

The Impact of Zero-COVID Policy on the Economic Conditions from Chinese Citizens' Perspective

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Abstract: Chinese social environment faces a transition. More and more citizens get tired of the current situation. This work selects 12 citizens from different regions in mainland China and analyzes their current conditions and the impacts to each industry. Many occupations' interests have been severely damaged and thus most citizens are looking forward to the end of zero-COVID policy. The research exhibits the conditions and real willingness of Chinese citizens in mainland. It is not only a theoretic analysis but also with real cases. This work provides unprecedented details of the Chinese public.

Keywords: China, economics, COVID, impact, citizens

1. Introduction

This research mainly answers the question of the impact on the economic conditions from Chinese citizens' perspective.

This research unveils the authentic economic conditions in China and predicts the main trend of public opinion. So far, there has not been much fieldwork on such questions in China. Most scholars study the issues only by theories. Few scholars study the real conditions of the public in mainland China. This research is highly likely to become a very objective exhibition of the current situation. It is the research to show the real opinions of the Chinese public instead of those experts and celebrities.

I have done the interviews with 10 individuals chosen from 6 provinces and 10 different occupations and had a full detailed analysis of the answers organized to predict the public trend.

Many citizens' economic conditions are not well. The majority do not hope that the policy is going to be extended any longer.

1.1. Background

The Chinese government works toward stabilizing society in order to sustain political stability. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many unstable factors emerged, with people's fear and dissatisfaction mixed. Without an efficient solution, the economic and public health issues may lead to the dissolving of the social structure. More violent acts are highly likely to occur due to damage to citizens' interests.

The COVID-19 occurrence in 2020 is an associate degree extreme event and a worldwide emergency public health event. The Chinese government reacts quickly [1].

Expectantly, matters are utterly in restraint and back to traditional life in China in close to the future. There's a powerful necessity to contemplate and promote the Chinese model (protocol) of malady hindrance and management because it has been tested and tested helpful in forefending most invalid injuries of this pandemic scenario. However, the Chinese model might not be the ultimate solution [2].

The Chinese government's dynamic zero-COVID policy is efficient in the short run. Only a blocking strategy can temporarily alleviate the pressure of social conflicts. Chinese authorities have tackled the occurrence by imposing jurisprudence on an oversized fraction of the population, therefore presumptively lowering the infection rate to an oversized extent [3]. According to the analysis, China's success won't be the tip of its natural event [4]. An attack rate as low as a pair of may cause a second wave apace as a result of the community level of immunity remaining low at the beginning. The Chinese medical system cannot provide suitable treatment to every citizen. If a huge outbreak of an epidemic occurs, a huge portion of people at the bottom of society is highly likely to become the victims.

The problem is apparent with the long-run economic development.

The Chinese government needs to transform the strategy from the zero-Covid policy to a more efficient one, which is what Chinese citizens want to see. The real economy, like the tourism and service industries, has been significantly affected. The Chinese economy can no longer sustain itself if the government chooses to lock down cities like Wuhan and Shanghai again. The economy cannot bear the high cost anymore.

One thing for sure is that the government will change the policy, but 'when' is the vital part. The research mainly analyzes the current economic conditions of normal citizens in China.

The opinions of the majority can be organized. Then the social trend can be predicted.

This issue is tightly connected to citizens' benefits.

Therefore, this essay will include both opinions from the public and interviews of the local officials with appropriate analysis from different perspectives.

Most of the data is collected by interviews, and those cases are selected to provide a full comprehension of the policy's downsides and benefits. The selected groups are mainly distinguished by occupations to know which industries are affected more.

Several models, such as the rational mind model and behavioural model, are used to clarify those behaviours and phenomena. In a nutshell, this paper asks, what is the impact on the economic conditions from Chinese citizens' perspective?

1.2. Summary

Citizens should no longer bear the burden of lockdown. The longer the virus spreads, the additional economic performance is wedged, raising considerations concerning the money property, particularly for extremely indebted countries [5]. Most individuals are showing positive attitudes toward the ending of the restriction. There will be a recovery period in the economy soon if COVID-19 is not highly politicized. If the restriction period is extended for too long, citizens will start to gradually show dissatisfaction due to the severe damage to their living standards and the accumulation of negative emotions. That period will not be too long because current situations have already started to deplete the political capital of the Chinese government among its citizens. Therefore, I believe that the government should forgo long-term restrictions soon.

The coverage and effectiveness of vaccines are not enough [6]. It is terribly pricy and troublesome to keep up current scenario. If China is watching for the remainder of the states, that takes too long. Even countries like Australia and New Island, with earth science blessings, cannot complete the goal of the clearing.

In this case, it is not practical to maintain the zero-Covid strategy. Then the control method is improved. The dynamic COVID-zero strategy is invented to lower the cost.

The dynamic COVID-zero strategy is the outline of China's expertise in addressing variants and considering methods to a way to manage the epidemic in a lot of economical ways [7]. The aim is to reduce the impact on the economy and society to ensure socioeconomic stability.

Though the strategy is more efficient than the original one, it continues to bring damage to the economy, causing more social problems. This is also why the public has begun to turn against the policy.

Vaccines square measure effective enough against severe or fatal illnesses [8]. With the recall dose, the effectiveness reaches ninety-eight. However, although eighty-seven of the population have received 2 doses of the vaccine, solely two-hundredths of the older higher than eighty years received a booster. The government is still waiting for a higher vaccine rate in the most needed group. The government aims to extend immunity additional before reposeful controls and attempting to measure the virus [9]. Over seventy-fifth of Chinese adults square measure unsusceptible, and even kids as young as age three square measure currently obtaining shots. Even though some leading vaccines have better efficacy, the Chinese government still stick to the domestic ones [10].

The data is updated now. The coverage rate of the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine was 92.1%, the full vaccination rate was 89.7%, and the booster vaccination rate was 71.7% until July 23, 2022.

In the recent future, the coverage and effectiveness of vaccines will reach an appropriate level. Citizens have been waiting for this moment for a long time.

The service industry is affected the most. Many related industries are also affected. People have already started to feel dissatisfaction with the current policy, and people can hardly bear the policy for an extended period.

2. Methods

The study was conducted as follows. First, the interview questions were designed to gather all the information needed. The questions needed to be framed. The framing needed to guarantee authenticity and security simultaneously. Direct questions related to politics would have been shunned by most individuals. Thus, considering the feasibility of the study, proper framing was necessary for the research. After designing the question list, the sample was chosen. One part of the sample was from offline fieldwork, and the other was from online fieldwork. The sample was selected from 6 different provinces with 12 occupations. The sample includes 12 cases. Eleven of them are in the workforce except for 1 student. There are 6 males and 6 females. All of them live in urban areas now. 11 people are urban residents, and 1 is a migrant worker. The median age is 36.

Online interviews were done on many platforms like WeChat, a Facebook-like super app used by over 0.6 billion Chinese residents. Online platforms could help me reach many citizens that are physically far away from me in order to improve the representativeness of the sample and, by extension, the generalizability of the findings. Offline interviews were conducted in Chengdu and Chongqing. Chengdu Global Center was where I did the public interviews because shopping malls are one place where people from different areas gather.

It is especially difficult to interview the public on such a topic because it is relatively sensitive in politics. Government policies cannot really be doubted and discussed by the citizens in any public place like pedestrian streets, shopping malls or other places where people gather. It is an unspoken rule that social members should follow. There is not much freedom of speech in the country. Citizens only have such freedom in the name. However, on some occasions, many ordinary citizens are still willing to talk about their dissatisfaction, and some citizens may also do that when their life

is severely affected by some issues. This group of people do not have serious concerns about losing jobs, prestige or social status due to their being outspoken. They do not have much to lose. However, it is different for people with higher status. Those people have wealth and stable jobs. Their comments are related to politics no matter online, or offline all can become a threat to their current happy life. Once the comments are reported to the authority by anyone, the consequences may not be so affordable for these citizens. Even detention is possible. So, it would not be strange to have a high non-response rate in this group because they do not want to get into trouble. I tried to conduct public interviews at first, but about 50% of citizens rejected my request, and the authenticity of the answers was unknown. With consideration of the authenticity and validity of the answers, then the cases are chosen from the citizens that I know who are going to tell truths. It is the most effective way to get the data without risking much in current conditions.

This analysis will be divided into two parts, including highly educated scholars of three professions and three representatives of citizens in China.

3. Findings

According to the interviews, it is shocking that not only the service industry bears a huge loss. Other occupations like scientific research and information technology have also been affected to some extent.

The highly educated citizens from Peking and Chongqing provide me with some practical evidence of the current situation—many industries are in stagnation. All these citizens have been living in China since the first outbreak of Covid-19 began.

Both cases in Peking showed uncertainty about whether the epidemic would end soon. If the government cares about international reputation too much and regards changing policy as a denial of the success so far, they may act in an irrational way to maintain the current situation. No matter somebody in authority has a political purpose or purpose of money is highly likely to make unreasonable decisions for the public. Stopping restrictions is what people want to see. And without considering those human-intended factors, open is the corollary.

3.1. Interviewee #1, Employee in the Information Industry with PhD in Beijing

Surprisingly, even the information industry has been severely affected. The chain effect causes unimaginable damage to this industry. Those employees' salaries have been reduced already. If the prospect remains grim, there is likely to be further damage to the employees' and those companies' interests.

‘As the information technology base, the infrastructure layer will be affected by the orders of the upper application, which is a chain reaction. The degree is still relatively large, with an annual yield of 30% off.’

It is oblivious that the policy needs to be adjusted as all kinds of factors change. Maybe the strategy is right at a certain moment, but that does not mean that the strategy is right and sustainable all the time. The optimal solution is always changing. For example, the government may use an uncompromising attitude towards the dangerous virus. When all the citizens, even the authorities, do not know what the virus is and what potential consequences it may cause to human bodies. A lot of infected individuals show the fatality of COVID-19. Those compulsory regulations are the government's rational behaviours to prevent further deterioration. After a period when scientists analyzed the structure of the virus and vaccines were invented, the public's attitudes were mitigated.

‘Epidemic prevention policies should be constantly adjusted according to the epidemic strains and social situation. Taking the 1918 pandemic as an example, the mortality and severe rates of the three waves of the pandemic in the first 3 years were high, and the severity decreased as the virus

continued to mutate, forming seasonal influenza. The gradual reduction of severity over time is the basic law of the evolution of epidemic diseases. Over time, the pathogenicity and infectivity of mainstream strains should be continuously evaluated to adjust epidemic prevention policies, to balance epidemic prevention and social and economic life.'

Now Chinese citizens actually have been crossing the 'breakeven point. When the majority cross the point, their economic needs exceed their need for safety. Especially now, 89.7% of citizens have been vaccinated. People start to worry about poverty. People always stand together to fight against the largest enemy, and poverty becomes the largest. There are more people killed by other factors instead of the virus itself. Therefore, people shall know the importance of shifting the focus as the mission changes. 'The influence is not obvious for me, who is rather an "indoor guy".'

3.2. Interviewee #2, A Scientific Researcher with PhD in Beijing

The scientific researchers also faced the problem that they had neither the place nor the equipment to test the conjecture. Because of the lockdown, researchers can not go to the laboratories. They can not address the problems without practical evidence. Thus, the research is delayed.

'In the first half of the year, the business travels of technical service work in the factory became nearly impossible, and the laboratory work was greatly affected by the home office.'

Scientific researches are necessary for many emerging products. The economic benefits can not be ignored. If the technology is in stagnation, it would not be strange that the downstream industries are hugely impacted.

COVID-19 gradually becomes part of citizens' life. Citizens need to get used to the disease just like other common ones, such as the cold and the fever, as the morbidity decreases. Every epidemic has similar processes.

'The symbiosis between virus strains and human beings will be more and more harmonious. Epidemic prevention policies should keep pace with the times. It can be seen from history that general pandemics, plagues and viral infectious diseases will gradually reduce the damage to a certain extent, and there is no need to over-interpret a specific viral infectious disease at a specific stage of human social development.'

The problem of poverty may cause extra problems in society. More and more impacted citizens may cause many social conflicts. There are too many examples. In Shanghai, during the last outbreak of the new variant, more citizens die of improper distribution of medical resources and rigid procedures in the hospitals.

'There is a certain impact. The income decreases, and there is no income in some months. If it lasts for a long time, some unstable factors may occur.' Other factors may cause further damage. Social conflicts are the most crucial ones.

3.3. Interviewee #3, Scholar with PhD in Pennsylvania

Scholars and teachers are not impacted so much as other occupations. They just need other platforms to have their classes. Educational institutions are impacted. Their alternatives can address their problems effectively.

'Because I am not in high-risk areas, the impact is relatively small. But I had to take online classes, and some students suspended classes. My own work piles up. 'Many citizens still feel uncertainty about the consequences. It is mainly concerned with the problem of sequelae left after infection.

'It should be the best choice when the virulence of the virus strain is not clear. The distribution of social and medical resources is not uniform, and the public's fear of COVID is not gone.'

Many citizens, especially the young generations who love to hang out, may not feel comfortable with current conditions. But at least now, for the safety concerns, they can still endure the inconvenience.

'Freedom lovers certainly don't want the lockdown to continue. I love to travel, but I cannot do that now. However, considering the unknown sequelae, the population base, the young and old population and the shortage of medical social resources, policies still need to be implemented. But hopefully, they can be improved.'

The current strategy can not last for a long time. This issue may cause psychological problems for many citizens. The long suppression of emotions will eventually explode at some point, causing irreversible damage to society's stabilization.

3.4. Responses From Other Citizens

Besides professional scholars, a worker in the construction industry, local restaurant owners and commercial real estate managers also exhibit their worries.

3.5. Interviewee #4, A Construction Worker in Chengdu

From the interview of the worker, the current situation is apparent. 'The impact is huge. I had to move around for a living after the site shut down.' His experience exhibits the universal problems that most workers in China face. The workers in the construction industry or similar industries like manufacturing industries need to deal with unemployment. They become the most vulnerable group. They need to change their jobs constantly in order to get stable and enough wages to support their families. 'I do not hope that this policy will be carried out for a long time. If it is carried out for a long time, my life will not be secure, and I will face great economic pressure.' The phenomenon may cause more social instability and potential conflicts, which bring long-term harm to the nation's development.

3.6. Interviewee #5, Restaurant Owner in Chongqing

The local restaurant owner tells the devastating effect on the restaurant industry. 'Restaurants have been greatly affected by the pandemic. When the epidemic was severe during the Chinese New Year, the urban management government did not allow restaurants to open offline, and most of them were sold through online take-out. But for take-out, the platform of take-out will extract most of the profits, and the profits obtained by the merchants are very small.' The government forbade any restaurant from operating offline. Most owners can only depend on take-out to sell meals online. But those take-out platforms extract most of the profit. The profit is little for the owners. Even if they can operate offline, the number of consumers in the restaurant is limited. Therefore, the revenues are also decreased. Their economic conditions have already been affected. They can only reduce the expenditure on some aspects that are not so urgent to make a living.

3.7. Interviewee #6, Commercial Real Estate Manager in Chongqing

The commercial real estate manager discloses the fact that it is hard to recover the steady stream of visitors even after the temporary restrictions. 'The commercial project I work for had a decrease in the customer flow due to the epidemic prevention policy. It might be resumed after the control measures are cancelled. So far, the customer flow has not recovered to that before the epidemic, which leads to difficulties in business operation.' All those stores in the shopping malls face operation difficulties. Because many are exaggerating reports of COVID causing an unnecessary pandemic in public, reducing the willingness to consume, the consumers lose expectations of the

development prospect in the recent future. So, they tend to put more money into their bank account for emergencies. Many colleagues are laid off, and salaries are reduced. Those movements intensify citizens' panic.

4. Conclusion

As the left part of Figure 1 shows, there are 67% of cases impacted. This is only the current situation. As the policy continues to be imposed, a huger number of citizens are likely to be impacted.

As the right part of Figure 1 shows, there are 50% of the case hope that the restriction should be cancelled soon, and 25% of cases feel uncertain about the future. Most of the citizens in the sample are looking forward to a change in the current policy. Even though 25% of cases think that the restrictions will not be cancelled soon, they still hope to see the ending of the epidemic but with negative attitudes toward the current situation.

This analysis unveils the original economic conditions in China and predicts the trend of the general public opinions. So far, there has not been a lot of fieldwork on such questions in China. Most students study the problems solely by theories. Few students study the important conditions of the general public in China. This analysis square measure extremely seemingly to become an objective exhibition of this scenario.

Many citizens' economic conditions don't seem to be well. The bulk doesn't hope that the policy is getting to be extended any further.

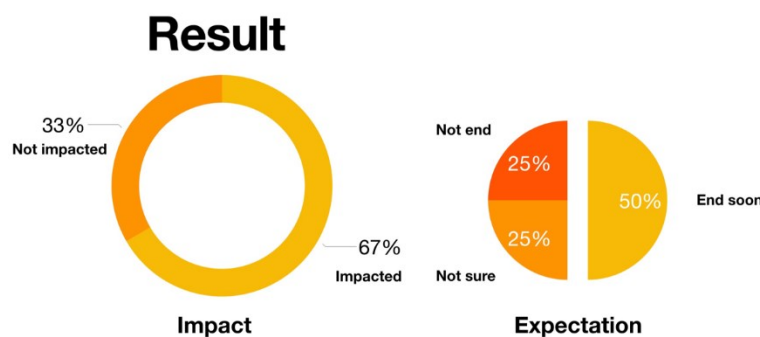


Figure 1: Impact and expectation.

Limitation: The sample of this study is not randomly drawn. Although the cases are carefully chosen from different occupations and cities in China, they may not be the most precise representatives of the population. The sample size is relatively small, and confounding variables also exist. Some remote areas may not be considered in consideration of this research because most cases are from big cities with large populations.

Despite these shortcomings, the findings from this study still shed light on how ordinary Chinese citizens perceive the current Covid-19 strategy, and their perceptions might vary with their educational levels and occupations. But the mainstream is still clearly defined according to the research data. Most citizens want to end this in the recent future. Because surveys related to politics are not quite feasible in China, the case study can be done in a more systematic way with more detailed questions. More rural areas shall be included in the consideration.

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