

## Countermeasures of Prevention and Control of Mass Disturbance

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**Keywords:** Mass Disturbance; Crisis Management; Countermeasures Research

**Abstract:** The transformation of our society leads to the differentiation of interests, the escalation of conflicts, the frequent occurrence of mass disturbance, which poses an extremely serious threat to social stability. Based on the previous studies, this paper summarizes the basic characteristics and analyses the primary causes of mass disturbance in China in recent years. In view of the three stages of before, during and after the occurrence of mass disturbance, this paper also proposes the prevention and control measures to solve mass disturbance from three dimensions of concept, system and behaviour, which may provide decision-making references for dealing with and responding to relevant mass disturbance.

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the rapid development of Chinese economy, it also brings about the escalation of contradictions and conflicts among various groups. According to the statistical data analysis from the Blue Book of Society, the number of mass disturbance in China has increased since 2006, reaching more than 60,000. In the next few years, the number of mass disturbance has been on the rise, which means the situation is not optimistic, and the group conflicts caused by environmental pollution is increasing at an average annual rate of 26%. Since 2013, the total number of mass disturbance has demonstrated a downward trend, but the environmental pollution as a cause has maintained a rapid growth, and rural land acquisition, labour relations, the law enforcement of urban management have become new blasting fuses. In 2016, the number of mass disturbance remained stable, but the contents of appeal have become increasingly diversified. The governance of mass disturbance is not only to test the operative performance of the national governance system, but also is linked to the improvement of national governance capacity. At present, the social risk factors in China are continuous increasing and the security situation is becoming much more complicated. How to deal with the frequent occurrence of major mass disturbance has become a practical problem and a hot topic.

### 2. Literature Review

Mass disturbance is a common social phenomenon in every country. At present, the research on mass disturbance mainly focuses on the causes, evolution and countermeasures. It's Park (1921) that first defined it as "collective behavior", holding that this behaviour is out of the individual emotional impulse driven by collective push.<sup>[1]</sup> From the perspective of its causes, Gurr (1970) believed that the relative sense of deprivation of the people provides the possibility for the occurrence of mass disturbance. Coser (1956) concluded that the causes of mass disturbance include resource allocation and value orientation differences.<sup>[2]</sup> In terms of its evolution, Le bon (1895) believed that people are all rational, but the emotions of participants will infect each other under the instigation of individual organizers, which makes their behaviours becoming uncontrollable and irrational. Based on social combustion theory, Shan (2010) analysed the evolution process of mass disturbance from "combustion substance", "combustion supporting agent" and "blasting fuse", and

believed that the outbreak of this contradiction was the result of many factors. <sup>[3]</sup> As for prevention and control countermeasures, Wang (2015) proposed that the mindset of rule by law and the awareness of regulation should be developed, democratic decision-making and classified ways to handle should be carried out to deal with mass disturbance. <sup>[4]</sup> Zhang (2018) held that effective prevention and ways of dealing with mass disturbance must improve the mechanism of information release and guidance on public opinion. <sup>[5]</sup> Based on the research results that is mentioned above, it can be roughly concluded that scholars almost agree on that mass disturbance is the result of multiple factors, and different risk incentives are matched with different solutions.

### **3. The Extraction of Mass Disturbance Characteristics**

At present, the development of mass disturbance in China has changed mainly in the region of occurrence, participants, contents of appeal and appeal modes.

#### **3.1. Seen from the Region of Occurrence, It Extends from Rural to Cities**

In the 1980s, the rural population of China suffered heavy economic burden, which resulted in the high incidence of mass disturbance in rural areas. With the promulgation of a large number of preferential policies for farmers in China, the burden of farmers has been reduced to a great extent, which fundamentally shook the preconditions of mass disturbance that took place in rural areas in the early stage. Meanwhile, under the background of the national urbanization policy, many farmers, especially young people, began to migrate to the city, which caused the decline of the population in rural areas and the imbalance of the population structure, which greatly weakened the capability to instigate mass disturbance. Since the 21st century, urbanization has pushed a large number of floating populations from all walks of life to settle in cities. The population structure is becoming more and more complicated and the interests of the people tend to be diversified, which has caused the mass disturbance to gradually transfer to urban areas. Moreover, urban mass disturbance involves a wide range of subjects resulting in a large scale of crisis, and it is difficult to calm down with frequent recurrence.

#### **3.2. Seen from the Subject of Participants, It Develops from Single to Multi-organization**

After entering the society of risks, all kinds of unstable factors, such as western differentiation strategy in politics, illegal fund-raising in economy, religious conflicts in culture and so on, are highlighted and amplified, which makes the participating groups involved in mass disturbance and start to develop from a single vulnerable group to a multiple powerful organizations, that is, besides the vulnerable groups such as farmers, migrant workers, rural demolition households, high-quality groups such as on-the-job employees, business owners, teachers and students have also got involved. What's more, the mass disturbance at the early stage is mostly spontaneous and loose in organization, and there is no so-called planner, while today's group actions are often accompanied by careful planning and there's even a suspicion of manipulation behind it.

#### **3.3. Seen from the Appeal Contents, It Transforms from Interest-driven to Dissatisfaction**

The "collective protest" caused by the outbreak of mass disturbance at the early stage was mainly based on organizations with relevant interests, focusing on the issues of housing demolition, enterprise restructuring, environmental pollution, labour disputes and so on. However, during the period of social transformation, the conflicts has escalated and many non-stakeholders have begun to participate in mass disturbance. There are two reasons behind it, one is because of their own dissatisfaction with the society or the government, including the wealth gap in the society between the rich and the poor, unfair income distribution and other incentives, the other is the lack of legitimate channels for appealing, people feel empathy based on the appeal of the main body or appeal events, resulting in herd mentality and triggering extreme behaviour.

#### **3.4. Seen from the Appeal Modes, It Changes from Mass Parade to Network Dissemination**

The traditional mass disturbance is limited by the inherent system and information dissemination

ability. The masses can only take some small-scale demonstrations to protest. These methods tend to be slow to spread and have narrow coverage, which also frees up time for government to tackle with. Under the background of information era, the general application of new media provides an opportunity for the evolution of mass disturbance. On the one hand, the organizers of mass disturbance can quickly contact with each other through the network platform to achieve the unity of the group at the lowest cost; on the other hand, they can use the Internet to quickly spread false information, so as to achieve the purpose of inciting irrelevant people and stirring up troubles. Moreover, the concealment nature of the Internet, many onlookers also hold the wrong ideology that the public won't be punished by the law, so that they join in the discussion of the event with a mentality of hecklers, which increases the difficulty for the government to handle and control the crisis.

#### **4. The Causes of Mass Disturbance in China**

The way of mass disturbance is often caused by objective contradictions and external conditions. This paper analyses the causes of mass disturbance in China from three aspects including concept, system and behaviour.

##### **4.1. Concept: Biased Thinking and Cognitive**

###### **4.1.1. Government Prefer Treatment to Prevention**

Judging from the current situation, local governments have paid a high degree of attention to frequent mass disturbance. Once the mass disturbance occurs in a certain place, the local government will actively organize manpower to tackle with it. However, the pressure to deal with these problems often comes from the accountability of superiors rather than the real efforts on the welfare of the public. As a result, many government departments often respond passively to public crises and lack of relative warning mechanism. Actually, the relative government departments are always committed to eliminating the current mass disturbance rather than investigating hidden dangers. Moreover, most of the departments do not summarize the shortcomings of their work, resulting in many potential problems not being discovered and triggering many similar incidents.

###### **4.1.2. People Prefer Perceptual Cognition to Legal Awareness**

There are two types of participants in mass disturbance, one is the initiators whose interests are damaged and the other is the non-direct stakeholders. The purpose of the initiators is to protect their vital interests. They are eager for their own problems to be properly resolved. In fact, most of these people lack of relative knowledge of law and also do not know how to appeal to the relevant departments, thus they are forced to choose extreme ways to attract government's attention, causing serious negative impact on social stability. Although the other type of people are not the stakeholders, they also positively participate in the mass disturbance. They either feel empathy with the subject or content of appeal or just want to take the opportunity to make trouble for government, thus they can take advantage of the mass disturbance to vent their dissatisfaction, seriously endangering the social order.

##### **4.2. Mechanism: Absent Guidance and Appeal**

###### **4.2.1. Undisclosed and Undemocratic Information and Decisions**

Based on the various types of mass disturbance that have occurred, there is a factor that cannot be ignored. The outbreak of mass disturbance is mainly due to the fact that the government did not solicit public opinions before making decisions. Projects that create high performance for the government may often have a potential threat to the lives and work of some people, but the government has not asked for the opinions of those who may be disadvantaged and directly implement the project. It is likely to trigger the mass disturbance if citizen participation is absent at the beginning of the policy formulation. In addition, rumours have become a powerful weapon to incite ordinary people in amounts of mass disturbance. The public has never been able to get an

officially replied if the government do not open the relative information, causing unnecessary misunderstanding and conflicts.

#### **4.2.2. Unsmooth and Non-diversified Democratic Channels**

American political scientist Huntington believes that if the political system cannot provide channels for political participation of individuals or groups, the political behaviours of individuals and social groups may breach the social order and bring social instability. If the public's demands cannot be timely received feedback, causing the occlusion and backlog of public opinions with ease, which makes some small problems that are easy to solve evolving into large-scale mass disturbance with serious consequences.

#### **4.3. Action: Insufficient Capacity and Experience**

Many facts prove that if the government take violent means to achieve social control, the result is either that the people are temporarily surrendered or that they are irritating on a larger scale. The cause of mass disturbance may be just daily disputes, but without proper disposal, it will become a confrontation between the government and the people. Therefore, the ability to dispose the crisis is crucial. This ability means that government should match different types of mass disturbance with least harmful and lowest cost solution. However, few regions have classified the local mass disturbance into different categories. Even if an amount of mass disturbance occurs frequently, the experience available to the government departments has not yet been systematic, which has caused some disturbance missing the best disposal time. In addition, the handling of crisis often involves joint enforcement by multiple departments. These relative government departments lack of necessary communication which has easily aggravated the deterioration of incidents.

### **5. Countermeasures to Handle the Crisis of Mass Disturbance**

The occurrence of mass disturbance is an alarm of social stability. If it has been accumulated for a long time without effective persuasion and ventilation, it may lead to a greater crisis of legitimacy. Starting from the time sequence of mass disturbance, based on the three dimensions of concept, system and behaviour, this paper proposes corresponding countermeasures and suggestions on the three timing points of before, during and after the event, so as to prevent and control the crisis.

#### **5.1. Prevention in Advance**

Prevention means collecting analytical data before crisis, and to do the appropriate disposal work in advance.

##### **5.1.1. Concept: Strengthen Promotion and Education of the Rule of Law**

The government should promote the education of rule of law as a normal governance, change the biased traditional concepts of citizens, and play an active role in guiding them to take a legal way to pursue their interests, fundamentally shock the root of mass disturbance. At present, the county has become a concentrated area for the outbreak of mass incidents. Therefore, in particular, the popularization of legal knowledge in county should be strengthened. Citizens should learn how to use legal weapons to defend their rights. Meanwhile, they can also use legal rules to restrain their own extreme behaviours, preventing themselves from causing damage to others' interests from the source, so as to complete the mission of maintaining social stability.

##### **5.1.2. Mechanism: Contain Potential Crisis**

###### **5.1.2.1 Improve Expression Mechanism of Public Opinions**

During the period of social transformation, various interest differentiation and escalation of contradictions require the government to focus on improving the public opinion expression mechanism, providing multiple channels for ordinary people for appeal, and effectively guaranteeing citizens' right to express their opinions. The traditional channels to carry out the expression of interests are relatively single and unilateral, which cannot protect the interests of the

vulnerable groups at the bottom of society, and it is difficult to meet the expression needs of large-scale masses. Therefore, the government should reform the traditional way of appeal, by virtue of the excellent characteristics of real-time sharing and rapid dissemination of mobile network technology, build a bridge to communicate with the public, provide multiple and convenient expression channels for all interest groups in the society, help citizens to reasonably appeal for their interests in the form of legal compliance, so as to reduce the mass disturbance caused by the unsmooth and invalid appeals.

#### 5.1.2.2. Implement Information Disclosure Mechanism

The government information disclosure has not been very effective. The important information and major decisions have not been announced for the first time. It has become combustion agent of mass disturbance. Therefore, it is of vital importance to improve the relevant information disclosure mechanism. It is not only an effective way to weaken the outbreak of mass disturbance, but also a powerful weapon to ensure the efficient resolution of mass disturbance. On the one hand, the government should promote the openness of government affairs, establish and improve relevant information release mechanism so as to put the power for the supervision of the public. On the other hand, government should timely release the causes of relevant events, the disposal situation and post-work arrangements in order to improve the transparency of administrative decision-making, prevent the spread of rumours, reduce unnecessary misunderstandings and conflicts, and positively guide the masses to actively respond.

#### 5.1.2.3. Establish a Screening and Early Warning Mechanism

Mass disturbances didn't happen without omen, but it was because the government departments did not pay enough attention to it. Therefore, the government urgently needs to shift the focus of its work from emergency to prevention in advance after occurrence. On the one hand, it's necessary to establish a multi-channel and multi-level intelligence information network in accordance with regional principles, collect intelligence information, identify risks and potential dangers, monitor and predict in real time, move the crisis management gateway forward and place its focus down on the front line, and try to eliminate threats at the grass-roots level. On the other hand, relative departments need to focus on visiting groups that are prone to stir up crisis, go deep into the grass-roots level in the usual troubleshooting work, center on coordination and communication, and control beforehand, and we should try our best to resolve conflicts and make corresponding emergency plans.

### 5.1.3. Action: Accelerate the Improvement of Laws and Regulations

The rule of law is not only a powerful guarantee for deepening reform in an all-round way, but also the only way to handle mass disturbance. From the perspective of the current law, some problems still exist, such as the disunity of competent departments, the inharmonious coordination of legislation and the imperfection of contents. All of these also make the government departments short of detailed policy guidance in dealing with mass disturbance, the boundary of governance is vague, and there is an awkward situation that no law can be abided by. Therefore, the government should speed up the improvement of special laws for mass disturbance, specify the main body that is responsible for handling and clear the process of how to handle in the form of law, so as to ensure the legal procedures for the government to deal with mass disturbance.

## 5.2. Emphasize the Solution during Events

When mass disturbance occurs, the government must respond timely to resolve conflicts and crises as soon as possible.

### 5.2.1. Concept: Promote the Governance of Multiple Subjects

The traditional group governance mostly adopts the single-center management and control mode by government, which is proved to be expensive, ineffective and repetitive in practice. It is not suitable for complex and diversified modern mass disturbance, and it is easy to stir up greater conflicts under specific circumstances. Therefore, this requires the government to change to a diversified model of governance. The first is to realize the linkage of government departments and

form a joint law enforcement mechanism to deal with mass disturbance; the second is the linkage of government and social forces, that is, the government actively unites the forces of social intermediary organizations and ordinary people. For some events that are not suitable for excessive intervention or management by the government, the power of intermediary organizations should be used to negotiate and handle, so as to reduce the cost of governance and form the effective restraint between subjects involved, improve the suitability of decision-making, and realize the complementary coordination between the government and the society.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **5.2.2. Mechanism: Improve the Mechanism of Resolving Contradictions**

Mass disturbance is the result of the sudden outbreak of contradictions. The traditional mode of repression is hard to calm down the people's anger. This requires the government to improve the mechanism of resolving conflicts, starting from the root causes of mass disturbance. The first is to strengthen the sense of responsibility of the government, clarify the responsibilities of all departments, and ensure that communication and coordination agencies and law enforcement agencies perform their respective duties. Secondly, according to the types of mass disturbance, different emergency plans should be formulated. When the crisis occurs, the emergency plan can be put into practice in time, and the best way to resolve the conflict should be selected at the earliest time. Finally, we should improve the corresponding mediation mechanism, cultivate professional mediators, and be able to communicate with the participants in time when the crisis occurs, so as to resolve the crisis quickly.

### **5.2.3. Action: Make Good Use of Internet to Control Public Opinion**

The trans-boundary nature of the Internet often invisibly expands the development scale of some mass disturbance and deepens the development degree of events, thus initiating a new round of confrontation, so it is essential to control the public opinion online. The traditional way to transmit the voice of the government is to hold a press conference, to carry out the live news or broadcast, the form is relatively single and subject to a specific time. Therefore, the government should actively make good use of the excellent characteristics of rapid dissemination online and real-time sharing, establish a monitoring group for online public opinion. On the one hand, it can timely stop and refute the network rumours, purify the network environment, prevent conflict escalation. On the other hand, it's necessary to release the progress and disposal results of relevant events at the earliest time, seize the opportunity to control public opinion, avoid further deterioration of the events and protect the public's basic rights of ordinary people.<sup>[7]</sup>

## **5.3. Stress Management after Events**

After the crisis is rectified, relevant government departments need to thoroughly explore the causes of the incidents and prevent the recurrence of mass disturbance.

### **5.3.1. Concept: Cultivate the Social Identity of Citizens**

After mass disturbance happens, it will bring trauma to the body and mind of the citizens who suffer from these events, causing people's dissatisfaction with the government. And the government may face the crisis of legitimacy, so it is very essential to cultivate the sense of social identity of citizens. The higher the political identity is, the stronger the legitimacy of political rule is, and the higher the fitness between the government and the will of the people will be, the people are more willing to cooperate with the government, and the social conflicts will be reduced because of them. This requires the government to take the interests of the people as the priority, change from control to service, implement an open and transparent operation mechanism, consciously accept the people's supervision, enhance the people's sense of trust, and try to resolve and make up for the distrust brought to the people, which is caused by mass disturbance.

### **5.3.2. Mechanism: Establish Accountability Mechanism after Events**

After the mass disturbance is resolved, the government departments should classify the events and investigate the underlying causes. One is to investigate why the contradictions among the

people arise? Why did these events happen? Who is in charge? The core is to help the people thoroughly solve these problems and prevent the recurrence of group events. Second, we should investigate whether the measures taken by government departments are reasonable? Is the intervention timing appropriate? Is there any vacancy? The core is to examine the internal management problems and response capacity of the government, and find out the weaknesses of the government departments in emergency response. The third is to investigate whether officials at all levels are administering abiding by law? Is there corrupted official? The core is to seriously deal with some officials who violate the rules and fail to take action, so as to rectify the discipline of the party and select officials who really work for the people. Accountability mechanism after events is to urge departments at all levels to deal with the aftermath of mass disturbance in the form of superior and external accountability, comprehensively improve the emergency response capacity of mass disturbance, and prevent similar cases from happening again.

### **5.3.3. Action: Compensation and Care for the Group that Suffers**

Social equality is mainly embodied in equity of rule and result, in which result equity is achieved by strengthening the social security of the people at the bottom of the society. After calming down the mass disturbance, the government should, according to the results of the negotiation between the two sides, fulfil all kinds of compensation for the groups whose interests are damaged as soon as possible, organize human resources to conduct real-time follow-up visits, give humanistic care and urge the implementation of the progress of the compensation for the interests of the people. In this way, we can avoid the recurrence of mass disturbance, restore the image of the government, and regain people's trust in the government.

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