

An Analysis of the Impact of Online Political News on Political Security -A Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract

Political security constitutes the cornerstone of national security. Drawing on data from the “2019 Netizen Social Awareness Survey” released by the China National Survey Database, this study introduces “government trust” as a mediating variable and “official media trust” as a moderating variable to investigate the mechanism through which online political news influences political security. The results indicate that online political news exerts a significant positive effect on political security; government trust also positively influences political security and serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between online political news and political security. Additionally, official media trust moderates the link between government trust and political security. These findings highlight the interrelationships among the four variables, and deepen our understanding of how online political news shapes netizens’ perceptions of political security, also offer insights for further research aimed at enhancing political security.

Keywords: online political news, political security, government trust, media trust, mediating effect; moderating effect

1. Introduction

Political security concerns the fundamentals and core of national security and falls within the scope of the overall concept of national security (Wu & Guo, 2021). This overall concept encompasses multiple domains which are not isolated but interconnected and interdependent. Without political security, achievements in other areas of security would also be undermined. This underscores the critical importance of political security. Political security serves as a cornerstone in the pursuit of a national security path with Chinese characteristics (Li, 2018). It represents the most fundamental requirement of a country and constitutes the basic condition for its survival and development.

With the development of the Internet and related technologies, the “audience” has evolved into the “public”. Leveraging the interactive, timely, and open nature of the Internet, the public's access to domestic and international information has significantly expanded in both sources and volume. However, the uneven quality of this information affects netizens’ perceptions and attitudes toward political security, which may, in turn, lead to practical actions. The Internet and new media have transformed political communication and given rise to a model of Internet-based communication (Zhang & Wang, 2021). In the context of online communication, the dissemination of news and information is the most direct factor influencing political security (Huang, 2018). Driven by the rapid development of Internet information technology, phenomena such as online participation and cyber politics are reshaping the existing political and social ecology. In the open cyberspace, threats to political security are becoming increasingly diverse and complex. In terms of methods, in addition to traditional forms such as political propaganda and infiltration that exist in the physical world, new approaches such as algorithmic propaganda based on big data and other advanced technologies have also emerged (Tang, 2022).

Many previous studies have examined the logic, significance, influencing factors, dilemmas, and challenges related to political security. Regarding influencing factors, although some research has explored the effects of media and online public opinion on political security, there is a notable lack of studies specifically focusing on the impact of online political news. Furthermore, in-depth investigations into potential mediating factors such as government trust, and moderating factors such as official media trust, remain scarce. Quantitative evidence on these mechanisms is also relatively limited and requires further empirical validation. In response to these gaps, this paper focuses on the specific group of Chinese netizens, utilizing data from the 2019 Netizen Social Mentality Survey. It empirically analyzes the relationships among online political news, government trust, official media trust, and political security, taking into account the unique characteristics of political information dissemination in China. This study quantitatively verifies the mediating role of government trust between online political news and political security, as well as the moderating role of official media trust. The findings aim to offer new perspectives and a deeper understanding of political communication research and to provide valuable references for studies on political security.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Political Security

There is no universally accepted definition of political security. Within the framework of the traditional concept of security, political security is defined as a sovereign state's ability to defend itself against external political interference, oppression, and subversive activities, as well as to deter destructive actions by domestic hostile forces (Liu, 2004). Political security is crucial for a country's ability to maintain independence and autonomy in the international political arena and concerns the country's core interests and long-term development. Based on the internal logic of political security and the developmental needs of modern society, political security can be further defined as a national political system that is structurally sound, functionally compatible, coherently managed, and capable of responding to changes in an orderly manner. It is typically assessed through indicators such as the independence of state sovereignty, the stability of the political regime, the consolidation of the ruling party's position, the predominance of ideology, and the maintenance of a well-ordered political environment (Yu, 2018).

It is important to note that the connotation of political security varies across different political contexts, and its focal concerns also shift accordingly (Yu & Shu, 2012). In general, scholars have examined the concept of political security from multiple perspectives, with representative interpretations including national sovereignty security, regime security, ideological security, governance security, and the security of the political system (Shu & Yu, 2015). Additionally, political security is often interpreted through two distinct lenses: a negative, or preventive, perspective and a positive, or developmental, perspective. From the negative perspective, political security is defined as the absence of external interference and internal division. In contrast, the positive perspective emphasizes a stable and well-functioning political system (Yu, 2018).

The study of political security can be traced back to ancient Greece, where philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle deeply examined the justice of different political systems and their transformations (Zhang, 2013). At that time, political security was primarily associated with issues of corruption. The broader "study of security" emerged as a central theme in international politics, gaining particular prominence after the end of the Second World War. However, during that period, the primary focus of security studies was national security, especially in the context of war, which was defined as "the study of the control and use of military power, and threat behavior" (Walt, 1991). In the 1990s, Barry Buzan, a leading figure of the Copenhagen School, expanded the framework of security studies in his book *The New Security Theory*, dividing the field into five sectors: political security, military security, environmental security, economic security, and societal security (Shu, 2013).

The academic study of political security by Chinese scholars began in the 1990s (Liu, 2016), with various scholars offering their own interpretations of the concept. As traditional and non-traditional security threats have become increasingly intertwined, the importance of political security has continued to grow alongside historical developments.

Political security is influenced by a wide range of factors. From a macro perspective, it can be shaped by economic, social, cultural, and scientific and technological environments (Yu & Shu, 2012). From a domestic standpoint, a country's political security is not only linked to national governance, political ecology, and the ruling party's governing capacity, but also to broader issues such as the prevailing global order and the themes of the times (Liu, 2016). More specifically, key influencing factors include ideological security, corruption, and cybersecurity.

2.2 Online Political News and Political Security

As a form of hard news, current affairs reporting covers a broad range of topics, including not only recent events that the public is unaware of but should be informed about, but also factual reports of political relevance and public value (Ding & Li, 2006). Political news, as a fundamental genre within the field of political communication, primarily concerns the reporting of political events within a specific country or region. It is characterized by a high degree of political relevance, sensitivity, and timeliness (He, 2015). Specifically, current affairs news encompasses leadership changes at the national level, including the appointment or replacement of heads of state and government; government formation and policy development; political meetings, both domestic and international, involving significant political agendas; foreign engagements by national leaders, such as state visits; activities of international and regional organizations; and intergovernmental dialogues, including bilateral and multilateral negotiations and consultations (Duan, 2010).

Political news can be understood from both broad and narrow perspectives. Broadly defined, political news encompasses coverage of new and significant developments in the political, economic, cultural, and social fields. Narrowly defined, it focuses specifically on the reporting of political events and political activities within a particular country or region (Chen, 2014). Moreover, political news operations involve not only the reporting of political events but also their commentary and analysis. At the definitional level, political news can be understood along two dimensions: the ontogenetic form and the communicative form. In the ontogenetic form, political news refers to the latest factual information related to politics or possessing political significance. In the communicative form, political news involves reporting on and commenting on political facts or recent events from a political perspective, with special emphasis on the latest or ongoing developments in political life, and with political parties or political activities serving as the focal points of reporting or commentary (Liu, 2021).

Research on political news can be broadly categorized into two perspectives: static research and dynamic research. Static research focuses on the writing and dissemination of current affairs news, including the production, structure, and discourse of news content. In contrast, dynamic research relies on continuously collected survey data, embedding these data within an evolving political context to explore the interactions between political news and its environment, and to assess how political news influences key areas such as public ideology and political engagement (Liu, 2021). In China, during the early stages of development, the term "political news" was more commonly referred to as "political reporting".

In his book “Applied Television Journalism”, Zhang Junchang provided the first clear definition of “political news”, which includes reports on national policies, guidelines, political events, international politics, and foreign relations, as well as coverage of national political activities, political party developments, foreign affairs, labor unions, youth and women’s organizations, religious affairs, united front work, and military-related issues (Zhang, 1997). From its inception, the primary task of political news has been to convey the ideas of the ruling class and to ensure the dissemination of its ideology and values within mainstream society (Wu & Long, 2017). Furthermore, with the rise of new media and its impact on traditional media, many scholars have begun to explore innovative approaches to political news reporting, particularly as exemplified by programs such as “News Broadcast” and the coverage of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

In summary, online political news refers to exposure to political news through the Internet. The media functions not only as a disseminator of information but also as a shaper of social concepts and behavioral patterns, subtly influencing individuals’ decision-making (Xia & Zhao, 2024). As a constructor of the mimetic environment, the media plays a crucial role in shaping the public’s understanding of the world and perceptions of the social environment. Through online political news, netizens continuously interpret and assess political security. In recent years, political rumors and incitement originating from cyberspace have exerted a significant impact on political security. The political news disseminated through new media platforms such as the Internet has a direct effect on political security. Given the role of China’s news media as the “mouthpiece” of both the Party and the people, online political news in China is more likely to exert a positive influence on political security.

Thus, research hypothesis I is proposed:

H1: online political news has a significant positive impact on political security.

2.3 Government Trust: As a Mediator Between Online Political News and Political Security

The focus on government trust can be traced back to the significant decline in public trust in government observed in some countries, which led to the so-called “crisis of governance” (Niu, 2012). Government trust, also referred to as political trust, denotes the belief or confidence that the outcomes of government or political system operations align with public expectations (Albrow & Easton, 1966). D.G. Carnevale defines government trust as the public’s confidence in the reliability of the government, where individuals assess the responsibility and competence of governmental organizations to determine whether the government is trustworthy or whether its behavior is predictable (Terry, 1997). There are two primary approaches to measuring government trust. The first involves the assessment of institutional trust, covering a broad range of areas such as the political system, political behavior, and government decision-making. The second focuses on evaluating trust in political institutions and public officials, including various levels of government, the courts, and the police (Mei & Tai, 2018). Based on this framework, this paper adopts the second approach to measure government trust.

Domestic and international research perspectives on government trust can be broadly categorized into three paradigms: institutional theory, cultural theory, and social capital theory. The institutional paradigm emphasizes how perceptions of political performance shape the mechanisms of trust in government, whereas the cultural paradigm focuses on how information influences individual perceptions during the processes of political socialization and resocialization. Meanwhile, the social capital paradigm extends the concept of micro-level trust among individuals to macro-level trust at the national scale (Mishler, 2001). In the Chinese context, public attitudes toward government trust can be classified as either optimistic or pessimistic. For instance, contemporary college students generally exhibit a high level of trust in the state and government, and demonstrate strong confidence in the fundamental political system (Li, 2011). Similarly, research has found that the level of political trust among the farming population also remains high (Xiao & Wang, 2010).

Numerous studies have examined the factors influencing government trust. Key determinants include government performance, social capital, cultural influences, media exposure, and demographic variables such as gender, age, education, and income. Other influential factors include interpersonal trust, life satisfaction, authoritarianism, and political efficacy (Zhao & Yu, 2017). Notably, research has consistently shown that Chinese citizens tend to exhibit higher levels of trust in the central government than in local governments, a pattern widely recognized as the “central government is stronger than local government” (Li, 2004). This finding has been broadly acknowledged in the existing literature.

2.3.1 Online Political News and Government Trust

As a vehicle for online political news, media use exerts a profound influence on government trust. On one hand, the media shapes cultural values through information dissemination, thereby indirectly affecting public trust in government. On the other hand, trust is gradually built through interactions among community members, and sufficient access to information can strengthen trust during negotiation and communication processes (Lu & Quan, 2015).

There are three primary perspectives on the media’s influence on government trust. The first is a negative view. Michael J. Robinson, one of the earliest scholars to examine the link between negative media coverage and political cynicism, coined the term “media malaise” to describe the phenomenon whereby public reliance on television for political information, combined with the medium’s negative and anti-government tone, fosters political apathy (Robinson, 1976). Similarly, the decentralized nature of the Internet exposes the public to a wide variety of complex information, while also challenging the state’s political messaging, potentially weakening public trust in government (Shuai, Luo & Guo, 2021). Studies have shown that exposure to official media positively correlates with Chinese netizens’ trust in government, whereas unofficial media use has a significant negative effect (Xue, Yu & Yu, 2017). Additionally, the use of new media significantly decreases trust in government, while traditional media usage enhances it (Hu & Zhuang, 2017). The third view is neutral, suggesting that media primarily serves as a channel for transmitting political information without inherently shaping trust (Hu & Zhuang, 2017). Moreover, political trust tends to decline with increased exposure to overseas “alternative media” and higher levels of public

participation in political affairs (Zhang & Liu, 2014).

Specifically regarding online political news, studies by foreign scholars have found that increased voter exposure to political information via television is often associated with decreased trust in government (Robinson, 1976). Similarly, Chinese scholars have proposed that exposure to political information on microblogs is negatively correlated with government trust (Hong, Pang & Yu, 2014).

As a result, research hypothesis II is proposed:

H2: online political news has a significant negative effect on government trust.

2.3.2 Government Trust and Political Security

The factors that contribute to political security risks evolve with changes in the political, economic, cultural, and social environment (Huang & He, 2015). As government trust belongs to the political domain, it is closely correlated with political security. From the perspective of risk transfer theory, there is a strong link between political trust and political security, as political trust can transfer risks to the domain of political security, thereby introducing potential threats (Hu, 2021). Political mistrust may lead to adverse consequences such as suspicion, apathy, panic, cynicism, and anger, all of which undermine political stability (Liu & Yang, 2018). Political security fundamentally relies on the trust between the public and the government. From the perspective of governmental communication, the key to ensuring national political security lies in continuously improving the public nature of government communication and enhancing the credibility of governmental actions to strengthen public trust (Ju, 2019).

As a result, research hypothesis III is formulated:

H3: Government trust has a significant positive effect on political security.

In the light of the above literature, there are relevant studies on “online political news and government trust” and “government trust and political security”. Therefore, research hypothesis four is proposed:

H4: Government trust has a significant mediating role between online political news and political security.

2.4 Official Media Trust and Political Security

Official media serve as a communicative bridge between the government and the public. Media trust refers to the audience’s trust in media organizations or their services and represents a subjective evaluation of media credibility (Zeng & Chen, 2022). It is a crucial factor influencing public trust in democratic institutions (Tsfati, 2005), which, in turn, can shape public perceptions of political security. In contemporary society, the rapid development of media technology significantly impacts political security, particularly by influencing citizens’ political attitudes, evaluations of government performance, and confidence in future development prospects (Ma & Wang, 2016). Through the dissemination of information, the media shape the public’s cognitive framework, thereby indirectly affecting the socio-political

climate and perceptions of political security. Government trust is not static; therefore, an important question arises: does government trust influence political security as moderated by trust in official media? Based on the special nature of the official media in China as the mouthpiece of the party and the government, research hypothesis V is thus proposed:

H5: Official media trust plays a moderating role in the process of online political news affecting political security, and those with high official media trust have a higher sense of political security relative to those with low official media trust.

In summary, this paper proposes a moderated mediation model (Figure 1) to explore the impact of online political news on political security and its mechanism of action.

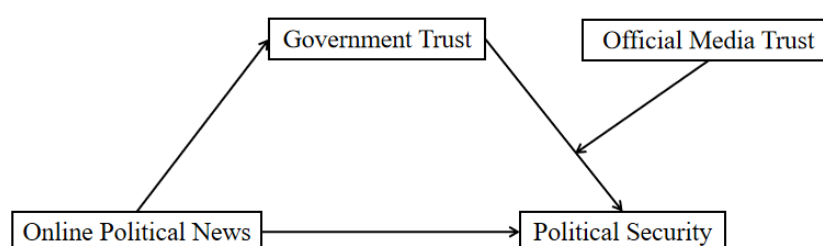


Figure 1. Research framework diagram

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample Source

The data of the study comes from the database of “2019 Netizen Social Awareness Survey”, which is made public by China National Survey Database, and the questionnaire contains four variables: online political news, political security, government trust, and official media trust, so this data is chosen, with a total of 4882 samples. The survey was designed and led by Prof. Ma Deyong, a political science professor at Renmin University of China, who collected data nationwide through the questionnaire to ensure the credibility of the data collection. In order to maintain the quality of the data and improve the accuracy of statistical analysis, only samples with no missing values for all variables were included in this paper, so samples containing missing values were excluded; at the same time, in order to minimize the interference of untrue answers to the statistical results, questions with the option of “don't know (or don't want to say)” in the questionnaire were regarded as invalid and deleted. After screening, a total of 4445 valid samples were finally obtained. The data were analyzed using SPSS26 software and the Process macro plug-in developed by Hayes.

3.2 Measurement of Variables

3.2.1 The Dependent Variable is Political Security

The dependent variable is political security, which is derived from the questionnaire “Are you worried about political security (instability of the regime, decline in the credibility of the government, and challenges to the party's ruling position)? where the alternative options for

each dimension are set: “3=not at all worried, 4=not too worried, 5=quite worried, 6=very worried”. For ease of analysis, the alternative options were transformed: 6=1 “very worried”, 5=2 “more worried”, 4=3 “not too worried”, 3=4 “Not at all worried”, the higher the value, the higher the netizen's evaluation of political security. Mean $M=2.36$, standard deviation $SD=1.049$.

3.2.2 The Independent Variable is Online Political News

Corresponding to the questionnaire, “Do you think your access to news information about domestic and foreign politics or government is sufficient at present?” Where the alternative options for each dimension are set: “3=very inadequate, 4=inadequate, 5=half and half, 6=comparatively adequate, 7=very adequate”. For ease of analysis, the alternative options were converted: 7 = 5 “very adequate”, 6 = 4 “more adequate”, 5 = 3 “half and half”, 4 = 2 “inadequate”, 3=1 ‘very inadequate’, the higher the value, the more adequate the online current news exposure. Mean $M=3.73$, standard deviation $SD=1.008$.

2.2.3 The Mediating Variable is Government Trust

Derived from the questionnaire “How much do you trust the following institutions or organizations?” The questionnaire includes five options: “central government”, “local government at county and township level”, “court”, “public security bureau”, and “police”, “Police”. For each of these dimensions, the alternative options were set as follows: “3=Not at all, 4=Distrust, 5=Half and half, 6=More trust, 7=Very much trust”. For ease of analysis, the alternative options were transformed: 7=5 “very trusting”, 6=4 “more trusting”, 5=3 “half and half”, 4=2 “don't trust”, 3=1 ‘don't trust at all’, the higher the value, the higher the trust. Through factor analysis, it was found that the KMO value of the above five indicators was 0.859, the significance in Bartlett's test of sphericity was 0.000, and the Cronbach's α value was 0.841>0.7, which indicated a higher level of confidence, so the variable was downgraded by the method of summing up and taking the mean and was named “Government trust “. The mean value is $M=4.120$ and standard deviation $SD=0.701$.

3.2.4 The Moderating Variable is Official Media Trust

Derived from the questionnaire “How much do you trust these following institutions or organizations (official news media)?” Where the alternative options for each dimension are set: “3=Not at all, 4=Don't trust, 5=Half and half, 6=More trust, 7=Very much trust”. For ease of analysis, the alternative options were converted: 7=5 “very trusting”, 6=4 “more trusting”, 5=3 “half and half”, 4=2 “don't trust”, 3=1 ‘don't trust at all’, the higher the value, the higher the trust. Mean $M=3.96$, standard deviation $SD=0.902$.

3.2.5 The Control Variables are Mainly Demographic Variables

The demographic variables after recoding and assigning values include age (1=under 18 years old; 2=18-24 years old; 3=25-29 years old; 4=30-34 years old; 5=35-39 years old; 6=40-44 years old; 7=45-49 years old; 8=50-54 years old; 9=55-59 years old; and 10=60 years old or older), gender (1=male; 2=female), highest level of education (1= Elementary school and below; 2=Middle school; 3=High school; 4=Specialist; 5=Bachelor's degree; 6=Master's

degree), annual income (1=\$20,000 and below; 2=\$20,000-\$50,000; 3=\$50,000-\$100,000; 4=\$100,000-\$150,000; 5=\$150,000-\$200,000; 6=\$200,000-\$400,000; 7=\$400,000-\$600,000; 8=\$600,000-\$1,000,000; 9=\$1,000,000 and above).

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of Variables

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables, and the statistical analysis of the data shows that online current news ($M=3.73$), government trust ($M=4.120$), and official media trust (3.96) are all at a high level, while political security performs comparatively poorly ($M=2.36$) and fails to reach the median level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of main variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Political security	1	4	2.36	1.049
Online political news	1	5	3.73	1.008
Government trust	1	5	4.120	0.701
Official media trust	1	5	3.96	0.902
Age	2	10	3.47	1.325
Gender	1	2	1.4	0.491
Highest level of education	1	6	4.16	0.97
Annual income	1	9	3.25	1.587

Table 2 presents the correlations of online political news, official media trust, government trust, demographic variables, and political security. The results show that online political news, official media trust, and government trust are significantly positively correlated with political security, with correlation coefficients of 0.080, 0.081, and 0.082 ($p<0.01$), respectively, and there is a significant positive correlation between online political news and government trust ($\beta=0.419$, $p<0.01$). Among demographic variables, age ($\beta=0.090$, $p<0.01$), gender ($\beta=0.038$, $p<0.05$), highest level of education ($\beta=0.079$, $p<0.01$), and annual income ($\beta=0.101$, $p<0.01$) are significantly and positively correlated with online political news; age ($\beta=0.089$, $p<0.01$), highest level of education ($\beta=0.043$ ($\beta=0.053$, $p<0.01$), and annual income ($\beta=0.053$, $p<0.01$) are significantly positively correlated with trust in the official media; age ($\beta=0.118$, $p<0.01$), and highest level of educational attainment ($\beta=0.056$, $p<0.01$) are significantly positively correlated with political security; age ($\beta=0.042$, $p<0.01$), and gender ($\beta=0.049$, $p<0.01$), highest level of education ($\beta=0.044$, $p<0.01$), and annual income ($\beta=0.49$, $p<0.01$) are significantly and positively related to government trust.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations of variables

Variant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Age	1							
Gender	0.131**	1						
Highest level of education	-0.02	0.014	1					
Annual income	0.120**	-0.066**	0.322**	1				

Online political news	0.090**	0.038*	0.079**	0.101**	1			
Official media trust	0.089**	0.016	0.043**	0.053**	0.321**	1		
Political security	0.118**	0.02	0.056**	0.011	0.080**	0.081**	1	
Government trust	0.042**	0.049**	0.044**	0.049**	0.419**	0.571**	0.082**	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, $N = 4445$, same below.

4.2 Mediation Model Test of Government Trust

In order to verify the direct effect of online political news on political security and the mediating role of government trust in the relationship between online political news and political security, this study adopts the Bootstrap method. The specific implementation steps are to apply the Process plug-in developed by Andrew F. Hayes based on the SPSS platform in SPSS 26.0 software, version V3.3, choose Model 4, take online current political news as the independent variable, political security as the dependent variable, government trust as the mediator variable, the confidence interval is set to 95%, and carry out 5000 repeated samples. If the confidence interval does not contain 0, it indicates that the mediating effect exists, and vice versa, the mediating effect does not exist.

As shown in Table 3, online political news significantly and positively affects political security ($\beta = 0.056$, confidence interval $CI = [0.025, 0.092]$ does not contain 0, and $p < 0.001$), hypothesis H1 is supported; online political news significantly and positively affects government trust ($\beta = 0.419$, confidence interval $CI = [0.273, 0.310]$ does not contain 0, and $p < 0.001$), hypothesis H2 is not supported; government trust significantly and positively affects political security ($\beta = 0.058$, confidence interval $CI = [0.039, 0.135]$ does not contain 0, and $p < 0.001$), and hypothesis H3 holds.

Online political news has a significant positive indirect effect on political security through government trust ($\beta = 0.024$, confidence interval $CI = [0.011, 0.038]$ does not contain 0), combined with the above conclusion of hypothesis H1 (online political news has a significant positive effect on political security), it can be seen that the government trust plays a partial mediating role between online political news and political security, so that hypothesis H4 is also verified.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis of online political news sources on political security

Variant	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Online political news	0.081	5.380***	0.419	30.718***	0.056	3.412***
Government trust					0.058	3.538***
R^2	0.007		0.175		0.009	
F	28.947		943.571		20.769	

Note: Model 1, i.e., online political news predicts political security; Model 2, i.e., online political news predicts government trust; Model 3, i.e., online political news and government trust together predict political security; β is the standardized regression coefficient; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Breakdown of total, direct and indirect effects

	Effect	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI	Percentage of total effect
Total effect	0.081	0.016	5.380	0.000	0.053	0.114	
Direct effect	0.056	0.017	3.412	0.001	0.025	0.092	
Indirect effect	0.024	0.007	/	/	0.011	0.038	29.630%

Note: Boot standard error, lower limit of BootCI and upper limit of BootCI refer to the standard error, lower limit of the 95% confidence interval and upper limit of the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect estimated by the bias-corrected percentile Bootstrap method, respectively.

Based on the above analysis, this leads to a model of the mediating role of government trust in predicting political security in online political news (Figure 2).

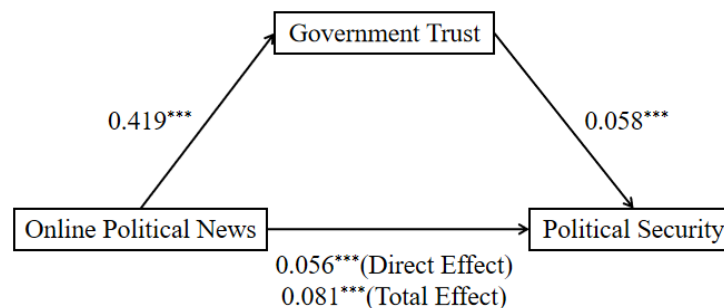


Figure 2. The mediating role of government trust between online political news and political security

4.3 Moderated Mediation Model Test

Using Model 14 in the Process macro program to carry out the moderated mediation model test, through 5,000 repeated samples and based on the 95% confidence interval, government trust is regarded as the mediator variable, and online political news is used as the moderating variable, so as to explore the mechanism of the influence of online political news on political security. The relationship between the variables is shown in Table 5, and the results of data analysis show that online political news ($\beta=0.047$, $p<0.01$), government trust ($\beta=0.1$, $p<0.01$), and online political news ($\beta=0.069$, $p<0.01$) all have a significant positive effect on political security. The interaction term between government trust and official media trust ($\beta=0.126$, $p<0.001$) has a significant positive effect on political security. This indicates that official media trust has a significant positive moderating effect in the process of online political news affecting political security mediated by government trust. Therefore hypothesis 5 passes the test.

Table 5. Regression analysis of the relationship of the main variables

Regression equation		Overall fit index		Significance of regression coefficients	
Implicit variable	Independent variable	R ²	F	β	t
Government trust	Online political news	0.175	943.571	0.291	30.718***
	Online political news			0.047	2.711**
Political security	Government trust	0.019	21.938	0.1	3.387**
	Official media trust			0.069	3.240**
	Government trust × official media trust			0.126	6.301***

Note: Variables in the model are standardized, *p<0. 05, **p<0. 01, ***p<0. 001, two-tailed test.

The government trust is categorized into low government trust and high government trust, and its regulating effect in different scenarios of low official media trust and high official media trust is examined respectively, and the specific regulating effect is shown in Figure 3.

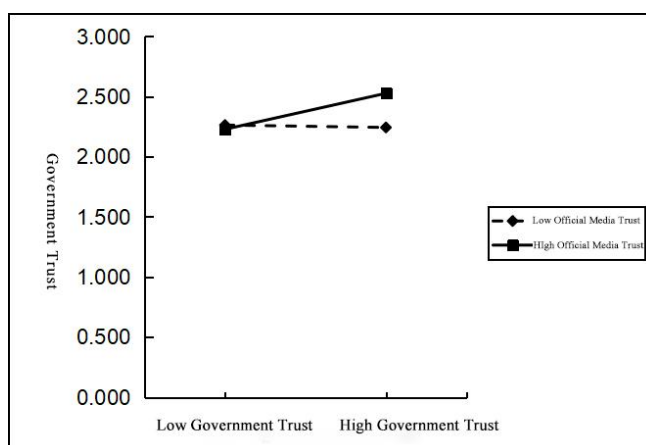


Figure 3. Plot of the moderating effect of official media trust on the relationship between government trust and political security

As shown in Table 6, further Bootstrap tests show that the 95% Bootstrap confidence intervals for Internet users with high official media trust, when government trust is used as a mediating variable, do not contain 0. This suggests that, for Internet users with high official media trust, online political news can positively affect political security through government trust. For Internet users with low trust in official media, the 95% Bootstrap confidence interval for government trust as a mediator variable contains 0. This suggests that for Internet users with low trust in official media, the predictive effect of government trust on the influence of online political news on political security is not significant.

Table 6. Results of mediated effects analysis with moderation based on Bootstrap test

Action path	Official media trust	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Online political news	-0.902	-0.004	0.009	-0.021	0.013
-government trust-political security	0	0.029	0.009	0.011	0.047
	0.902	0.062	0.012	0.039	0.086
Moderated intermediation		0.037	0.007	0.024	0.05

Note: Variables in the model are standardized, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed test.

Based on the above findings, the final effect model diagram for this study is shown in Figure 4.

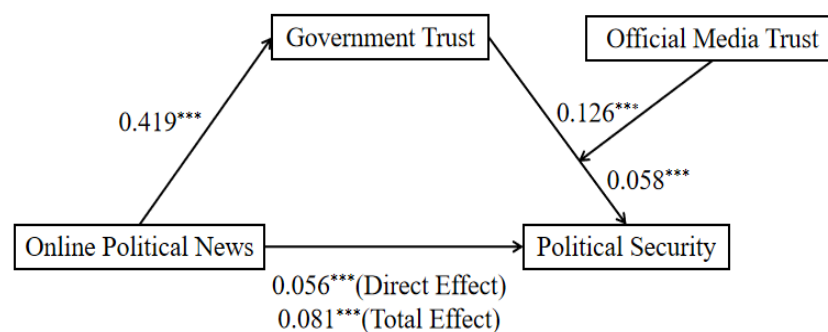


Figure 4. Final effect model diagram

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Several Paths of Online Political News Affecting Political Security

The data from the 2019 Netizen Social Consciousness Survey were analyzed to examine the specific influence mechanisms between online political news, government trust, official media trust, and political security. Based on the analytical judgment of the two paths of influence of online current affairs news on political security, i.e., the direct influence and the mediating effect of government trust, the following conclusions are drawn:

5.1.1 Direct Influence Path

The analysis results indicate that online political news has a significant and positive impact on political security. Specifically, the more comprehensive the sources of domestic and international political or governmental news are, the higher the evaluation of political security, which aligns with previous studies.

This could be attributed to the strong political nature of political news, coupled with China's unique media system, where under the "party-controlled media" framework, although netizens are exposed to various types of information, most of the political and governmental news they encounter is framed within a positive propaganda narrative. Consequently, the

more netizens are exposed to online political news, the more they perceive the current state of China's political security as stable. However, the rise of online media has also introduced challenges to political security, such as the use of the Internet to distribute "wall-flipping" software and political spam emails. This underscores the importance of traditional media maintaining their responsibilities and functions, ensuring that online information adheres to minimum political security standards (Huang, 2018). Moreover, the regulation of online information should be strengthened, alongside improvements in the sourcing and transparency of information disclosure. In the new media era, the principle of "content is king" remains crucial, and providing netizens with valuable, authentic content is essential.

5.1.2 Indirect Influence Path

Online political news significantly and positively affects government trust, meaning that the more adequate the sources of domestic and foreign political or governmental news, the greater the public's trust in the government. Additionally, government trust significantly and positively impacts political security, with higher levels of public trust in the government correlating with a more favorable evaluation of political security. This suggests that government trust plays a crucial role in shaping netizens' perceptions of political security. In summary, these findings indicate that government trust partially mediates the relationship between online political news and political security. Specifically, online political news not only has a direct impact on political security but also exerts an indirect influence through the mediating role of government trust.

The indirect influence pathway highlights the significance of government trust. The study found that online political news positively affects government trust, which contrasts with the findings of Western scholars, suggesting that this issue is context-dependent. The conclusion that government trust significantly and positively impacts political security is consistent with previous research.

5.1.3 Influence of Control Variables

Age and education have a significant positive effect on the political security of Internet users, while gender and annual income have no significant effect on the political security of Internet users.

5.2 Moderating Effect of Official Media Trust

The study results indicate that the interaction term of government trust and official media trust has a significant positive moderating effect. The data reveal that when government trust is considered as the mediating variable, netizens with higher trust in official media experience a stronger sense of political security. In contrast, for netizens with lower trust in official media, changes in government trust do not lead to changes in their sense of political security. This suggests that trust in official media plays a significant moderating role in the mediation model of how online political news affects political security.

In the pathway through which online political news affects political security via government trust, the moderating effect of official media trust shows a significant difference. Netizens

with higher trust in official media exhibit a stronger sense of political security, whereas those with lower trust in official media show minimal changes in their sense of political security. This suggests that the moderating effect of official media trust on government trust is significant. When government trust is established, official media trust becomes a key factor in determining netizens' political security, with higher levels of official media trust correlating with a higher sense of political security among netizens.

5.3 Limitations and Prospects

It is important to note that this study has certain limitations due to the use of secondary data from the 2019 Internet Users' Social Awareness Survey. The measurement of variables is constrained by the dimensions and topics covered in the questionnaire, which may limit the alignment between the data and the variables. Additionally, regarding indirect effects, it remains unclear whether other factors mediate or moderate political security. Future research could explore these factors more comprehensively by designing a more detailed questionnaire to provide a deeper and more sustained examination of the elements influencing citizens' political security.

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