



Regional Informatization Development and the Quality of National Audit

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Abstract. National audit occupies an important position in national governance, plays a central role in the rule of law, efficiency, transparency, accountability and integrity. In the context of the digital era, national audit is facing many changes: in terms of the audit mode, the national audit has to deal with diversified, rapid and fluctuating value of information; in terms of the audit methods, the national audit needs to expand from uni-dimensional to multi-dimensional, so that the financial and operational data could be extracted, transformed, and analyzed; in terms of the audit function, the national audit should cover the scope of the work by the aftermath of the whole process, and pay more attention to potential risks; in terms of the audit organizational structure, it is necessary to improve the efficiency of communication, as well as the degree of resource integration. Therefore, it is of practical significance to explore the factors affecting the state audit in the digital era, and then break through the current dilemma of improving the quality of state audit. This paper takes the level of provincial informatization development from 2008 to 2017 as the research object, constructs a regression model, and explores the effect of digital development on the quality of state auditing and the mechanism of its effect. It is found that: (1) the higher the level of regional informatization development, the higher the quality of state audit; (2) the level of regional informatization development positively affects the quality of state audit by improving the independence of state audit.

Keywords: national audit quality, audit informatization, national governance

1 INTRODUCTION

In June 2021, the Office of the Central Audit Commission and the Audit Office issued the National Audit Development Plan for the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan (hereinafter referred to as the Plan). The Plan clearly states that "the requirements of General Secretary Xi Jinping on improving auditing power through science and technology should be fully implemented, innovation in auditing technology and methods should be strengthened, and modern information technology should be fully utilized to carry out auditing and improve the quality and efficiency of auditing", which is mainly reflected in the three aspects of enhancing the information technology to support the business capacity, improving the level of data management and strengthening the data resources

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analysis and utilization. Against this background, the contradiction between insufficient audit power and the arduous task of auditing has become more prominent, and how to effectively improve the quality of state auditing, and better enable it to play the role of an immune system in the broader system of national governance is an important issue.

After entering the 20th century, the rapid development of information technology has brought about profound changes and even transformations in society and industry, and national auditing has also been a part of its impact. The development of regional informatization can improve the cooperation among audit institutions through information sharing under the mechanism of cost reduction and accountability promotion under the mechanism of application of audit results. On the one hand, the networking audit, big data audit, government information disclosure and other supervisory methods formed by the development of regional informatization can largely reduce the number of financial and material resources required in the process of state auditing, so that the auditors can have more time and energy to analyze and study the potential risks of the audited objects. Besides, with the help of the government information system and data-sharing platforms, the cooperation between the audit authorities and supervision departments would be significantly strengthened, thus breaking down the information barriers and accelerating the speed of information transfer and sharing. On the other hand, the digital supervision platform formed by the development of regional informatization is conducive to the audit authorities' timely follow-up of illegal matters, urging disciplinary, inspection and supervisory departments to fasten the processing speed in due course, improving the degree of application of the audit results, and enhancing the efficiency of the auditee's rectification of relevant issues. However, has the development of regional information technology improved the quality of state audit? Further, what is the mechanism of its impact on the quality of state audit? These issues need to be studied in depth and are of great practical significance for the further implementation of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the Development of State Auditing, and for the construction of a centralized, unified, comprehensive, authoritative and efficient audit supervision system.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, domestic experts and scholars mostly study the factors affecting the quality of national audit from three aspects: audit subject, audit object, audit method and audit environment. In terms of audit subject, the audit functions undertaken by national audit institutions are not the same. The UK Audit Office, the Audit Commission, the Scottish Accounts Commission, and the Northern Ireland Audit Office have their own audit functions¹. China's audit agencies have a strong administrative attribute, to a certain extent, act as the country's "internal audit" role², and the administrative intervention of the local government will affect the independence of the audit, which in turn will have an impact on the quality of the national audit³.

In terms of audit personnel, the tenure length of the leader^{4,5,6}, the stability of the tenure⁷, the period of rotation⁸, the method of promotion, the personal characteristics,

the presence of experience in working with finances, and other characteristics of the tenure all have an impact on state audit quality.

In terms of audit object, Huang⁹ argues that the increase in the number of audit projects has a negative impact on the quality of state audits; Wu Qiusheng, Guo Mengnan, and Shangguan Zeming¹⁰ points out that the quality of the audit is on a decreasing trend with the increase in the number of audited units, but the efficiency of the auditing staff can significantly improve the audit efficiency.

In terms of audit approach, the two main points are audit organization approach and audit technique approach. Among them, Xu Kui and Leng Yanmei¹¹ argue that the integrated management of audit resources, the flexible use of internal and social audit resources, the detail and comprehensiveness of the audit plan, the choice of audit venues, and the implementation of penalties to deal with the problems detected are all important factors that affect the organizational management of audit projects. Specific audit organizational methods include but are not limited to upper and lower level linkage, digital audit platform^{12,13}, big data visualisation technology¹⁴ and blockchain technology¹⁵ and other technology approach innovation.

In terms of the audit environment, the relevant literature mainly focuses on the audit authority's own environment, social environment, and political environment. (1) Audit institution's own environment: Wu Qiusheng and Guo Wei¹⁶ find that the intensity of the audit task positively affects the performance of provincial audit institutions, which in turn improves the quality of the audit. (2) Social environment level: Xu Li¹⁷ argued that with the continuous development of the market economy of Chinese characteristics, the national audit authority can find more problems, more actively rectify problems, and adopt audit recommendations; Zheng Wei et al.¹⁸ found that with the development of the social informatization environment, the difficulty of auditing work increases, which in turn adversely affects the quality of auditing. (3) At Political environment: Zheng Weihong et al.¹⁹ point out that the degree of cleanliness of local high-level leading officials is significantly positively correlated with the performance of the revealing, resisting and preventing functions of government auditing.

In the field of national auditing, national audit institutions have proposed to strengthen the computerisation of auditing to promote high-quality development of auditing work. Internationally, national auditing authorities have proposed to strengthen the informationisation of auditing to promote the high-quality development of auditing work. The Belgian Supreme Audit Institution strengthens the team of auditors by adding specialists with strong data processing skills, participating in the whole process of auditing and enriching the functionality of the audit team, as well as developing a Structured Query Language (SQL) repository for storing recurring financial data streams from management²⁰. Significant differences exist in the administrative culture between the British Audit Office and the French Court of Auditors²¹. Domestically, scholars have explored the auditing technology methods combining high technology in the new era, and big data auditing can change the traditional auditing concept²², which makes data auditing come into being²³. Moreover, the positive impact of audit information technology on national auditing has also been discussed. Advances in information technology can make up for the shortcomings of traditional audit forensics and change the way of forensics, so that the forensics have new features of online, panoramic, full, real-

time, native, encrypted and intelligent²⁴. Zheng Wei et al.²⁵ found that national audit institutions choose to increase the investment in information technology, can significantly improve the impact of the social information technology environment on the quality of the audit, and improve the quality of national audit.

To conclude, existing literature on the factors affecting the quality of state audits has mainly studied the roles of the audit subject, the audit approach, the audit object and the audit environment, and has also begun to focus on the importance of the progress of the audit technology approach. However, most of the studies focus on the empirical research on the audit effect of audit information technology advancement on CPAs and the normative research on the effect of state auditing, and there has not yet been any literature to study how the region's overall informatization affects the quality of state auditing, and there is a lack of research on the moderating effect of digitalization development on the relationship between state audit independence and the quality of state auditing.

3 THEORETICAL ANALYSES AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

3.1 Regional information technology development and the quality of State audits

The synergistic supervisory role of the audit authorities with the supervision departments is mainly reflected in the efficiency and effectiveness of the handling of matters, persons and amounts referred by the audit authorities to these departments. The development of the regional digital economy can improve the synergistic supervisory role of audit institutions with these departments through the path of information sharing under the cost reduction mechanism and the path of accountability promotion under the mechanism of applying audit results. Therefore, based on the concept of common fiduciary economic responsibility, this paper sets the ratio of the total volume of regional postal and telecommunication business to the regional GNP as a measure for judging the level of regional informatization development, and examines whether it can improve the quality of state audits by achieving the three major functions of revelation, prevention, and correction, and puts forward the following hypotheses:

H1: The higher the level of information technology development in the region, the higher the quality of state audits.

3.2 Moderating effect of digitalization development on the relationship between state audit independence and the quality of state auditing

The development of informatization in the region can promote the disclosure of government information, improve the efficiency of information transmission, play a synergistic supervisory role, and further strengthen democratic politics. In other words, with a higher degree of digital development in the auditing environment (the province in which the auditing authority is located), the overall system construction will be more

complete, and it will be easier or more effective for the public to supervise the fulfilment of the government's fiduciary responsibility and whether government auditing is working. Combined with Guo Lemnan's (2021) view, the higher the level of audit digital development, the greater the timeliness and deterrence of state audits, implying the more independent audit disclosure. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: The higher the level of marketisation, the stronger the effect of regional digital development on improving the quality of state audits.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper measures the quality of national audits from different perspectives by dividing them into an exposing function (IN), a preventive function (EX), and a corrective function (HO). Among them, the disclosure function (IN) is measured by dividing the number of irregularities detected by the auditing authority in the audited units by the number of audited units; the prevention function (EX) is measured by dividing the number of adopted audit recommendations by the number of recommendations made by the audit; and the correction function (HO) is measured by dividing the number of matters dealt with by the relevant authorities by the number of matters referred to the relevant authorities.

The regional informatisation development level of each province is measured using the ratio of the total annual postal and telecommunications business to the annual GNP of that province to eliminate the effect of differences across provinces.

The control variables are selected as follows: the level of urbanisation (UR), measured by using the ratio of the urban population to the permanent resident population at the end of the year; the level of education of citizens (Edu), measured by using the average number of years of education of citizens; the level of economic development (LnGDP), measured by the natural logarithm of GDP per capita in each province; the level of economic openness (Open), measured by the ratio of FDI to GNP; and the level of the rule of law (Law), measured by the settlement rate of economic cases in each province.

China's national audit independence is mainly affected by local government administrative intervention, therefore this paper adopts the "marketisation index of each region" to define the independence of the state audit. The larger the marketisation index, the smaller the administrative intervention and the stronger the state audit independence. Therefore, the definitions of the specific variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Variable definitions and descriptions

Variable type	variable symbol	variable name	Variable description and calculation method
explanatory variable	IN	disclosure function	Measured by the number of non-compliance amounts in the audited units divided by the number of units audited

explanatory variable	EX	preventive function	Number of accepted audit recommendations divided by number of audit recommendations issued
	HO	Corrective function	Number of matters dealt with by the department concerned divided by the number of matters referred to the department concerned
moderator variable	DIGITAL	Regional informatisation development level	Ratio of total annual postal and telecommunications business to GNP
control variable	IND	National audit independence	Marketisation index
	UR	urbanisation level	Ratio of urban population to resident population at the end of the year
	EDU	Level of education of citizens	Average years of schooling of citizens
	LNGDP	Level of economic development	GDP per capita measured in natural logarithms
	OPEN	Economic openness	Ratio of FDI to GNP
	LAW	Rule of law level	Economic case completion rate

4.1 Modelling

To empirically verify that the higher the level of regional informatisation development, the higher the quality of state auditing (H1), this paper constructs model (1.1), model (1.2), and model (1.3) for empirical testing.

$$IN_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIDITAL_{it} + \alpha_2 EDU_{it} + \alpha_3 LNGDP_{it} + \alpha_4 OPEN_{it} + \alpha_5 LAW_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{1.1}$$

$$HO_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIDITAL_{it} + \alpha_2 EDU_{it} + \alpha_3 LNGDP_{it} + \alpha_4 OPEN_{it} + \alpha_5 LAW_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{1.2}$$

$$EX_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIDITAL_{it} + \alpha_2 EDU_{it} + \alpha_3 LNGDP_{it} + \alpha_4 OPEN_{it} + \alpha_5 LAW_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{1.3}$$

In order to empirically prove that state audit independence has an influential effect on the level of digital development to improve the independence of state audits, this paper constructs models (4)-(6) for empirical testing.

$$IN_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIDITAL_{it} + \alpha_2 MARKET_{it} + \alpha_3 DIDITAL_{it} \times MARKET_{it} + \alpha_4 EDU_{it} + \alpha_5 LNGDP_{it} + \alpha_6 OPEN_{it} + \alpha_7 LAW_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{4}$$

$$HO_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIDITAL_{it} + \alpha_2 MARKET_{it} + \alpha_3 DIDITAL_{it} \times MARKET_{it} + \alpha_4 EDU_{it} + \alpha_5 LNGDP_{it} + \alpha_6 OPEN_{it} + \alpha_7 LAW_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{5}$$

$$EX_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIDITAL_{it} + \alpha_2 MARKET_{it} + \alpha_3 DIDITAL_{it} \times MARKET_{it} + \alpha_4 EDU_{it} + \alpha_5 LNGDP_{it} + \alpha_6 OPEN_{it} + \alpha_7 LAW_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (6)$$

5 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Descriptive statistical analyses

Table 2 illustrates the results of descriptive statistical analyses. From the table we can know that the disclosure function performs well and large differences exist among provinces; the preventive function and the corrective function need to be improved, and large differences exist in these two variables.

Table 2. Analysis of descriptive statistics

variable	sample size	average value	standard deviation	minimum value	median	maximum values
IN	280	417.681	446.8362	29.3614	269.725	2253.3397
HO	280	0.5651	1.4687	0.0000	0.2692	11.0000
EX	280	0.6833	0.1223	0.2986	0.6893	0.9284
GOLD	280	0.6286	0.4841	0.0000	1.0000	1.0000
DIDITAL	280	0.0463	0.0245	0.0151	0.0377	0.1114
MARKET	280	6.3409	1.7620	2.8800	6.1850	10.2000
EDU	280	9.0250	0.9110	7.0343	8.9254	12.1002
LNGDP	280	9.5659	0.8388	7.2962	9.5744	11.3165
OPEN	280	0.0247	0.0215	0.0007	0.0200	0.1079
LAW	280	0.9975	0.0471	0.8230	0.9985	1.2120

5.2 Analysis of empirical results

5.2.1 Regional informatization development level and the quality of State audits

The regression results are reported in Table 3 and it can be seen that the regression coefficient between the development of regional informatisation (DIGITAL) and the revealing function of state auditing (IN) is 0.2758 and is significant at the 1% level, the regression coefficient with the preventive function of state auditing (HO) is 0.1281 and is significant at the 5% level, and the regression coefficient with the corrective function of state auditing (EX) is 0.1028 and is significant at the 10% level, which can verify the hypothesis H2, that is, the higher the level of development of regional information technology, the better the quality of state audit. The phenomenon in practice is reflected in the following: when the regional informatisation development level is lower, the level of IT construction is lower, which is not conducive to the creation of information systems, restricting the access of auditing institutions to more comprehensive audit-related information, and restricting their cooperation with relevant departments. With the improvement of regional informatization level, the information barriers between various departments have been broken, and the auditing institutions can better realize the three

"transformations" of auditing supervision, that is. from a single after-audit to a combination of after-audit and during-audit, from a single static audit to a combination of static and dynamic audit, and from a single on-site audit to a combination of on-site and remote audit. In other words, the development of information technology in the region has enhanced the ability of auditing institutions to investigate and correct mistakes, regulate management, expose corruption and combat crime in a computer environment, and can play a role in maintaining economic order and promoting the construction of a clean and efficient government.

Table 3. Regional level of information technology development and the quality of state audits

	(1) IN	(2) HO	(3) EX
DIDITAL	0.2758*** (4.0264)	0.1281* (1.7394)	0.1028* (1.6825)
UR	-0.1236 (-0.8548)	0.0499 (0.3198)	-0.5256*** (-4.0736)
EDU	0.3087** (2.2538)	-0.0393 (-0.2667)	0.1624 (1.3286)
LNGDP	-0.1001 (-1.5482)	-0.0597 (-0.8567)	0.5254*** (9.1060)
OPEN	-0.0959 (-1.3920)	-0.0504 (-0.6790)	0.1523** (2.4774)
LAW	-0.0296 (-0.5183)	-0.0278 (-0.4525)	0.0643 (1.2595)
N	280	280	280
R ²	0.1203	0.0082	0.2995

Standardized beta coefficients; t statistics in parentheses * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

5.2.2 Regional level of information technology development, State audit independence and State audit quality

The regression results are shown in Table 4. After adding the cross-multiplier term (DIDITAL_MARKET), the regression coefficients between DIGITAL and the quality of state auditing (IN, HO, EX) are all positive. Similarly, the coefficients between the cross-multiplier term (DIDITAL_MARKET) and the quality of state auditing (IN, HO, EX) are also all positive. Meanwhile, the regression coefficients between the cross-multiplier term (DIDITAL_MARKET) and IN is 0.0107 and is significant at the level of 5%; the regression coefficients between the cross-multiplier term (DIDITAL_MARKET) and HO is 0.2419 and is significant at the level of 1%; the regression coefficients between the cross-multiplier term (DIDITAL_MARKET) and EX is 0.1810 and is not significant, indicating that the higher level of marketisation is, the stronger effect of regional informatisation development on improving the quality of state auditing in terms of the disclosure and preventive functions exerts, but does not affect the corrective function.

Table 4. Moderating effect of the level of marketisation on the relationship between the development of information technology in the region and the quality of state audits

	(1) IN	(2) HO	(3) EX
DIDITAL	0.1066* (1.8923)	0.3715** (2.3968)	0.2973*** (2.8562)
MARKET	0.2188* (1.7089)	0.1185 (0.8029)	0.0458 (0.4468)
DIDITAL_MARKET	0.0107** (2.1302)	0.2419*** (3.2332)	0.1805 (1.4448)
UR	0.1692 (0.4311)	-0.7340 (-1.1829)	-1.0191*** (-4.6971)
EDU	0.2500*** (3.3480)	-0.3594 (-1.3514)	-0.0719 (-0.5811)
LNGDP	0.8846** (2.3636)	0.7050 (1.3735)	1.2370*** (5.0702)
OPEN	-0.2228** (-2.2558)	-0.0288 (-1.0287)	0.1004* (2.0505)
LAW	-0.0585** (-2.6134)	-0.0586 (-1.4477)	0.0313* (1.7595)
N	280	280	280
R ²	0.2207	0.0323	0.2519

Standardised beta coefficients; t statistics in parentheses * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

6 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This paper empirically examines the impact of regional informatisation development level on state audit quality and the moderating effect of state audit independence between the two, using the provincial local audit authorities in China as a sample from 2008-2017. The findings show that the higher the level of regional informatisation development, the better the quality of state auditing, and the higher the level of marketisation, the stronger the effect of regional informatisation development on the disclosure and prevention functions of improving the quality of state auditing but does not affect the corrective function of regional informatisation development in improving the quality of state auditing.

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