a non-linear regression and needs to test the joint significance between independent variables. The specific results of Wald test and likelihood ratio test are shown in Table 3. As can be seen from Table 3, P-values are all less than 0.01, which indicates that the independent variables are jointly significant and the overall fitting degree of the model is good.

Table 3. Significance tests for the Ologit model.

Wald test		Likelihood ratio test	
chi ²	Prob>chi ²	LRchi ²	Prob>chi ²
1681.46	<0.0001	3476.08	<0.0001

3.6. Statistical Analysis of the Data

In the ologit model, the regression coefficient β of each explanatory variable can represent the direction of the explanatory variable's influence on the explained variable but not directly reflect the extent of its influence [22]. Therefore, this study uses Odds Ratio (converted from regression coefficient) to indicate the degree of influence of the explanatory variable on the explained variable [33]. Through ologit regression analysis, four explanatory variables are identified to have a highly significant influence on political

institutional identity ($p < 0.001$). They include institutional fairness, institutional representation, institutional performance, and cultivation of individual values. The explanatory variable of multi-culture has a significant influence ($p = 0.011$). In addition, the P-values of control variables such as gender, grade, subject background, political status, parental demonstration, and income level is greater than 0.1. This indicates all control variables do not have a significant impact on the political institutional identity of college students. The specific regression analysis results of the ologit model are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of ologit regression analysis.

Variable	β	S. E.	Z	P	OR
Gender	0.031	0.091	0.350	0.730	1.032
Grade	-0.042	0.039	-1.080	0.279	0.959
Subject background	0.037	0.043	0.860	0.389	1.037
Political status	-0.097	0.115	-0.850	0.397	0.907
Institutional fairness	1.186***	0.061	19.330	0.000	3.274
Institutional representation	0.392***	0.058	6.720	0.000	1.480

Variable	β	S. E.	Z	P	OR
Institutional performance	0.278***	0.046	6.000	0.000	1.320
Individual values	0.197***	0.042	4.720	0.000	1.218
Multi-culture	-0.044**	0.017	-2.540	0.011	0.957
Parental demonstration	0.025	0.028	0.890	0.372	1.025
Income level	0.009	0.075	0.120	0.906	1.009

Note: ***p< 1%, **p< 5%, *p<10%.

3.7. Interpretation of the Regression Analysis Results

The results of regression analysis have verified five proposed hypothesis. For “institutional fairness”, “institutional representation” and “institutional performance” at institutional levels, the correlation coefficients are all larger than 5, with corresponding P-values smaller than 0.001, which indicates these 3 important factors can positively and significantly affect political institutional identity (H1, H2 and H3). It further implies whether the institutional design can reflect the people's stand and whether the institution can be effectively implemented are the premise and basis for citizens to identify with the political institution. At the same time, Cultivation of individual values in colleges and universities has similar pattern. It is verified to have positive and significant impact on political institutional identity (H4). This indicates ideological education can play an important role in promoting college students' political institutional identity. In contrast, the correlation coefficient of -2.540 for multi-culture indicates that multi-culture in the social environment have a negative impact on the political institutional identity of college students, which verifies the hypothesis H5. This reveals that the factor associated with social environment can affect the deviation in political institutional identity.

4. Discussion on Promoting the Political Institutional Identity of College Students

4.1. Promoting the Political Institutional Identity of College Students by Innovating Institutional Arrangement

Compared with college students in the early stage of reform and opening up, contemporary college students are concerned about whether fairness and justice are violated, whether democratic rights can be respected, and whether the living environment can be improved [10, 45]. These concerns are consistent with the significant factors (content system justice, representation of opinions and implementation performance) identified in regression analysis results of this study. Based on these findings, in order to improve the contemporary college students' identity with the political institution, we need to proceed from the following two aspects. On the one hand, we need to adhere to and perfect the socialist political institution, enrich the form of people's democracy, improve the socialist legal system, and gradually establish an institutional guarantee system with fair rights, fair opportunities, and fair rules as the main content [37]. With the gradual improvement in these fields, the democracy, fairness and justice of the socialist political

system can be more recognized by citizens, and the authority of the socialist political institution can be shaped in comparison with other political institutions [46]. On the other hand, we need to give full play to institutional advantages and release institutional performance. By promoting the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities, improving the performance of institutional operation, and continuously increasing the well-being of the people, new progress will be made in education, employment and medical treatment for all, and college students' recognition of the political institution will be promoted.

4.2. Strengthening the Political Institutional Identity of College Students by Improving Political Education

In the social transition period, the level of citizens' political institutional identity is closely related to individual values [15]. From analysis results in this study, we can clearly see that the cultivation of individual values can positively affect the political institutional identity of college students. However, the related education in China's colleges and universities plays an obviously insufficient role in this area. The improvement requires that the political education in colleges and universities should be "close to reality, close to life and close to students", organically combine the students' own needs and social needs, and guide them to correctly analyze and deal with social practical problems, so as to promote their political institutional identity [30]. For this purpose, two "combinations" can be adopted in education and teaching. First, the imparting of knowledge is combined with the guidance of values [2]. Knowledge imparting is to teach the basic political principles and experience while value guidance is to cultivate students' political sense of belonging. Second, traditional method is combined with modern means [7]. With the help of new platforms and new carriers in political education, the timeliness of cultivating individual values can be improved [28].

4.3. Guiding the Political Institutional Identity of College Students by Optimizing the Social Environment

With the advancement of reform and opening policies, the influx of multiculturalism becomes the norm in China. In particular, with the development of modern communication technology and the Internet, information dissemination has become more rapid and extensive. The impact of diverse culture and moral norms on college students' political beliefs is more direct and intense, which has a huge impact on college students' value orientation [20]. The analysis result of this study shows the multiculturalism can lead to deviation in political identity among college students. This requires us to guide the political

institutional identity by making the mainstream culture more inclusive and open in the practice of socialist reform and construction. One method is to absorb and borrow good parts of other ideologies and cultures and promote cultural harmony. In addition, in order to create a favorable social environment, it is necessary to further deepen the reform in political, economic and social life. That is, to strengthen the supervision and restriction of the operation of public power to optimize the political ecological environment; to improve the rules of the market economy to resolve the differentiation of interests of different classes; to break the barriers of class consolidation to promote the orderly flow of social classes [12]. These are also important measures to optimize the social environment and guide college students to identify with the political institution.

4. Conclusion

College students are the main force in China's future political and social development. Based on the survey data of colleges and universities in central China, this study adopts a research paradigm that combines qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis, and constructs an ologit regression model on the political institutional identity of college students from the institution, school and social levels. The research shows that institutional rules, institutional performance, cultivation of individual values and multiculturalism are important factors that affect the political identity of college students [49]. On this basis, this article proposes to promote the political institutional identity by innovating institutional arrangement, improving political education and optimizing the social environment [48]. The results of this research provide a theoretical basis for the government and management departments to construct the mechanism of college students' political institutional identity. To improve the level of political institutional identity of college students, we should innovate institutional arrangement, strengthen ideological and political education, and optimize social environment.

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