



Analysis of Reasons for Insufficient Public Participation in Grassroots Social Governance Systems and Improvement Pathways

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SUMMARY: *As the fundamental approach to grassroots social governance, the mass line plays a crucial role in promoting orderly governance at the community level. Taking Z Town's grassroots social governance as a case study, this paper combines its social participation and mass self-governance practices to conduct an in-depth analysis of the existing problems and their causes within the current grassroots governance system. Based on this analysis, a comprehensive evaluation system for mass participation in grassroots governance is established, comprising 15 secondary indicators across three dimensions: platform construction, public awareness, and actual participation. By defining evaluation levels for participation depth and establishing assessment criteria, a material-element extensible evaluation model for measuring the depth of mass participation in grassroots governance is constructed. The 2023 assessment of public participation depth in Z Town's grassroots governance, based on this material-element extended evaluation model, reveals that both the "Platform Development" (0.1290) and "Participation in Matters" (0.1382) dimensions achieved their maximum values at the "Poor" level. This indicates that Z Town's grassroots governance should prioritize building public participation platforms and enhancing the effectiveness of public engagement in governance processes.*

KEYWORDS: *Object-based Extensible Evaluation Model; Public Participation; Deep Evaluation System; Grassroots Social Governance*

1 Introduction

Grassroots governance constitutes a vital component of the social governance system, directly impacting the fundamental interests of the people and the harmony and stability of society [1, 2]. However, the current practice of grassroots governance suffers from insufficient depth of public participation, potentially leading to unscientific and unreasonable government decision-making. This significantly undermines the effectiveness of grassroots governance efforts and the level of public satisfaction [3-6].

The primary reasons for insufficient public engagement include: (1) Weak awareness of participation. Many grassroots residents show low enthusiasm for civic affairs, viewing governance as the responsibility of local officials rather than their own concern [7, 8]. For instance, when planning a new community plaza, most residents merely observe without offering input, assuming they might not use the facility even after completion [9]. (2) Limited participation channels. Grassroots bulletin boards serve as the primary information dissemination channel, yet many residents rarely consult them [10]. Online platforms like

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WeChat groups remain inaccessible to older residents, preventing timely access to participation information. Even when feedback mechanisms exist—such as suggestion boxes—they often go unnoticed [11-13]. (3) Insufficient participation capacity. Educational levels among grassroots residents vary widely. Complex governance decisions, such as adjustments to land transfer policies, are difficult for them to comprehend. They often lack the means to articulate their reasonable demands and suggestions [14-16]. (4) Inadequate organizational mechanisms. The absence of a comprehensive framework for organizing public participation in governance—including unclear definitions of matters requiring public involvement, participation procedures, and safeguards for participation rights—leaves citizens eager to engage but unsure how to proceed [17-20]. Enhancing public participation requires strengthening public education, diversifying outreach methods, and conducting training initiatives [21].

Zhan, W. and You, Z. examined factors influencing public willingness to participate in grassroots governance, revealing that the positive correlation between political efficacy and public participation intent is affected by satisfaction with government performance [22], while political efficacy promotes public participation willingness [23]. Li, A. and Li, X. identified challenges in grassroots social governance and proposed strategies from the perspective of local governments, including clarifying governmental functions and stimulating residents' enthusiasm for community governance, aiming to provide references for addressing community governance issues [24]. Msukwa, C.A.P.S., and Taylor, D. emphasized strengthening grassroots democratic governance through communication platforms. These platforms enable institutions to resolve conflicts, jointly formulate development visions, clarify responsibilities, and coordinate operations [25]. Bakare, L. examined factors influencing grassroots participation in social governance, citing insufficient government inclusivity and responsiveness at the local level, as well as barriers to accessing information about government programs, and proposed improvement measures [26]. Huang, Q. et al. studied incentive mechanisms for public participation in grassroots social governance across multiple regions, finding that externally driven organizational systems positively influence public engagement [27]. Adogbeji, O.E. and Ugochukwu, M.O. emphasized the importance of local government autonomy in promoting grassroots participation, noting that the process of achieving local autonomy faces numerous challenges. They proposed recommendations such as ensuring direct allocation of funds to local governments [28]. Hao, C. et al. discussed challenges in integrating public participation into governance, finding that project planning significantly impacts governance while public participation significantly influences sustainable development [29]. Islam, N. and Rahaman, M. aimed to identify multiple pathways for individuals from underrepresented groups to participate in Bangladesh's local governments and assessed the extent to which these pathways empowered these groups [30]. Mao, J. underscored the significance of grassroots social governance. Using literature review and logical analysis, he examined existing issues in grassroots social governance and proposed strategies such as establishing correct governance concepts and promoting grassroots social autonomy [31].

This paper examines the grassroots work in Town Z, tracing its demographic shifts over the past two decades. Building on this foundation, it briefly outlines the status of social participation and public self-governance within the town's grassroots governance framework. Subsequently, it conducts a detailed analysis of the existing problems and shortcomings within the current grassroots social governance system and their underlying causes. This analysis serves as the basis for proposing a comprehensive evaluation system for public participation in grassroots governance. Concurrently, it designs a grading system for the depth

of public participation, sequentially elaborating on the calculation methods for correlation coefficients and grade variable characteristic values, and constructs a structural element extensible evaluation model. We then assign weights to the indicators for evaluating the depth of public participation in grassroots governance. Statistical analysis and organization of 2023 data on Z Town's public participation depth in grassroots governance are conducted, calculating the correlation between indicators at each level to summarize and analyze the depth of public involvement. Finally, based on Z Town's current state of public participation in grassroots governance and incorporating nudge theory, improvement pathways for enhancing the depth of public participation in grassroots governance are proposed.

2 Current Status of Grassroots Social Governance and Public Participation in Town Z

2.1 Population Structure Changes

In recent years, the demographic structure of Z Town has undergone significant changes, profoundly impacting its social governance and development strategies. Table 1 illustrates the shifts in population distribution and natural growth rates in Z Town from 2003 to 2023, with comparative population distributions shown in Figure 1. It is evident that from 2003 to 2023, Z Town's total population, working-age population, elderly population, and child population all showed an overall upward trend, with the working-age population exhibiting the most pronounced growth. Furthermore, the natural population growth rate increased from 1.73% in 2003 to 4.76% in 2023, indicating a gradual expansion of labor resources that has provided human capital support for Z Town's economic development.

Table 1: Population distribution and changes in natural growth rate in Town Z

Year	Population (thousand people)				Natural population growth rate (%)
	Total	Young and middle-aged	Agedness	Teen-age	
2003	22	13.45	1.77	6.78	1.73
2013	26	14.02	2.81	9.17	3.08
2023	60	35.69	12.04	12.27	4.76

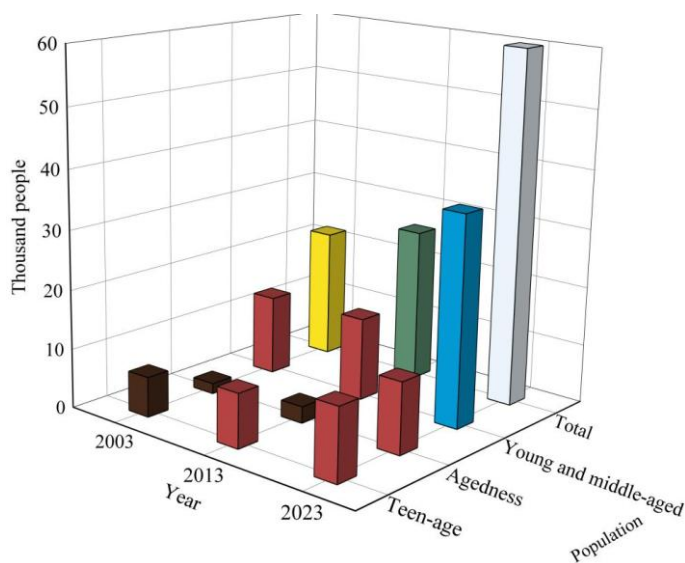


Figure 1: A comparison of Population Distribution Changes in Town Z (2003-2023)

From 2003 to 2023, the growth rates of the child population and the working-age population were lower than the overall population growth rate. The growth rate of the child population was lower than that of the working-age population, while the growth rate of the elderly population was significantly higher than the overall population growth rate. These changes indicate that Town Z is experiencing an aging population trend, posing new challenges to social services and public policy.

These demographic shifts have profound implications for Z Town's social governance, economic development, and public service requirements. A stable working-age population and steady overall population growth provide a foundation for economic advancement, yet also necessitate government policies in education, employment, and housing to address evolving demographic needs.

2.2 Social Participation and Mass Self-Governance in Grassroots Governance

In Z Town's grassroots governance practices, public participation and self-governance have demonstrated positive changes despite ongoing challenges. This paper investigates the town's 2023 grassroots social governance and public engagement through questionnaire surveys and in-person interviews. In recent years, participation rates in Z Town's community assemblies have significantly increased, rising from 58.91% in 2013 to 80.56% in 2023. This shift indicates a growing awareness among residents regarding their involvement in community affairs. Concurrently, public engagement in community decision-making processes has risen from 42.33% to 71.78%, reflecting the gradual refinement of self-governance mechanisms. Furthermore, volunteer participation has risen from 29.63% to 51.49%, demonstrating the gradual formation and cultivation of a community service culture.

Despite a noticeable increase in public participation, Z Town's self-governance practices have also demonstrated certain progress. Public satisfaction with community self-management has significantly improved, rising from 52.4 points to 73.2 points, indicating a gradual enhancement in the effectiveness of public self-governance. Additionally, the success rate of community-initiated projects has increased from 50.21% to 80.66%, suggesting that the public's capacity within the self-governance process is steadily growing. These positive developments collectively point to Z Town's notable achievements in advancing grassroots governance and public self-governance.

This process is not without challenges. Despite heightened public engagement, information asymmetry remains a primary issue, hindering citizens' deep understanding of community affairs and their effective participation. Furthermore, imperfect participation mechanisms leave some residents, particularly marginalized groups, feeling their opportunities for involvement are unequal.

Town Z has made considerable progress in advancing grassroots governance and community self-governance. However, to further enhance the effectiveness of self-governance practices, it is essential to address key issues such as information asymmetry, the refinement of participation mechanisms, and the improvement of decision-making transparency. By tackling these challenges, Town Z can continue to elevate public engagement and the efficacy of self-governance, thereby fostering more harmonious and efficient community governance.

3 Comprehensive Evaluation System for Public Participation in Grassroots Governance

3.1 Problems and Causes in the Grassroots Social Governance System

3.1.1 Existing Issues

(1) The level of grid-based social governance requires improvement.

Grid-based governance fully leverages the information platform of the social management work network, facilitating the efficient resolution of various disputes within jurisdictions and fostering harmonious neighborly relations. However, practical implementation of grid-based governance still faces operational challenges. First, grid delineation lacks sufficient granularity. During grid division, there is a tendency to allocate grids and personnel based solely on functional divisions, neglecting specific factors like population structure and management complexity. This leads to overlapping grids and unclear responsibilities, wasting resources and creating bottlenecks in grassroots governance. Second, grid team development requires strengthening. Grid management demands meticulous services involving specific tasks related to people's livelihoods, interests, and safety. The pressure and complexity of these tasks pose significant challenges to the capabilities and resilience of grid teams. Simultaneously, low compensation reduces grid workers' sense of identity, while their relatively low educational attainment prevents grid information platforms from achieving maximum effectiveness.

(2) Lack of Mechanisms for Resolving Social Conflicts and Disputes

Resolving social conflicts and disputes while maintaining social harmony and stability is crucial for building a safe society. The current lack of mechanisms for resolving social conflicts and disputes remains a limiting factor in addressing grassroots social tensions. First, early warning and prevention mechanisms have not been established. There is a lack of scientific analysis based on big data regarding the root causes of social conflicts, making it difficult to develop early warning and prevention systems. This results in a reactive approach to existing conflicts—putting out fires as they arise, addressing incidents one by one, and focusing on firefighting rather than fire prevention. The handling of emergencies and mass incidents still relies primarily on post-event responses. Second, there is a lack of coordinated mechanisms for resolving conflicts and disputes. The single-entity approach to resolving conflicts and disputes makes it difficult to form a multi-stakeholder synergy. At the same time, bottlenecks in processes such as transfer and assignment severely constrain the effectiveness of dispute resolution. Once mass incidents occur, it is common for government departments to quell the events. Third, insufficient social coordination leads to a shortage of specialized dispute resolution professionals. For instance, local courts struggle to play a leading role in diversified dispute resolution. Legal professionals such as judges and lawyers, along with other relevant specialists, rarely participate. Consequently, as the cohesive power and authority of “elders” continue to wane, mediation efforts in urban and rural communities still rely heavily on retired personnel.

(3) Inadequate Mechanisms for Data Integration and Sharing

Achieving data integration and sharing through “network connectivity,” “data connectivity,” and “business connectivity” is a fundamental element of modernizing grassroots social governance. In reality, information remains non-transparent and inaccessible, with persistent issues of poor communication, difficulty in sharing, and even isolation between departments, as well as between departments and social organizations or the public. Some grassroots government service halls still lack integration with unified data sharing and

exchange platforms and government service platform systems, hindering the implementation of deep public participation in grassroots governance.

(4) Limited Effectiveness of Social Organizations and Public Participation

The pathways for social organizations and public participation in grassroots governance are either singular or entirely absent, preventing effective public involvement in local governance. Some regions over-rely on government agencies, communities, neighborhood committees, and other functional departments for governance, a model that faces numerous limitations in terms of manpower, funding, and coverage. While some areas have established community service hotlines to provide a convenient channel for public participation, citizens can only engage through one-way feedback. This passive and inefficient participation process dampens public enthusiasm and fails to effectively harness the initiative of social organizations and citizens.

3.1.2 Root Cause Analysis

(1) Lack of Clear Understanding of Social Governance Innovation

Advancing grassroots social governance innovation requires first clarifying governance concepts, governance entities, governance methods, governance targets, and governance objectives. Accurate understanding is a prerequisite for precise governance. Only by clarifying the true meaning of social governance can we eliminate psychological confusion and operational hesitation, prevent missteps during governance, delineate the boundaries of each entity's actions, and ensure that all governance entities fulfill their respective roles to achieve co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits. Existing practical problems are directly linked to this lack of clarity regarding social governance. This ambiguity leads to the distortion of governance content, the absence or overreach of governance actors resulting in non-cooperation, pronounced administrative tendencies, and the adoption of simplistic, crude, and unsophisticated governance methods.

(2) Insufficient emphasis on technological support

The integration of modern information technology with social governance represents an inevitable trend for future development and serves as a crucial pillar for social governance. Outdated thinking and obsolete concepts have led to inadequate recognition of technology's vital role in social governance, insufficient emphasis on its application, delayed platform development, institutional barriers, ideological resistance, and practical obstruction. Consequently, grassroots social governance faces challenges of “inability,” “unwillingness,” and “lack of know-how” in utilizing information technology, thereby hindering the modernization of grassroots social governance.

(3) Insufficient Understanding of “Root-Cause Management” of Conflicts

Advancing the development of non-litigation dispute resolution mechanisms is an urgent necessity for maintaining peace and stability, a crucial approach to alleviating the “too many cases, too few personnel” dilemma, and an essential pathway to reduce existing conflicts and curb new ones. The key to grassroots social governance lies in resolving conflicts at their source to prevent minor issues from escalating. This approach emphasizes prevention and rapid response. It requires not only the competence and capabilities of all governance entities but also corresponding institutional mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness.

(4) Evaluation Mechanisms Struggle to Deliver Tangible Results

Effective evaluations can drive innovation in grassroots governance and stimulate the initiative of governance entities. The inability of evaluation mechanisms to deliver tangible results stems primarily from the absence of a scientifically structured, tiered, and categorized evaluation indicator system. The design of evaluation indicators fails to comprehensively highlight central tasks or incorporate local characteristics, lacking scientific rigor and

comprehensiveness. Simultaneously, the evaluation system lacks flexibility, unable to adjust content and weighting in response to changing circumstances and tasks. Rigid evaluation formats prevent the mechanism from fully leveraging its positive impact. Second, there is a lack of comprehensive, scientific, and standardized evaluation methods. This is primarily due to a single evaluation entity, with assessments primarily conducted through periodic evaluations. Routine evaluations and project-based assessments have not been institutionalized, resulting in a strong tendency toward formalism. Third, the application of evaluation results is largely perfunctory. Evaluation outcomes are not reflected in cadres' promotions, career advancement, or appointments to important positions, making it difficult to incentivize the advanced and spur the lagging.

3.2 Establishing a Comprehensive Evaluation System for Public Participation in Grassroots Governance

Based on the preceding analysis, this paper establishes the depth of public participation in grassroots governance as the target layer. It proposes 15 secondary evaluation indicators (see Table 2) under three primary criteria: (A) Platform and Channel Development, (B) Public Awareness, and (C) Actual Participation. The “(A) Platform and Channel Development” category includes the following secondary indicators: (A1) Democratic operational mechanisms ensuring political equality and diverse participation; (A2) Comprehensive public participation channels and platforms; (A3) Top-down and bottom-up integrated public accountability and oversight systems for grassroots governance; (A4) Well-established public feedback mechanisms for grassroots work; (A5) Emphasis on training and guidance to enhance public capacity for grassroots participation. The “(B) Public Awareness” category includes the following secondary indicators: (B1) Regularly updating the public on grassroots work progress and the latest policy content, (B2) Popularizing the importance of public participation in grassroots work through diverse forms, (B3) Encouraging public participation in grassroots work through diverse forms, (B4) The public possessing a high level of grassroots awareness and democratic consciousness, (B5) The public being familiar with the grassroots work system and participation channels in their community, (B6) The public recognizing the importance of participating in grassroots work. “(C) Actual Participation” includes the following secondary indicators: (C1) Active public participation in grassroots activities, (C2) Public having a voice in grassroots decision-making, (C3) Grassroots decision-making actively soliciting public input, (C4) Grassroots decision-making actively adopting public suggestions.

Table 2: Evaluation indicators for public participation in grassroots governance

Primary index	Secondary index
(A) Platform construction	(A1) It has a democratic operation mechanism featuring political equality and multi-party participation
	(A2) It has complete channels and platforms for public participation
	(A3) It has a system of top-down and bottom-up public participation in grassroots accountability and supervision
	(A4) It has a complete feedback mechanism for the participation of the masses in grassroots work
	(A5) Attach great importance to the training and guidance of the masses' practical ability to participate in grassroots work
(B) Public perception	(B1) Regularly update the masses on the situation of grassroots work and the latest policy contents
	(B2) Popularize and publicize the importance of the masses' participation in grassroots work through various forms
	(B3) Encourage the masses to participate in grassroots work in various forms
	(B4) The masses have a relatively high sense of grassroots awareness and democratic consciousness
	(B5) The masses are familiar with the grassroots work system and participation channels of their respective communities
	(B6) The masses recognize the importance of participating in grassroots work
(C) Participate in the actual situation	(C1) The masses actively participate in the implementation of grassroots work
	(C2) The masses have a certain degree of say in grassroots work
	(C3) Actively solicit opinions from the masses when making decisions on grassroots work
	(C4) Grassroots work decision-making actively adopts suggestions from the masses

4 A Participatory Multi-Objective Evaluation Model for Grassroots-Level Deep-Level Physical Resources

4.1 Classification of Participation Depth Evaluation Levels

This paper categorizes the depth evaluation of public participation in grassroots governance into five levels: I, II, III, IV, and V, corresponding to poor, relatively poor, average, good, and excellent, respectively. Each indicator is scored out of 100 points. The score ranges for lower evaluation levels exhibit a larger numerical span, while those for higher evaluation levels show a smaller numerical span. For specific details on the classification of public participation in grassroots governance depth evaluation levels, see Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation grades for public participation in in-depth grassroots governance

Order of evaluation	Standard for evaluation
I	[0,40)
II	[40,50)
III	[50,60)
IV	[60,80)
V	[80,100]

4.2 Determination of Classical Domain, Section Domain, and Element to Be Evaluated

(1) Defining the classical domain

The classical domain element R_j is shown in Equation (1):

$$\begin{aligned}
 R_j &= (N_j, C_i, V_{ji}) = (N_j, C_i, [a_{ji}, b_{ji}]) \\
 &= \begin{bmatrix} N_j & c_1 & [a_{j1}, b_{j1}] \\ & c_2 & [a_{j2}, b_{j2}] \\ & \vdots & \vdots \\ & c_n & [a_{jn}, b_{jn}] \end{bmatrix} \\
 &\quad (i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, n; j = 1, 2, 3, \dots, m)
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

In the formula: N_j — the j rd evaluation grade of N ;

C_i — the i th evaluation indicator of N ;

V_{ji} — the value range of the i th evaluation indicator at the j th evaluation grade, i.e., the classical domain;

a_{ji} — Lower bound of the value range for the i th evaluation indicator at the j th evaluation grade;

b_{ji} — Upper bound of the value range for the i th evaluation indicator at the j th evaluation grade.

(2) Determining the Control Region

The control region element R_p is shown in Equation (2):

$$\begin{aligned}
 R_p &= (N_p, C_i, V_{pi}) = (N_p, C_i, [a_{pi}, b_{pi}]) \\
 &= \begin{bmatrix} N_p & c_1 & [a_{p1}, b_{p1}] \\ & c_2 & [a_{p2}, b_{p2}] \\ & \vdots & \vdots \\ & c_n & [a_{pn}, b_{pn}] \end{bmatrix} \\
 &\quad (i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, n)
 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

In the formula: N_p —All evaluation grades of N ;

C_i —The i th evaluation indicator of N ;

V_{pi} —The value range of the i th evaluation indicator across all evaluation grades, i.e., the interval;

a_{pi} — Lower bound of the value range for the i th evaluation indicator across all evaluation grades;

b_{pi} — Upper bound of the value range for the i th evaluation indicator across all evaluation grades.

(3) Determine the element to be evaluated

The research object N is taken as the evaluation object, the evaluation index is C_i , and the

corresponding index value is V_i . If the n evaluation indicators of N are expressed as: $c_1, c_2, c_3, \dots, c_n$, and the corresponding index values are expressed as: $v_1, v_2, v_3, \dots, v_n$, then the element to be evaluated of N is shown in Equation (3):

$$R_0 = (N, C_i, V_i) = \begin{bmatrix} N & c_1 & v_1 \\ & c_2 & v_2 \\ & \vdots & \vdots \\ & c_n & v_n \end{bmatrix} \quad (3)$$

In the formula:

R_0 — Element under evaluation;

N — Object under evaluation;

C_i — The i th evaluation indicator of N ;

V_i — The numerical value corresponding to C_i .

4.3 Calculating Association

(1) Association Function

The association function is a mathematical expression used to quantitatively represent the degree of association between evaluation indicator C_i and evaluation level N_j , as shown in Equation (4):

$$K_j(v_i) = \begin{cases} \frac{-\rho(v_i, V_{ji})}{|V_{ji}|}, & v_i \in V_{ji} \\ \frac{\rho(v_i, V_{ji})}{\rho(v_i, V_{pi}) - \rho(v_i, V_{ji})}, & v_i \notin V_{ji} \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

In the formula:

$\rho(v_i, V_{ji})$ — Distance between C_i and the classical domain;

$\rho(v_i, V_{pi})$ — Distance between C_i and the node domain;

$|V_{ji}|$ — Length of the classical domain's value range $[a_{ji}, b_{ji}]$.

Where equations (5)-(7) apply:

$$\rho(v_i, V_{ji}) = \rho(v_i, [a_{ji}, b_{ji}]) = \left| v_i - \frac{a_{ji} + b_{ji}}{2} \right| - \frac{b_{ji} - a_{ji}}{2} \quad (5)$$

$$\rho(v_i, V_{pi}) = \rho(v_i, [a_{pi}, b_{pi}]) = \left| v_i - \frac{a_{pi} + b_{pi}}{2} \right| - \frac{b_{pi} - a_{pi}}{2} \quad (6)$$

$$|V_{ji}| = |b_{ji} - a_{ji}| \quad (7)$$

(2) Comprehensive Correlation and Evaluation Grade

The comprehensive correlation between the subject under evaluation N and grade j is

expressed using formula (8):

$$K_j(N) = \sum_{i=1}^n w_i K_j(v_i) \quad (8)$$

In the formula:

$K_j(N)$ — the composite correlation between N and j ;

w_i — the weight value of C_i ;

$K_j(v_i)$ — the indicator correlation between C_i and j .

If $K_j = \max_{1 \leq j \leq m} K_j(N)$, then the evaluation grade of N is j .

4.4 Calculating Eigenvalues of Binary Variables

The level variable characteristic value j^* for subject N is calculated using formulae (9)-(10):

$$\overline{K_j(N)} = \frac{K_j(N) - \min_{1 \leq j \leq m} K_j(N)}{\max_{1 \leq j \leq m} K_j(N) - \min_{1 \leq j \leq m} K_j(N)} \quad (9)$$

$$j^* = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^m j \cdot \overline{K_j(N)}}{\sum_{j=1}^m \overline{K_j(N)}} \quad (10)$$

5 Analysis of the Depth of Public Participation in Grassroots Governance in Town Z

5.1 Determining Evaluation Indicator Weights

This paper employs the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to calculate the weights of the proposed indicators for evaluating the depth of public participation in grassroots governance, summarized in Table 4. Within the criterion layer, the weights for “(A) Platform Establishment” and “(C) Actual Participation” are 0.350 and 0.400 respectively, representing relatively high proportions. This indicates that analyses of the depth of public participation in grassroots governance should prioritize examining the establishment of participation platforms and the actual participation of the public.

Table 4: Initial weight of evaluation index

Primary index	Hierarchical weights	Secondary index	Hierarchical weights	Total weight
(A)	0.350	(A1)	0.156	0.055
		(A2)	0.308	0.108
		(A3)	0.139	0.049
		(A4)	0.288	0.101
		(A5)	0.108	0.038
(B)	0.250	(B1)	0.155	0.039
		(B2)	0.165	0.041
		(B3)	0.262	0.065
		(B4)	0.151	0.038
		(B5)	0.165	0.041
		(B6)	0.103	0.026
(C)	0.400	(C1)	0.191	0.077
		(C2)	0.306	0.122
		(C3)	0.267	0.107
		(C4)	0.236	0.094

5.2 Depth of Public Participation in Grassroots Governance in Town Z

5.2.1 Calculating the Depth of Public Participation in Grassroots Governance

The depth evaluation indicators for public participation in grassroots governance designed above were assigned scores, with each secondary indicator capped at 100 points. An evaluation of the depth of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z for the year 2023 was conducted. The obtained evaluation data underwent normalization processing. The secondary evaluation indicator data for the depth of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z and the normalized results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Evaluation data and normalization processing results

Secondary index	Score	Normalize the processing score
(A1)	41.32	0.413
(A2)	40.38	0.404
(A3)	44.58	0.446
(A4)	43.79	0.438
(A5)	67.64	0.676
(B1)	52.3	0.523
(B2)	56.74	0.567
(B3)	49.99	0.500
(B4)	59.13	0.591
(B5)	39.58	0.396
(B6)	35.05	0.351
(C1)	61.82	0.618
(C2)	39.5	0.395
(C3)	69.52	0.695
(C4)	54.35	0.544

5.2.2 Correlation of Secondary Indicators

Based on the secondary evaluation indicators for the depth of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z, the correlation function results for its 15 secondary indicators are calculated and summarized in Table 6. The correlation functions for all secondary indicators under the criteria layers “(A) Platform Establishment” and “(C) Participation Reality” achieved positive values at Level II, providing preliminary insights into the general issues affecting the depth of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z. Specifically, three indicators—(A2) Establishing Comprehensive Public Participation Channels and Platforms (0.857), (A3) Implementing Top-Down and Bottom-Up Public Accountability Oversight Mechanisms (0.847), and (C4) Actively Incorporating Public Suggestions into Grassroots Decision-Making (0.503)—all recorded values exceeding 0.500. This indicates deficiencies in Z Town's grassroots government regarding participation platform development, oversight system establishment, and the implementation of democratic principles.

Table 6: Calculation results of index correlation degree function

Secondary index	I	II	III	IV	V
(A1)	-0.394	0.163	-0.105	-0.536	-0.7
(A2)	-0.131	0.857	-0.928	-0.957	-0.97
(A3)	-0.141	0.847	-0.923	-0.954	-0.968
(A4)	-0.231	0.237	-0.284	-0.361	-0.45
(A5)	0	-1.000	-1.000	-1.000	-1.000
(B1)	-0.148	-0.154	0.388	-0.577	-0.67
(B2)	-0.071	-0.917	0.958	-0.971	-0.978
(B3)	-0.123	-0.129	0.412	-0.564	-0.648
(B4)	-0.246	-0.252	0.626	-0.75	-0.812
(B5)	-0.331	-0.699	0.872	-0.926	-0.947
(B6)	0	-1.000	1.000	-1.000	-1.000
(C1)	-0.408	0.243	-0.309	-0.124	-0.404
(C2)	-0.456	0.375	-0.266	-0.002	0.006
(C3)	-0.409	0.247	-0.288	-0.116	-0.398
(C4)	-0.259	0.503	-0.248	-0.557	-0.698

5.2.3 Comprehensive Correlation

Based on the correlation function results of secondary indicators for the in-depth evaluation of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z, the overall correlation values at the criterion level are calculated as shown in Table 7. Among these, the maximum value for the “(A) Platform Establishment” level is 0.1290, but it falls under the “Poor” category; The maximum value for the “(B) Public Perception” level was 0.1667, classified as ‘Moderate’; the maximum value for the “(C) Participation Reality” level was 0.1382, classified as “Poor.” This indicates that in 2023, public participation in Z Town's grassroots social governance was ineffective, with both platform development and participation levels requiring urgent improvement.

Table 7: The comprehensive correlation degree of the criterion layer

Item to be evaluated	I	II	III	IV	V	Level
A	-0.0661	0.1290	-0.2179	-0.2540	-0.2741	II
B	-0.0396	-0.1162	0.1667	-0.1914	-0.2040	III
C	-0.1552	0.1382	-0.1104	-0.0746	-0.1386	II

Based on the correlation results of the guideline layers, the overall correlation of the depth of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z for 2023 is shown in Table 8, which serves as the basis for determining its rating level. The correlation analysis indicates a maximum value of 0.0714, placing it in the “Poor” category. This signifies that overall, public participation in governance within Z Town during 2023 remained superficial. Efforts to advance grassroots participation failed to materialize effectively, primarily due to the absence of adequate participation platforms and insufficient depth of public engagement.

Table 8: The comprehensive correlation degree of the target layer

Item to be evaluated	I	II	III	IV	V	Level
Overall situation	-0.0951	0.0714	-0.0788	-0.1666	-0.2024	II

6 Improving Grassroots Governance Through Public Participation Based on Nudge Theory

Based on the 2023 in-depth evaluation of public participation in grassroots governance in Town Z, it is evident that the current grassroots social governance system lacks sufficient public engagement. The superficial reason lies in the absence of well-established and reliable participation platforms and mechanisms. However, public participation is not only a crucial cornerstone for effective grassroots governance but also the core concept underpinning the construction of the contemporary social governance community. Therefore, to deepen public participation in grassroots governance, it is essential not only to adopt a people-centered approach in institutional design—expanding and refining channels for public engagement in grassroots work—but also to strengthen the public's sense of ownership in social development. This will ignite enthusiasm for governance participation and propel high-quality development in social governance. This chapter adopts a theory-driven perspective to explore pathways and measures for enhancing the depth of public participation in grassroots governance.

6.1 Nudge Theory and Grassroots Participatory Governance

6.1.1 Mechanism of Action

Nudge theory is a behavioral economics framework designed to influence people's choices and behaviors through small, non-coercive interventions. A defining feature of behavioral economics is its deep consideration of psychological factors. Existing psychological research indicates that the human brain operates based on two primary systems: the intuitive thinking system and the rational thinking system. The intuitive thinking system functions as a rapid, automatic response mechanism grounded in intuition, distinct from the commonly recognized deliberate mode of thinking. In contrast, the deliberative system is more planned and conscious, resulting from thorough consideration. In daily life, people often rely on the intuitive system for choices because it is more convenient and instinctive. However, this approach can sometimes lead to overly subjective or one-sided perspectives, creating

systematic biases. To help individuals make optimal choices, the concept of nudging was introduced. Its core principle involves creating an optimized decision-making environment that allows individuals to freely choose what they genuinely desire. This is often termed “liberal paternalism.” Within this concept, ‘liberal’ reflects its encouragement of people to freely pursue what they value; “paternalism” implies that choice designers aim to guide individuals toward decisions more beneficial to their well-being through reasonable nudges. It's important to note that nudging is not coercive. For instance, making fruits readily accessible is a form of nudging because it increases opportunities for healthier choices; banning junk food consumption, however, is not nudging because it restricts choice. To truly achieve the goal of nudging, this strategy must ensure side effects are minimized or even entirely avoided.

6.1.2 Adaptation with Depth and Meaningful Engagement

The public is the primary agent of community governance, and widespread public participation is key to effective governance. From a practical perspective, grassroots governments increasingly rely on high-cost public service provision to secure public support and cooperation when implementing policy initiatives. However, this strategy has failed to resolve longstanding issues such as weak community identity and low participation rates among residents; instead, these problems have in some respects become more severe. Particularly in collective actions requiring extensive community collaboration and coordination, conflicts frequently arise where residents refuse to comply or even resist public policy arrangements. This exposes the challenges confronting contemporary community governance. Applying behavioral science's deconstructive approach to analyze participatory governance at the grassroots level reveals three defining attributes: social pluralism, institutional complexity, and knowledge uncertainty.

Social diversity in grassroots governance manifests in the plurality of governance actors. Governance is not solely the responsibility of government but also involves extensive participation from social organizations and the public. This diversity is reflected in varied governance philosophies, multiple governance entities, and diverse governance approaches. The institutional complexity of grassroots governance primarily lies in the intricate array of institutional norms and arrangements that must be followed during the governance process. Grassroots governance directly engages with the public, necessitating the handling of multifaceted information and complex governance issues. Consequently, institutional design and implementation must account for diverse potential scenarios and factors. This complexity also manifests in the need to balance various interests throughout the governance process. Knowledge uncertainty in grassroots governance primarily arises from the diverse unpredictable factors encountered during governance. Given its direct interaction with the public and the complex, ever-changing nature of the issues involved, it is difficult to address these challenges with fixed knowledge or models.

Due to the aforementioned attributes and characteristics, addressing this complex issue becomes exceptionally challenging. For instance, establishing a shared understanding of the problem among multiple stakeholders is a significant hurdle in itself; when seeking solutions, one often finds no ready-made models to reference; Furthermore, these issues frequently exhibit an inherent resistance to technical governance approaches. Consequently, when tackling such complex problems, the governance capabilities of both organizations and individual managers are severely tested, and traditional governance methods prove inadequate in this context. Given this reality, behavioral science-based nudge mechanisms can play a crucial role.

6.2 Pathways for Enhancing the Depth of Public Participation in Grassroots Governance

6.2.1 Further Empower the Public as Key Participants in Grassroots Governance

First, enhance public participation capacity. Strengthen the balanced development of grassroots social infrastructure, including networks, data centers, and smart terminals, to provide reliable technical support for grassroots social governance. Focus on improving citizens' digital literacy for grassroots participation through digital education and training, fostering a proper sense of ownership, and consciously enhancing the public's ability and willingness to participate in governance. Second, reinforce public participation rights. Encourage public involvement in decision-making and oversight to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of grassroots government decisions. Strengthen public awareness and capacity building to increase participation rates and democratic engagement. Place greater emphasis on listening to public voices, expanding opportunities and empowerment through open decision-making processes. Third, innovate public participation formats. Further broaden interaction spaces between citizens and grassroots operations, establish online platforms for community engagement, optimize communication environments, and pioneer participatory models to offer more accessible and convenient options for public involvement in grassroots governance.

6.2.2 Further Improve Mechanisms for Public Participation in Grassroots Governance

First, strengthen the sharing and utilization of public foundational data for grassroots work. Improve the construction of standardized data sharing platforms by establishing a unified, standardized public foundational data sharing platform. This ensures efficient data interconnectivity, enhances data accessibility and utilization rates, reduces information silos for the public, and increases public willingness to participate in grassroots governance. Second, promote the integration of data openness with artificial intelligence technology to diversify the forms of public participation in grassroots governance and decision-making. Leverage AI technology to enhance data analysis and decision-making efficiency, accurately identify grassroots issues, and rapidly engage public participation, thereby providing data support for government decision-making, public services, and social governance. Third, utilize internet technology to improve feedback platforms and accountability oversight mechanisms for public participation in grassroots work. Establish transparent, open, fair, and impartial grassroots decision-making mechanisms to enhance the efficiency of public feedback on grassroots work progress.

6.2.3 Further Strengthen Grassroots Governance and Enhance the Ability to Follow the Mass Line

First, optimize the construction of people-centered smart governance platforms. Initially, advance development in a categorized manner tailored to local conditions. Encourage regions with a large number of diverse application scenarios to explore establishing multifunctional large-scale platforms. For remote areas and sparsely populated mountain villages, explore innovative models such as platform affiliation, hosting, and data element exchange. Secondly, proceed pragmatically in phases. At this stage, maintain parallel online and offline governance channels to avoid blindly pursuing smart solutions while neglecting the offline participation needs of certain groups. Finally, launch targeted rectification campaigns to accelerate the optimization and integration of various social governance platforms. Second, optimize people-centered grassroots smart governance processes. Break down grassroots smart social

governance modules and workflows based on public needs, focusing on resolving new issues and challenges that citizens care about and urgently require solutions in the digital era. Promote cross-departmental collaboration and exchange, grant grassroots units appropriate discretionary authority, and review and streamline excessive procedures and regulations. Third, enhance grassroots cadres' capabilities in implementing the mass line through smart governance. Improve their mastery of digital management methods. While actively leveraging the strengths of traditional mass work approaches like “Four Descents to the Grassroots” and “Four Ten-Thousand Households,” fully utilize digital channels such as networks and platforms to boost efficiency. This will enhance the effectiveness of public participation in grassroots governance through integrated online and offline approaches.

7 Conclusion

Regarding the in-depth evaluation of public participation in grassroots governance, this paper not only comprehensively establishes a three-dimensional evaluation framework encompassing platform development, public awareness, and actual participation levels by integrating selected sample data with theoretical analysis. It also innovatively constructs a material-element extensible evaluation model for assessing the depth of public engagement in grassroots governance.

In the 2023 material-based extension evaluation of public participation depth in governance for Town Z, the overall correlation achieved its maximum value of 0.0714 at the “poor” level. Additionally, two dimensions—“Platform Development” and “Participation Reality”—each attained their maximum values at the “poor” level, measuring 0.1290 and 0.1382 respectively. Therefore, this paper recommends that current efforts to advance the depth of public participation in governance should prioritize a people-centered approach. This involves improving channels for public engagement in grassroots governance and empowering citizens to play a central role in local governance. Such measures will help enhance the efficiency of grassroots governance and promote harmony and stability within local communities.

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