

Local Determinants of the Enforcement and Defiance of  
Village Election Laws in China

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the late 1990s, village-level elections have been mandatory throughout China's more than 600,000 villages, and they in theory should enfranchise roughly 800 million people in rural areas. Yet implementation of the national law and the associated provincial laws have been quite poor; research shows that the majority of local governments fail to meet the basic standards of the laws, and a significant percentage fail to even hold elections at all. What determines how well the election law is implemented at the local level? Using original multi-level survey data from China's two largest provinces, Henan and Shandong, I show that the key determinant of election law implementation is the approach of the higher level government to village self-governance. Higher public education levels may also matter, yet greater economic self-interest is not a significant determinant of electoral rule of law. This finding is in marked contrast to theories that focus blame on village-level pathologies or individual-level inadequacies, such as local clan disputes and low political interest. It also contrasts with a common belief that credits the enforcement of village election laws (or other legal reforms) to an engaged public. Considering that elections are visible and high-stakes, and thus are more likely to attract public engagement than some other democracy-enhancing legal reforms, this finding raises questions about how effective the public alone can be at demanding that authority-challenging legal reforms be implemented in repressive political contexts. Significantly improving laws in this arena – in which democracy enhancement is clearly associated with building the rule of law – may require bringing more attention to improving top-down (not just bottom-up) incentives for official compliance.

Limited democratic reforms, such as the introduction of constrained elections or the institutionalization of a new forum for public participation, are not uncommon in authoritarian regimes. Yet even when such reforms have been written into law by higher authorities, they are often selectively or poorly implemented. What accounts for lower-level failures in the rule of law in this arena; and what might be done to improve implementation? Locating good answers to this pair of questions is important for improving the impact of existing reforms, but it is also vital for accurately assessing a broader question: whether the incremental pursuit of minor democratic changes in an authoritarian regime is likely to ever add up to major democratic progress. In this paper, I consider these issues through a within-country study of the implementation of village elections in China. Since the late 1990s, village-level elections have been mandatory in rural areas across the country. Yet, the implementation of the national law (and associated provincial laws) has been quite poor, as well as varied across space. Research shows that the majority of elections do not meet the basic standards of the laws, and a significant percentage fail to even hold elections at all.

What determines how well the national election law is implemented at the local level? Two kinds of explanations prevail. On the one hand, implementation failures are often attributed to the existence of particularly difficult local populations—an ungovernable or uneducated public, or an independent mafia or entrenched factions. Or implementation successes may be attributed to particularly active local populations—a demanding and capable public, or effective activists and civil organizations. These views share in common a

focus on *bottom-up* drivers of reform implementation. They contrast to an alternate set of explanations: that the *top-down* drivers of implementation vary across space and time. In particular, local governments' political skills, political resources, and/or political will to implement electoral laws may vary.

The two explanations have very different implications for promoting democratic change. If bottom-up drivers are mainly responsible for the quality of election law implementation, the implication is that efforts to improve implementation should focus on the populace: on improving education, awareness, political skills, and organizations. Moreover, it suggests that new reforms should not be attempted until the public has shown itself to be ready. Yet, if top-down drivers are mainly responsible, the implication is that improvements will come most rapidly through enhancing the ability, incentives, and norms that encourage government officials to adhere to electoral laws. Moreover, new democratic reforms are unlikely to do much better unless the incentives or nature of leaders change. Beyond that, if top-down drivers are a major reason for poor implementation, then it becomes plausible that building the rule of law over *democracy-enhancing reforms* faces special challenges within an authoritarian structure; and it may be useful to try to elaborate these.

In this paper, using original multi-level survey data from China's two largest provinces, Henan and Shandong, I show that a key determinant of village election law implementation is the attitude that the higher level government holds towards village self-governance. At the same time, higher education levels also correspond to better election implementation. It remains to be understood whether this is indicative of a top-down driver (that leaders are more willing to empower an educated public) or a bottom-up driver (that a more educated public can effectively demand better election implementation). No evidence is found in support of bottom-up theories that systematically blame implementation failures

on local socio-political fissures like clan divisions.

These findings suggest particular challenges may accompany efforts to build the rule of law when it comes to democracy-enhancing reforms within an authoritarian regime. I consider these issues in the conclusion. I also discuss the reach and the limits of this study, and I propose directions for new research. This project is a work in progress, and I am grateful for any comments, including suggestions arising from empirical research and theoretical perspectives from elsewhere.

## **I. ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHINA'S VILLAGE ELECTIONS**

China is a particularly interesting and appropriate arena for understanding the rule of law in the arena of democracy-enhancing reforms because, despite the restrictive political environment, it has a well-established and varied history of grassroots village elections. Beginning in the 1980s, village elections have been implemented, unevenly and with varying degrees of success, across rural areas of the country. Despite their often poor quality, the elections have a vast potential impact on the country's political development, as they are now required by law in the country's 644,000 villages, which encompass 800 million people (PRC State Council Information Office, "White paper on political democracy" 2005). Moreover, independents widely run and not infrequently win in these elections: a reality that contrasts sharply with the negligible competition that typically characterizes China's other types of public elections (which include its county and township People's Congress elections, and the urban neighborhood elections that place in selected districts). On top of this, the Chinese leadership explicitly speaks of them as a stepping stone in the country's democratic evolution, implying that their successes or failures may affect when and how the country

takes further democratizing steps. The enormity of the experiment to date, and the potential impact that it may have on future democratic change in China, makes village elections a very important subject of study in and of themselves. At the same time, village elections are both established and embattled enough to be an excellent launching point for theorizing about the implementation of reform laws in authoritarian regimes more generally. They offer an unusually informative opportunity for multivariate research because within-country comparisons are possible due to large variations in competitiveness, socio-economic context, and authoritarian pressures across villages.

### **Overview of the 1998 Organic Law on Villager Committees**

Essential requirements of China's national village elections law include periodic elections for Village Committees, universal enfranchisement within villages, direct nomination by villagers, advance publicity of eligible voters, anonymous voting, a secret voting booth, a minimum requirement of 50 percent participation by villagers, open counting of ballots, and immediate announcement of results. Many provinces add more stringent requirements over aspects such as how the election should be organized, acceptable methods of nomination, whether candidates are entitled to give public speeches, and what should be done if an election fails. However, in reality, elections practices often do not accord with legal standards of the national law, let alone the provincial laws or international standards. Not uncommonly, the elections are not even held every cycle or never have been implemented in a given location. Official statistics acknowledge that village elections are not fully implemented, but still significantly overstate their quality. The discrepancies between the laws, official reports, and the realities make it critical to independently and methodologically assess the elections.

## Methods for Investigating Village Election Law Implementation

One of the great difficulties in explaining the implementation of village elections in China has been the lack of appropriate multi-level data with good measures of bottom-up drivers, top-down pressures, and election implementation. To overcome this difficulty, in this study, I examine an unusual multilevel dataset encompassing individual level, village level, and township level measures over village democracy variables. This survey was collaboratively designed and implemented by Pierre Landry, Shiru Wang, and myself while at Yale University; as well as the Research Center on Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University.<sup>1</sup> The project was implemented in 2005 and 2006 in China's two largest provinces, Shandong and Henan, which together contain 185 million people between them, or 14 percent of China's population (All China Data Center 2007a, 2007c). Altogether, it includes individual surveys of 574 respondents over 14 townships and 26 administrative villages; qualitative interviews with the village leaderships; village election historical data; and interviews with supervising township officials in China's two most populous provinces. The data collected provides an especially rich understanding of election experiences in Shandong and Henan—taking into account election preparations, the nomination process, the voting process, attempts to undermine the elections, and earlier elections. It also provides a portrait of the various economic, social, and authoritarian contexts of the elections. Because of the layers of qualitative and quantitative information, each location serves as a revealing episode;

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Yale's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies and the Yale Council on East Asian Studies for major financial support for the 2005-6 survey project. Thanks are also due to the Yale Graduate School, Yale's Leitner Program in International and Comparative Political Economy, the Brookings Institution, and the Princeton Society of Fellows & Woodrow Wilson School for financial and/or institutional support which enabled subsequent research and development of the findings and ideas in this paper.

while collectively, the data are a representative sample of individuals and villages in the chosen provinces. **Appendix K** more fully describes the particular measures crafted from this data and used in this paper.

### **Measuring Implementation of the Most Recent Election Process**

I develop and employ a five-point index to measure the implementation of the most recent village election. The first measure is simply whether or not an election with contestation was held for the position of Village Head. I define contestation by whether or not the Village Head position was subject to a *cha-e* election,<sup>2</sup> that is, an election with a more candidates than winners. If this condition is not met, the election is coded to the lowest possible quality of implementation. If it is the case, election implementation is coded according to a combination of the four other measures: the extent of enfranchisement, the quality of voter preparation, the inclusiveness of the nomination process, and the quality of voting procedures.<sup>3</sup> All of these measures are continuous measures of the degree to which

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<sup>2</sup> The term *cha-e xuanju* might be translated as “an election with not enough positions” for all the candidates. In other words, it is an election with contestation, if not necessarily true competition; there are more candidates than available seats, so someone must lose. I look in particular at whether or not the election for Village Head (there is typically a separate vote for the Village Head, versus for the other Village Committee members) was a *cha-e* election.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Tianjian Shi for his feedback on creating an election quality index and his emphasis on five critical elements: the number of candidates per seat, the formation of the election oversight committee, the nomination process, the confirmation of formal candidates, and the secrecy of the ballot. I incorporate three of these elements directly; and rather than focusing on the formation of the election oversight committee and the confirmation of formal candidates, I use two other measures, the extent of enfranchisement and the quality of voter preparation. In fact, the democratic nature of the election oversight committee should be quite collinear with these two measures. I do not examine the confirmation of formal candidates because information on this process was not fully available. However, where primary elections, or *baixuan*, are held, the most popular candidates nominated are supposed to be automatically confirmed. In these cases, the nomination process is also very open; so that my measure of nomination process should capture whether or not there is a more democratic confirmation process.

the major legal requirements of the law are enforced, as detailed in **Figure 1**. To ensure the greatest accuracy, they are based on villagers' survey responses (rather than official reports), with one exception: the question of whether or not a *cha-e* election was held. This last measure was constructed from other sources, particularly the qualitative interviews.

**Figure 1**  
**Measuring Implementation of Village Committee Elections**

<b>Implementation of Latest Election Process</b>	
Contestation	whether a <i>cha-e</i> election was held for Village Head (with a choice of candidates) <i>1998 Organic Law: public election must be held, with choice of candidates (Article 10)</i>
Enfranchisement	percent of villagers who believed they were welcome to vote <i>1998 Organic Law: residents over 18 have the right to vote (Article 12)</i>
Voter Preparation	percent of villagers who know of the law on Village Committee elections <i>1998 Organic Law: Village Committees should publicize laws (Article 6)</i>
	extent to which average advance notice of election approaches 20 days <i>1998 Organic Law: Lists of voters should be publicized 20 days before election (Article 12)</i>
Nomination Openness	percent of villagers who believed they had the right to nominate <i>1998 Organic Law: All voters have the right to nominate candidates (Article 14)</i>
Vote Secrecy	secrecy of the ballot, according to villagers' reports <i>1998 Organic Law: Anonymous ballots and secret voting booths required (Article 14)</i>

*Contestation:*

In the sample, one village was judged to have never held a *cha-e* election, notwithstanding official records that stated otherwise, both because village leaders admitted to this and because many villagers asserted this in qualitative and survey interviews.

*Enfranchisement*

By law, all villagers over the age of 18 should be enfranchised.<sup>4</sup> However, villagers may sometimes not be allowed to vote in elections, may not truly be welcome to do so, or

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<sup>4</sup> “But those who are deprived of political rights in accordance with the law are excluded.” Article 12, Organic Law on the Villager Committees of the People’s Republic of China, November 4, 1998.

may not be told of elections. The distribution of the franchise may discriminate politically (as when only leaders or Party members may vote), by gender (as when only men or family heads may vote), by geography (as when not all areas are informed of an election) or in a variety of other ways. I measure the effective levels of enfranchisement by whether or not respondents believed they would be allowed to vote in their Village Committee election.

The data reveals that effective levels of enfranchisement were quite poor in a few cases. I was able to make this judgment based on the open-ended explanations given by non-voting villagers to explain why they did not vote. Only responses that clearly indicated disenfranchisement were coded as such, including “only Party members can vote,” “only the men vote,” and “no one told me about the election.” Responses such as “I was busy,” “I was working out of town,” or “I’m too old” were not coded as disenfranchisement because it is ambiguous whether or not the respondent was ever informed about the election.

As shown in **Appendix A**, in three villages, the rate of effective enfranchisement was 53 percent or less, including one village in which only 29 percent of respondents thought they would be allowed to vote. In contrast, in nine villages, 100 percent of adult respondents were effectively enfranchised, as they should be under the law. In all, sixty percent of villages had enfranchisement rates of at least 90 percent.

### *Voter Preparation*

The Organic Law requires that laws and lists of eligible voters be publicized within the village. The lists of voters should be made public twenty days before the election. While the law does not require that each and every voter be informed of their rights, and while voters might also learn about elections from other unofficial sources, the extent of poorly informed voters appears closely correlated to poor implementation of the election law by

official election organizers. With this in mind, I examine two component factors. The first factor measures the extent to which the average amount of notice that villagers had of an election approaches twenty days. The second factor measures the percentage of villagers who knew of the national law that requires public elections for Village Committee.

As shown in **Appendix B**, the average amount of advance notice that voters received of an election varied widely, from several hours in one village to more than twenty days in only one village. This does not count the voters who had never voted in a village election, some of whom may have received less notice. In the median village, voters had about one week's notice of an election. In order to take into account the fact that the number of days of notice probably does not have a linear relationship to election quality—because there is a more meaningful difference between 0 and 3 days of notice than between, say, 20 and 23 days of notice—the amount of notice that villagers had was scaled on an index from 0 to 8. This index treats differences between large amounts of notice as less meaningful than differences between limited amounts of notice.

In addition, voter preparation was measured by the percentage of villagers who knew of the Village Committee election law, the 1998 Organic Law on Villager Committees, which legally enfranchises them. Sixty-one percent of villagers reported knowing of the law, but the percentage of villagers who knew of the law ranged widely across villages, from a low of 11 percent in one village to a high of 89 percent in another village. The quality of voter preparation apparently varies widely from village to village.

### *Nomination*

By the national law, “villagers in the village shall directly nominate candidates”

(Article 14, Organic Law).<sup>5</sup> Because a common way of undermining this rule is to neglect to inform or even misinform villagers about their rights, I measure implementation of this provision by the percentage of villagers who believed they had the right to directly nominate a candidate. As shown in **Appendix C**, most of the nomination processes are quite closed in practice. Also, the openness of the process does not seem to vary across provinces, notwithstanding Shandong's more stringent law that requires primary elections (*baixuan*). In six villages, none of the survey respondents reported having a direct right to nominate. In another five villages, less than ten percent reported having the right. On the other hand, in seven villages, more than 20 percent of respondents reported a right to nominate; and in two of these, more than 40 percent had an effective right to nominate.

#### *Vote Secrecy*

The Organic Law requires anonymous ballots and secret ballot booths. All of the villages with elections reported having secret ballots. However, because many villagers reported in our survey that they did not feel fully confident in the secrecy of their vote, as shown in **Appendix D**, I measured the secrecy of the ballot in a village according to average villager reports. In nearly all the villages, one or more persons reported that they thought that others, besides their family and close friends, might know how they voted. This somewhat subjective measure was used, rather than a more objective measure like whether or not a secret ballot booth was available, because even when secret ballot booths are

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that nominated candidates do not necessarily become the final candidates on the ballot (even by law, as the laws on the “confirmation” of final candidates vary by province). But it is harder for authorities to refuse to confirm the most popular nominated candidates when the nomination rule is well-implemented. Thus, this implementation measure is also a reasonable measure of a more democratic process.

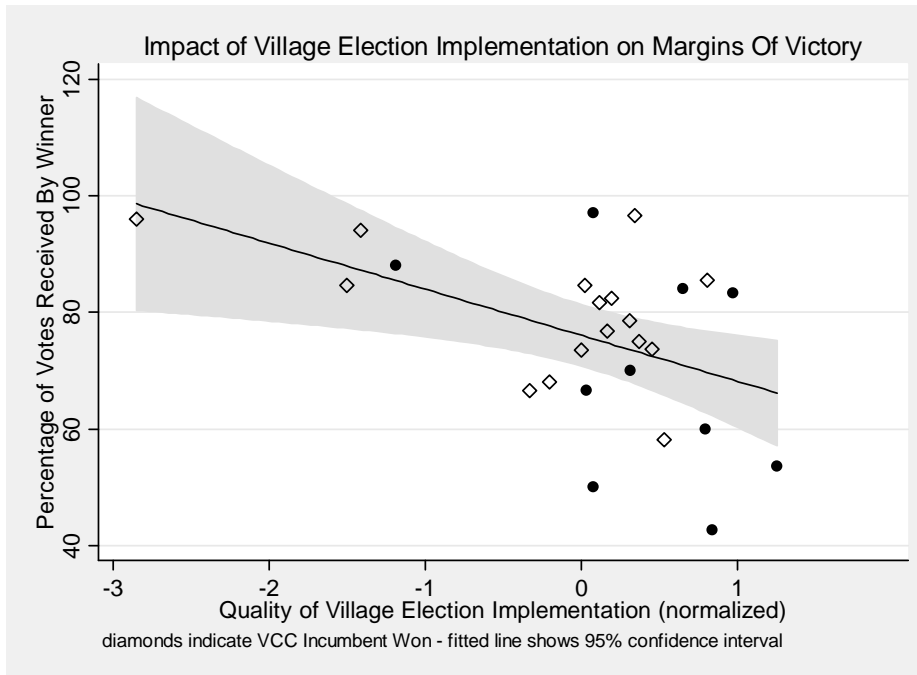
present, they may be for show and actual voting may be set up to take place outside of them. Moreover, asking about the perceived secrecy of the vote encompasses the anonymity of the ballot, which is a separate requirement of Article 14 of the Organic Law.

## II. ELECTION IMPLEMENTATION AS RULE OF LAW, NOT RULE BY AUTHORITIES

An important issue that should be resolved before further proceeding with this study is the question of whether election law implementation is truly indicative of rule of law, versus rule by authoritarian leaders. If election laws are implemented only to the degree that they suit the outcomes desired by authoritarian leaders, then election implementation would not represent the rule of law at all—but rather be an tool of rule by authorities. On the other hand, if the implementation of elections laws leads to outcomes that authoritarian leaders would not choose, then elections have an independent impact, as they should under rule of law. In this section, I show evidence that, in aggregate, the system of village elections leads to outcomes beyond authorities' control. Effectively, authorities are indeed binding themselves by the law and ceding an amount of authority to villagers to choose their leaders.

I explore this question by considering the following possibilities: If elections did not matter, then better implemented elections should be well controlled to ensure that they are simply “for show.” However, if elections do matter, then better implemented elections should be riskier elections for officials. The latter is what seems to be the case, as shown by **Figure 2**, which plots election implementation against the percentage of votes received by the winner. As election implementation is better, margins of victory are significantly narrower, indicating that elections with better processes are also truly more competitive.

**Figure 2**

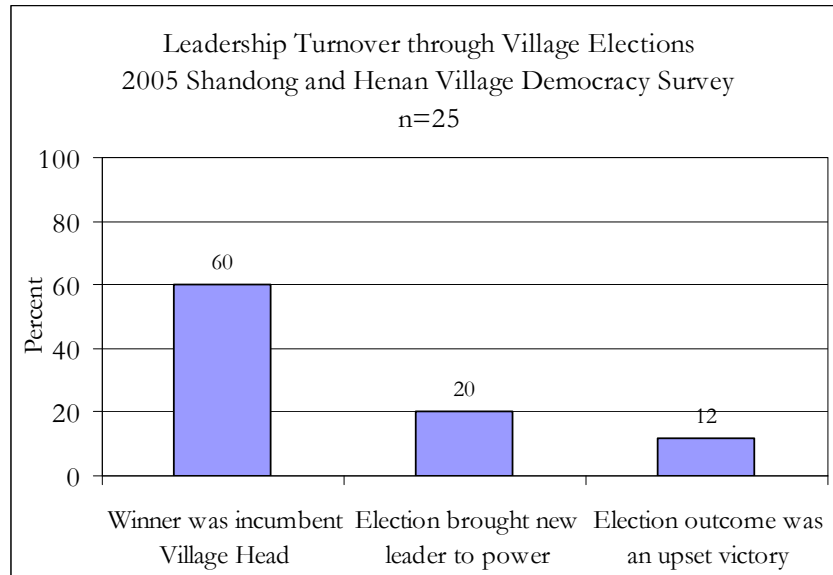


Better quality elections are not only more competitive, they also may produce turnover and bring to office persons who would almost certainly not otherwise be in office. As also shown in **Figure 2**, while the majority of Village Committee elections in the survey were won by the incumbent Village Head, the margins of victory were not as overwhelming as one would expect if the outcome were guaranteed. The incumbent Village Head ran in at least 17 of the 25 villages that held elections, and lost in at least two of them. At the same time, in 20 percent of the elections, the victor was someone other than the incumbent *or* the Village Party Secretary. That is, a new top village leader came to power through the election.

Moreover, as shown in **Figure 3**, in 12 percent of the elections, the victory could be considered an “upset victory” over the entrenched powers: when either a non-Party member defeated a Party member, or someone other than the Village Party Secretary defeated the incumbent Village Head. Given the preference that townships have for Party members and Village Party Secretaries to hold the position of Village Head, this is almost

certainly not their preferred outcome. Village elections thus threaten authoritarian choices.

**Figure 3**

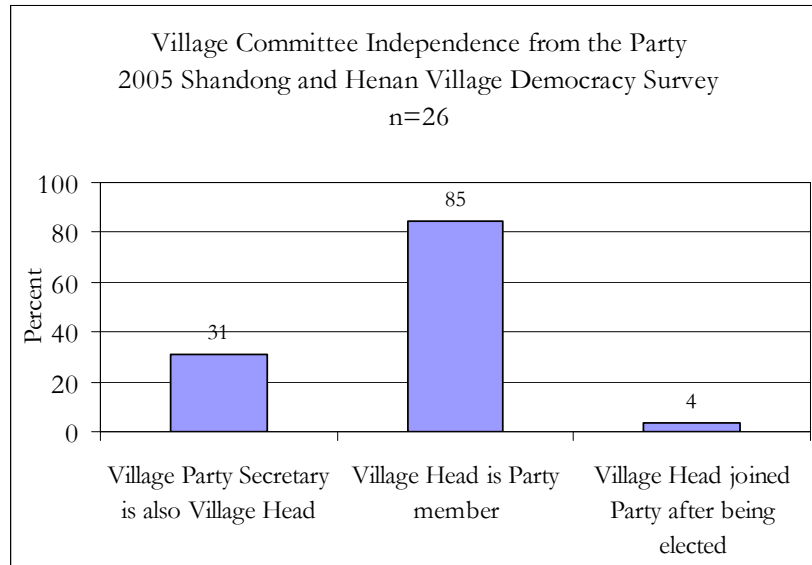


Even as elections seem to generate new types of leaders, authoritarian leaders do have high success rates in the elections. In particular, from the surveys of the 14 townships in the sample, we know that a village party secretary almost always wins when he runs. The high success rate of Village Party Secretaries is likely largely attributable to the institutional and personal resources they can bring to bear in the election. Yet, the fact that Village Party Secretaries almost always win the elections in which they compete is perhaps less interesting than the fact that Village Party Secretaries often do not run for election. This is despite the official policy that they should, suggesting strategic decisions to run only when certain to win. This underscores the fact that elections are not in the control of authoritarian leaders.

Looking at the composition of Village Heads according to Party ties, it is also evident that winners do not reflect the officially-stated Communist Party preferences that Village heads are Party members and double as Village Party Secretaries. As **Figure 4** shows, only 31 percent of Village Party Secretaries are Village Head. A large portion, 85 percent, are Party members (of which one joined the Party only after becoming Village Head), indicating

significant, but not at all complete, domination of the positions by the Party.

**Figure 4**



Altogether, the evidence clearly indicates that elections have an independent impact, bringing about village leadership changes that authoritarian leaders would not choose. When elections are better implemented, they also seem to be less in the control of authorities. Elections represent actual, not simply apparent, increases in the rule of law.

### III. DETERMINANTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ELECTION LAW

The previous sections demonstrated that electoral law, when implemented, effectively transfers power from authoritarian leaders to the public; but that overall implementation of the law is poor in Shandong and Henan. There is also high variation in implementation, and thus in the rule of law in this arena, across locales. Are such large variations due to village and sub-village conditions—or to the wider context surrounding the village? On the one hand, implementation failures are often attributed to the existence of particularly difficult local populations, such as ones featuring factional strife. A positive

version of this explanation is that implementation successes are often driven by particularly active local populations—a demanding and capable public, or effective activists and organizations. These views share in common a focus on bottom-up drivers of reform implementation. They contrast to an alternate set of explanations: that the top-down drivers of implementation vary across space and time. In particular, local governments’ political skills, political resources, and/or political will to implement electoral laws may vary.

In this section, I assess the impact of three possible bottom-up drivers of election implementation: popular self-interest (as measured by villagers’ economic dependence on the village); public political know-how (as measured by education levels); and local factional strife (as measured by villager concerns about clan or neighborhood splits in the village). I also assess the influence of the major top-down driver of village election implementation, the township government. In China, all villages are contained within township governments, each of which typically serves as the higher government to dozens of village units.

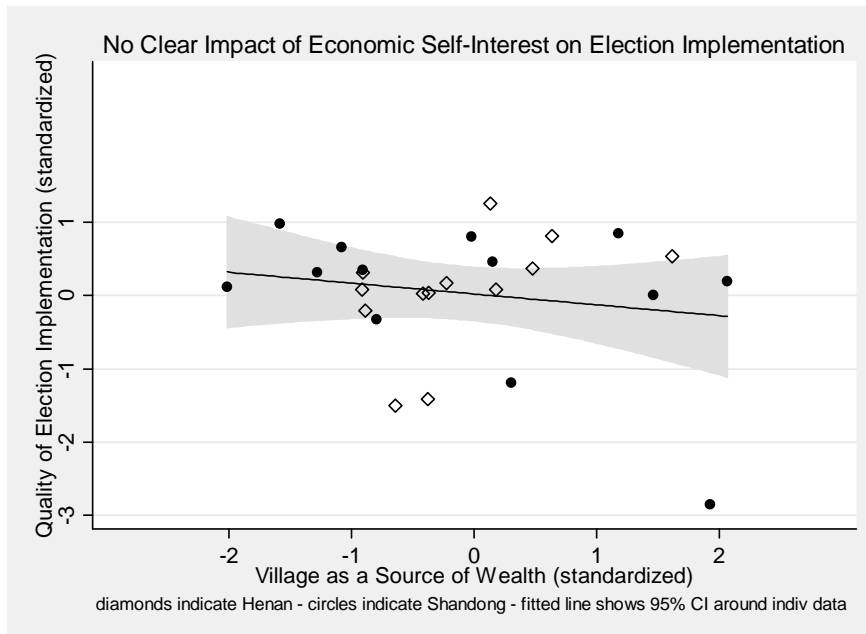
### **Villager Self-Interest: The Importance of the Village as a Source of Villager Wealth**

Because the Village Committee is supposed to have authority over village resources, which include land, public and private enterprises, and the village budget, the Village Committee might be a more important entity when village resources are more sizable and when villagers are more reliant upon those resources. In these circumstances, villagers might become more engaged in local politics, as Rong Hu has found in Fujian province (Hu 2005). Villagers would have a greater incentive to be more watchful and wary of their leaders, theoretically creating a positive impact on public political engagement. To the extent villagers can effectively translate any heightened interest into systemic political influence, greater economic self-interest in the village should cause better election implementation.

I first create an index of Economic Importance of the Village to help capture this concept. I measure the relative importance of the village economic resources to villagers by a combination of three measures: the extent to which villager incomes come from sources within the village, the average size of villager farmland plots, and the importance of any village enterprises within the villages. These measures vary significantly from village to village, as shown in **Appendices E, F, and G**. For instance, the proportion of village income that is from village sources is as low as 1.5 percent in one village, and as high as 85 percent in another. The average size of villager farmland plots also varies significantly, even within densely populated Shandong and Henan, from less than one tenth of an acre to 1.2 acres. Village enterprises play a limited role in the villages within the survey. More than half of villages do not have any village enterprises, and of those that do, none has enterprises scoring more than a 3 on a scale of importance ranging from 0 to 18. The importance of the village enterprises is measured using villager assessments of the enterprises' impact over six dimensions: work opportunities, the villagers' standard of living, the leaders' standard of living, the village's income, the amount of farmland in the village, and the environment.

This composite measure is then weighted by the average wealth of villagers, as assessed through an index of their major household possessions, to generate a final index of the Village as Source of Villager Wealth. There is great variation in the extent to which villages control economic resources that produce wealth for villagers. A simple bivariate regression shows that there is no statistically significant correlation between the index and election implementation, as shown in **Figure 5**. There is also no statistically significant relationship between the variables within the subset of any single province, although it might visually appear as if Shandong and Henan data follow different patterns.

**Figure 5**



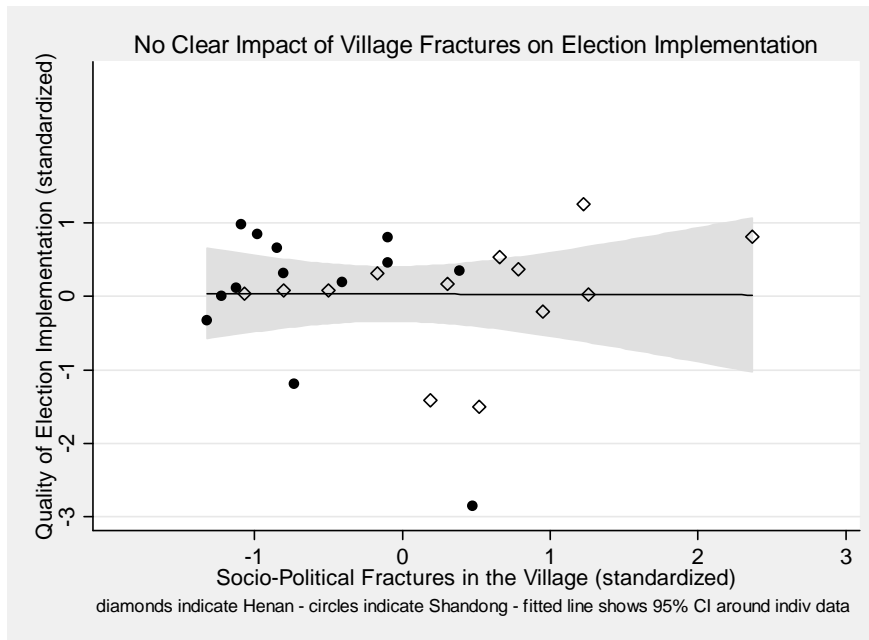
While the sample size of 26 villages across two provinces is limited in its ability to detect a weak or noisy relationship, this study finds no evidence that self-interest in the village affects election implementation. (Later in this section, multivariate analysis is applied to ascertain whether a significant relationship is apparent under a fuller model). This is not to say that self-interest in village affairs has no local political impact; in the next section, I show that it increases how much village leaders listen to villagers and villagers’ participatory attitudes.

### **Factional Strife: Socio-political Cleavages**

Fractures within the village are measured by the extent to which villagers reported that they would worry if someone from their lineage group, or else own hamlet (“natural village”), were not in the village leadership. In a few villages, the percentage of people who would worry if someone from their natural village were not in the village leadership was particularly high, above 40 percent. Concerns about clan divisions were less severe, but in three villages, at least 20 percent of respondents said they would worry if someone from

their lineage group were not in the village leadership. Overall, the variation in socio-political cleavages, which combines lineage and natural village-based divisions, ranged from nearly zero to almost sixty percent, as indicated in **Appendix H**. There is no significant correlation between the socio-political cleavages and election implementation, as shown in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6**



While the sample size of 26 villages across two provinces is limited in its ability to detect a weak or noisy relationship, this study finds no evidence that fractured villages systematically have poorer election implementation. (Later in this section, multivariate analysis is applied to ascertain whether a significant relationship is apparent under a fuller model). This is not to say that village fractures have no local political impact; in the next section, I show that it seems to reduce the participatory attitudes of villagers. This may be because villagers are less likely to find participation efficacious or easy in fractured villages.

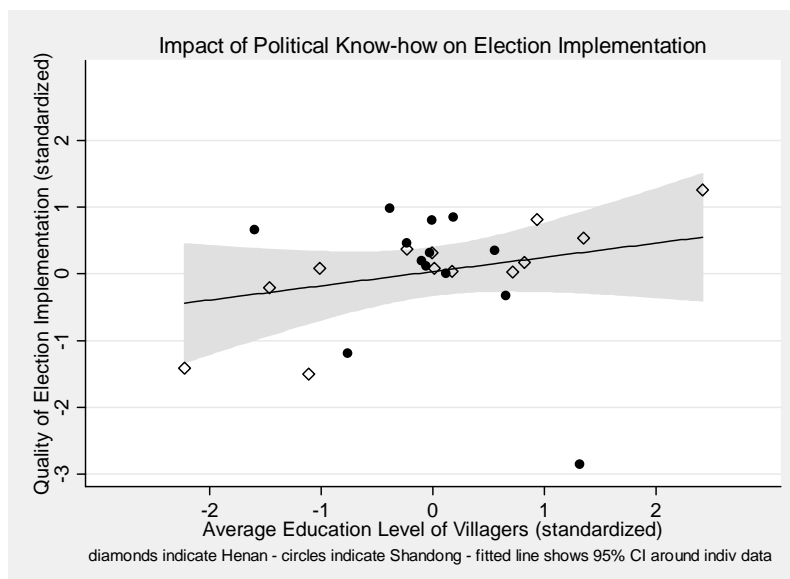
### Education Levels

Knowledge of how to find information, judge it, and act on it may be important

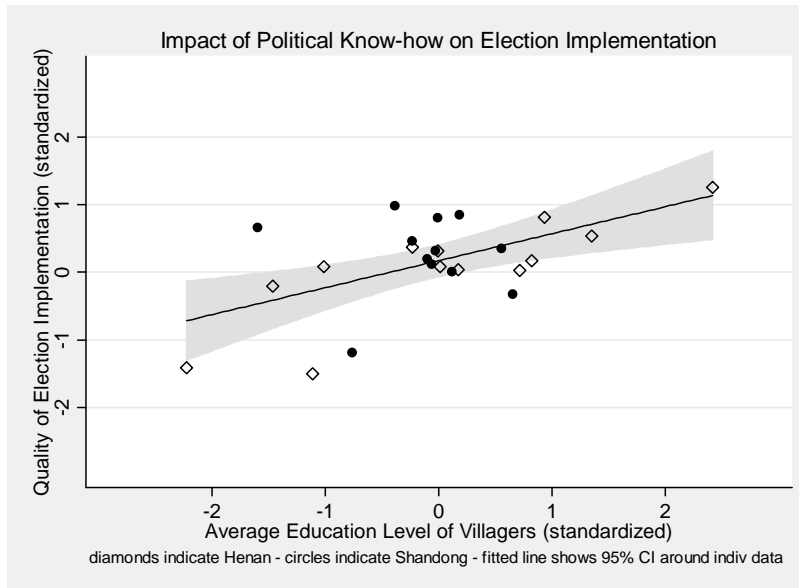
skills, and forms of leverage, for demanding the implementation of political reforms such as elections. Here, I approximate such “political know-how” by examining the average level of villager education in each village. Villager education levels are measured on a 7-point scale, in which 0 represents never having attended school, 1 represents a primary school education, 2 represents a lower middle school education, and onwards through graduate level education. Average village education levels ranged from a low of 0.44 to a high of 2.2.

The relationship between election implementation and education level appears positive in the scatter plot, yet is not statistically significant (**Figure 7**)—unless the data point for the one village that had no election is dropped (**Figure 8**). As that village was also a relatively well-educated village, in which 70 percent of respondents had finished lower middle school and 12 percent had finished upper middle school, it appeared as an outlier in terms of election implementation (shown in the lower right corner of **Figure 7**). However, there is reason to be concerned that the relationship is superficial, as education levels are highly correlated with knowledge, and some component parts of the Election Implementation index reflect knowledge of the election law or awareness of village politics.

**Figure 7: All villages**



**Figure 8: Villages that held an election in the last round**

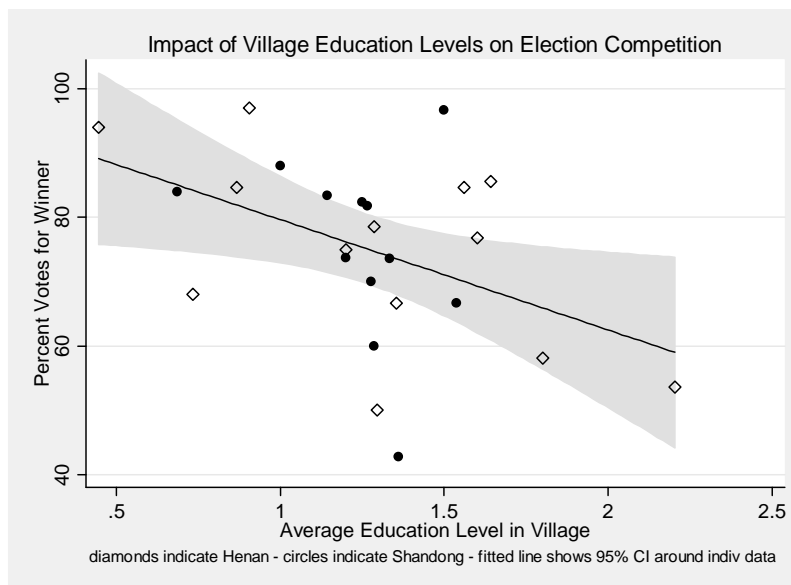


In order to check whether or not there is a true relationship between the quality of election implementation and village education levels, I regress village education levels on a measure of election competition that is correlated with election implementation but should not be directly correlated with political knowledge. This measure is percentage of votes received by the winner. **Figure 8a**, based on the data for the villages which held elections, shows that this relationship is significant and not likely to be simply due to a correlation between knowledge and education levels.

There remains the question of why the relationship is only significant across villages that held elections, but not when the village without an election is included in the data. A theoretical interpretation of this difference is that village education levels may bear a different relationship to elections that are partially implemented, versus to those that are not implemented at all. For instance, perhaps a better education does not help villagers to acquire elections when they have none, but can help them to effectively demand more once from elections once they are provided an opening. This hypothesis is consistent with what

we know, from qualitative interviews and individual level survey data, about the village without elections; villagers there appear relatively active politically, critical of their village leaders, and desirous of elections—factors that would correlate to better quality elections in villages with elections, but which have not led to an election there. That said, with only one case of an entirely unimplemented election in this sample, it is not possible to statistically explore how the relationship might differ between places with elections and places without.

**Figure 8a**



While the relationship between villagers’ average education levels and election implementation appears strong and not due to simple knowledge of the election law, it is tricky to interpret. One possibility is that the relationship is spurious, should both education levels and election implementation be independent of each other but positively driven by an outside factor. A theoretical candidate for such an outside factor is average villager wealth, but although this is quite positively correlated with village education levels (0.56), it is essentially uncorrelated with election implementation (-0.0048). Later in this section, I use multivariate analysis of the data to control for other possibilities, so entirely spurious correlation seems unlikely. Moreover, there is good theoretical reason to think that higher

education levels drive better election implementation—but, as I discuss later, this may be on account of a combination of top-down and bottom-up drivers of election implementation.

### **Authoritarian Pressures**

The attitude of authoritarian leaders towards village elections is widely seen as an important determinant of election implementation. Supportive township leaders, for example, may demand that reluctant village leaders submit themselves to elections, thus forcing relatively good implementation. On the other hand, authoritarian leaders might hinder the implementation of good elections, for instance, though limiting voter participation, controlling the slate of candidates, resorting to fraud, or entirely failing to hold an election. Based on the evidence from this study and many others, there is no question that township leaders in China sometimes hinder the implementation of good elections and sometimes resist their potential impact. What is not clear is how common this is.

This study is unusual in even attempting to measure authoritarian influence on village elections. A difficult challenge is how to measure it. Rather than using subjective measures, such as villagers' trust in the township, which may be influenced by elections as well as indicators of township quality, I employ a set of objective measures. These measures are taken from the survey of township leaders that was conducted as a follow-up to the village level surveys. I chose four particular measures that were less likely to be subject to measurement error or misrepresentation, and combined them into an index of how much the township pushes its choice of candidates in village elections. Three of the measures capture how much the township seeks to control election outcomes: one, whether they target having 100 percent of party secretaries elected as village heads; two, the percentage of the township's village party secretaries who run for the village head position; and three,

whether the township openly admits to routinely suggesting candidates for the Village Committee elections. A fourth measure captures the willingness of the township to accept the electoral preferences of villagers. This is the extent to which the township empowers its village heads by allowing them the honor and perks of holding seats on the township People's Congress; as **Appendix I** shows, this varies substantially across townships.

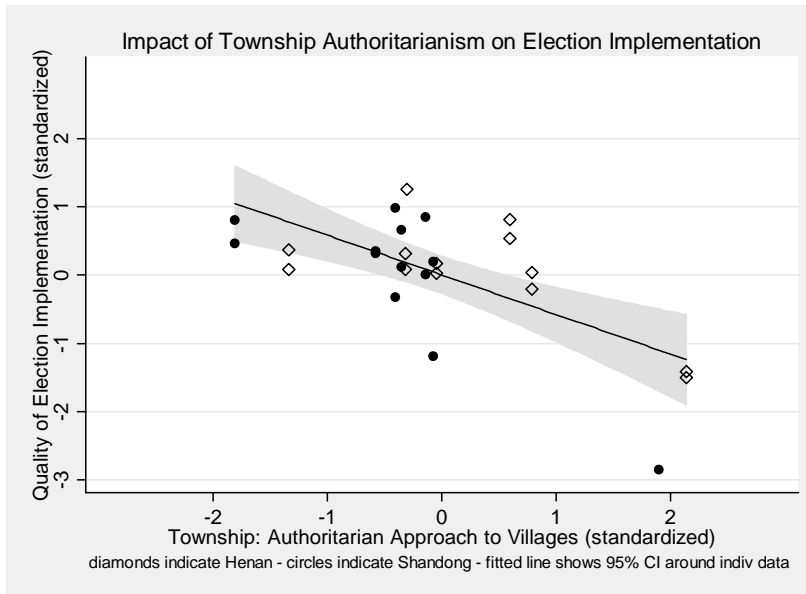
All of these components are based on the general attitude of the township towards village elections. They are thus unlikely to simply mirror the politics of any particular village, since each township contains multiple villages; in our survey, the size of the townships ranged from 10 to 64 administrative villages. In other words, the resultant index should be a solid measure of how authoritarian the township is in its approach to villages in general: a top-down measure that does not take into account particular village conditions.

Examination of the underlying data indicates that villages in the same township do tend to have similar levels of village election implementation.<sup>6</sup> Even where there are differences between villages in the same township, the gap might still be due to the higher government. For instance, a township might put extra effort into creating a good election in a model village, or it might try to limit the choice of candidates in an election in a particular village that is critical to its economic development plan. In fact, as **Figure 9** shows, there is a statistically significant negative relationship between election implementation and how authoritarian the township is in its approach to the villages. Townships with more respect for villager self-government are more likely to also implement good quality village elections.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that, in two townships, the two locations surveyed by chance fell into the same large administrative village. Thus, there is not information available for comparing the quality of village elections within those townships.

**Figure 9**



**Multivariate Analysis: Determinants of Village Election Implementation**

Multivariate regression analysis confirms that the impact of township authoritarianism is robust to controlling for economic self-interest in the village, internal village fractures, and the average educational level in the village, as show in **Figure 10**. This is true regardless of whether the village without an election is included in the analysis.

**Figure 10**

**Determinants of Election Implementation**

Observations: 26 clusters	Linear Regression			
	All Villages (n=26)	Villages with Elections (n=25)	All Villages (n=26)	Villages with Elections (n=25)
<b>Top-Down Drivers</b>				
Town: Authoritarian Towards Village	-0.565 ****	-0.343 ***	-0.578 ****	-0.366 ***
<b>Bottom-Up Drivers</b>				
Education Level (Political Know-How)	0.150	0.319 **	0.158	0.297 ***
Economic Self-Interest inVillage			-0.146	-0.019
Village Socio-political Fractures			0.146	0.073

\*\*\*\* statistically significant at 0.001 level; \*\*\* at 0.01 level; \*\* at 0.05 level; \* at 0.10 level

All variables are standardized to mean zero and standard deviation of one.

The average education level of villagers is also significantly correlated to election

implementation, even after controlling for other major explanations. However, as indicated earlier, the relationship holds only across villages that held elections. The following section explores the mechanisms that seem to drive these relationships and strengthens the argument that the relationships are causal.

#### **IV. MECHANISMS AND CAUSATION**

In this section, I examine broader qualitative and quantitative evidence from the Henan and Shandong Village Election study to investigate the mechanisms that may be behind top-down and bottom-up drivers of rule of law when it comes to village elections.

##### **Mechanisms for Township Influence on Election Implementation**

Evidence from this study and others shows that the township government has leverage over village officials in the implementation of village elections. They may also have motivations to implement elections better than many village leaders would prefer. Higher officials, particularly at the county and township levels, are trained and assigned to oversee village elections; and if they fail to hold elections, or if villagers complain about the process, it is likely to reflect badly on them professionally. According to the township officials surveyed in the Shandong and Henan Village Democracy Survey, each township trained members of the Township Party Committee, Township Party Organization, Township Office of Civil Affairs, and Township People's Congress, with the total number of these types of trained individuals ranging from 40 to 209. While it is hard to know what the quality of these trainings were or how formal they were, the responses indicate that townships at least feel responsible for organizing village elections. This is confirmed by the

fact that all townships took responsibility for setting the timeframe for village elections and several reported overseeing other aspects of election planning.

An examination of particular villages in the survey sample reveals some of the ways in which the township may have a positive or negative influence on village election quality. While some townships more closely supervise and implement village elections, others seem to find it inconvenient, and at least one township was widely accused of undermining the village elections and being in league with the local mafia. In one area of the survey, village officials informed us that the township followed a policy of holding village elections every five years, rather than every three years as the law requires. In another village in the survey, the township officials did not bother organize a second round of the 2002 election after the initial vote was unsuccessful, reportedly due to ballot stuffing. Instead, they asked the incumbent Village Head, who was not even seeking re-election, to continue in office. After the 2005 election was again unsuccessful, the township once again asked the same Village Head to continue in office. In another village, villagers accused the township of trying to fix the election through the illegal use of proxy votes, and then they protested the election after a filled ballot box was forcibly stolen. Rather than holding another election, the township sent representatives to take over all the village posts, effectively taking over leadership of the village. Villagers complained that the township is in league with the mafia.

Townships will also actively try to manage village politics through changing the actual physical parameters in which politics takes place, that is, through merging and dividing villages to shake off existing political influences. In theory, such gerrymandering might also be used to dismiss elected leaders who disliked by the township even if they are popular with villagers, since every merger entails the dismissal of a Village Committee. That said, in our sample, the two cases in which mergers were mandated seemed to represent attempts by the

townships to break the influence of mafias, not of the popularly elected village leaders.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, what these actions do underscore is that townships have the power and a range of tools to actively shape not only the nature of elections, but also the immediate impact of the election and the future parameters of electoral competition in villages.

Township leaders may face pressures from even higher levels to implement elections, at least to some minimum standard. The pressure to implement village elections often now has the weight of the Party apparatus, which controls the careers of cadres, behind it. While often having a self-interest in the outcome of elections, the Party has begun to more actively promote the implementation of elections in many provinces, including Henan just before the last election cycle. In at least ten of the fourteen townships surveyed across Henan and Shandong, senior County Party leaders led the village elections training session for township officials; and in at least two of the cases where County Party leaders were not present, the County Head or Vice Head were present.<sup>8</sup> This would have signified that the county Party organization and/or county government took the implementation of village elections

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of one village in the sample, call it Black Forest Village, the Village Party Secretary defeated the incumbent in the election for Village Head. From the township's perspective, this should have been a desirable outcome, not only because it helped them to achieve a higher proportion of Village Party Secretaries as Village Heads, but also because the defeated incumbent was reportedly a gang member who had hired thugs to attack the Village Party Secretary when they conflicted over a public project.<sup>7</sup> Still, the township judged Black Forest Village as potentially unstable, and they merged the village with a larger one, thus abolishing its Village Committee; however, Black Forest Village's elected head was retained in a post as a local leader and a liaison. Another village in the sample, call it Peony Village, annexed three smaller villages after the last election, at the order of the township. The three smaller villages were judged to "unstable" on account of severe mafia influence and recent thefts of public goods. The Village Committees of the smaller villages were thus abolished. Such gerrymandering by townships are undoubtedly paternalistic, but whether or not they promote or undermine local democracy probably depends on the particulars of a situation.

<sup>8</sup> In one township, neither senior County Party leaders nor the County Head or Vice Head were present at the trainings for township officials. The final township was not asked this limited sequence of questions, which were subsequently added, so we do not have information on who conducted their trainings.

seriously. All fourteen townships reported that the most senior township leaders, township Party officials, and the Township Office of Civil Affairs jointly oversaw the election trainings held for village officials, which would have indicated to village officials that all parts of the Township took the implementation of elections seriously. In addition, all but one Henan township reported that the Township Party Secretary or Township Vice Party Secretary personally supervised the village elections.

Thus, unless appointed local officials have some other compensation or appropriate indication, such as a kickback or a gesture from a boss that elections aren't desirable after all, they have reason to pressure village officials to hold elections of at least nominal quality. Elections still might be poorly implemented, but doing so is less possible than in the past and usually not cost-free. As the head of one county's Bureau of Civil Affairs explained to me, officials usually don't receive kudos for implementing elections well, but their professional reviews and career prospects could suffer if elections are implemented so poorly that villager complaints come back. In his area, officials automatically receive negative marks if there are collective complaints about the elections they oversee. The most damning type of attention would be media coverage of an election-related problem (Birney 2006a). Thus, township leaders face a range of motivations that may drive them to be either enforcers or obstructers of village election law; or in many cases, half-hearted overseers.

### **Village Politics and Election Implementation**

Earlier, I presented evidence that village education levels have a significant bearing on the quality of election implementation. Here, I explore the possible mechanisms behind the relationship by examining individual-level data on village politics. In doing so, I also offer some perspectives on how economic self-interest and within-village fractures may

influence the efficacy of elections without necessarily influencing election implementation. I consider what these findings may mean for the most promising paths and longer-term consequences of building rule of law over democratic reforms in China.

### *Education Levels*

The finding about village education levels may be interpreted as evidence of either a top-down or bottom-up driver of election implementation. It might be a top-down mechanism because higher leaders may be more comfortable implementing better elections in highly educated areas, considering a widespread belief amongst leaders is that a poorly educated populace cannot be trusted to govern itself. However, to the extent that higher leaders are compelled to do so by bottom-up pressures from well-educated publics, then the relationship may represent a bottom-up mechanism, or some combination of both types. Can examination of the relationship between individual levels of education and local politics reveal which mechanism is most likely? To answer this, I consider how educational levels relate to three aspects of village politics: how much village leaders listen to villagers; how transparent the (elected) village committee is; and the participatory attitudes of villagers. How much village leaders listen to villagers is reported on a scale of 0 to 10, the transparency of the village committee is measured by whether villagers have seen public performance reports, and the participatory attitudes is measured by an index that aggregates four measures of authoritarian and democratic participatory attitudes (shown in **Appendix J**).

Controlling for other variables, as shown in **Figure 11**, I find that more highly educated individuals are more likely to find the village committee transparent, although they are *not* more likely to find that village leaders listens to them, and they are not more likely to have participatory attitudes that align with democratic views. Note that these results do not change even if the regression is run on the subset of 25 villages that held elections,

notwithstanding the fact that, in the village-level analyses, the education variable is only significant for explaining election implementation quality when elections were held. In addition, the general significance of variables and magnitude of results do not change when the election-related variables are dropped from the regressions in **Figure 11**, indicating that collinearity with those variables is not masking any relationships.

**Figure 11**

**Impact of Local Factors on Village Politics**

	How Much Village Leaders Listen to Villagers	Transparency of the Village Committee	Participatory Attitudes of Villagers
<b>Village Election Experience</b>			
Election Implementation	1.173 ****	0.597 ***	0.738 ****
Visible Undermining of Election Process	-0.479 ***	-0.081	-0.295 *
Earlier Election History	0.569 *	0.051	-0.115
<b>Village Socio-economic Features</b>			
Village Socio-political Fractures	0.307	-0.013	-0.573 ****
Economic Self-Interest In Village	0.562 ***	0.202	0.452 ***
<b>Township Influence</b>			
Town: Authoritarian Approach to Village	0.360	0.036	0.035
<b>Individual Characteristics</b>			
Wealth	-0.056	0.194	0.102
Party Membership	0.015	-0.018	-0.095
Education	0.007	0.517 ****	0.051
Female	0.297	-0.258	-0.111
Age	0.094	0.201	-0.090
<b>Selection Variables</b>			
Familiarity with Local Politics	-0.089	<i>na</i>	-0.810
Propensity to Answer Sensitive Questions	1.827 ****	<i>na</i>	10.510 ****
Political Know-How (Education Level)	-0.155 *	<i>na</i>	-1.920 ****
	Model: Heckman Selection Linear Regression	Model: ologit	Model: Heckman Selection Linear Regression
	n: 558 Censored: 149 Uncensored: 409	n: 553	n: 562 Censored: 110 Uncensored: 452
	dependent variable is on 11 pt scale (0 to 10)	dependent variable is on 3 pt scale (0 to 1)	dependent variable is on 4 pt scale (0 to 3)

\*\*\*\* statistically significant at 0.001 level; \*\*\* at 0.01 level; \*\* at 0.05 level; \* at 0.10 level

Standard errors are adjusted for weights and clustering.

All explanatory variables are standardized.

The finding that well-educated people find the village committee more transparent confirms the idea of education as a window to political information, perhaps both because of increased ability to ferret out information and increased inclination to do so. The finding holds even though better educated people are apparently not more participatory in nature (as indicated by the lack of a significant coefficient in the regression on participatory attitudes) and even after controlling for other factors like wealth.<sup>9</sup> The ability of better-education populations to access and digest information may help to account for why higher village education levels are associated with better implementation of elections—more educated people may be more likely to know and inquire about the provisions of the election law, thus enhancing the probability that the provisions are implemented according to law. These results of the individual analysis also suggest a clear mechanism through which a better educated public creates more effective bottom-up pressure on authoritarian leaders; the story is not simply that authoritarian leaders offer better educated areas better elections.

#### *Economic Self-interest in the Village*

In contrast, also in **Figure 11**, the overall amount of economic self-interest that villagers have in village affairs seems to promote participatory attitudes and a sense that village leaders listen, but not increased transparency. Further analysis (not shown) indicates that the relationship between economic structure and less participatory attitudes seems to be due to a higher tendency to agree with the statements *valuing* political participation, as opposed to any lower tendency to agree with the statements devaluing political participation.

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<sup>9</sup> In all, thirty percent of all respondents reported having seen a village budget, and 12 percent reported having seen a Village Committee work report. Overall, 21 percent of villagers had seen one of these reports, and 10 percent had seen both of them. By village, the figures vary widely, from one village with no reported sightings of such reports, to one village in which the average respondents saw exactly one of the reports.

This implies that people are more willing to speak their mind as well as less elitist in their political attitudes when the village is an important source of wealth. Yet personal wealth, in the absolute, has no significant relationship to participatory attitudes. It thus may be the importance of safeguarding wealth sources, rather than post-materialist values associated with the diminishing marginal utility of personal wealth, that encourages people to value public participation—at least in the space of Shandong and Henan provinces.

These findings suggest that economic interests encourage democratic responsiveness (listening to villagers) and participatory inclinations (participatory attitudes)—and yet, earlier analyses in this paper found that economic self-interest does not drive democratic rule of law (better implementation of elections). One way to make sense of this is that authoritarian leaders are *less likely* to want to well-implement elections (or be transparent about their budgets) where they anticipate that villagers would be driven to engage in politics more forcefully. At the same time, when villagers collectively have a self-interest in local politics, they are more likely to value participation and have the ear of village leaders; but as long as they can address their immediate concerns through these mechanisms, they may not push for long-term systemic solutions such as better implementation of elections. The fact that economically-motivated political engagement does not appear to result in better-implemented elections or more transparency might be read as witness to the primacy of top-down drivers when it comes to enforcing rule of law over democracy-enhancing reforms.

#### *Village Socio-Political Fractures*

As also seen in **Figure 11**, internal socio-political fractures in the village correlate to less participatory attitudes. Further analysis (not shown) shows that the relationship between internal fractures and less participatory attitudes is probably due to a higher tendency to accept the statements *devaluing* political participation, as opposed to any lower tendency to

accept the statements valuing political participation. This suggests that internal fractures may lead to less trust in the political judgment of one's fellow villagers as well as greater acceptance of leadership decisions. In other words, village fractures seem to contribute to authoritarian attitudes, whereas economic self-interest encourages people to have more democratic attitudes. As with the economic self-interest of villagers in village affairs, village fractures may affect the efficacy or perceptions of elections, yet not their implementation.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper has put forth several findings about what drives the rule of law when it comes to village elections laws in China. The top-down influence of township leaders is the clearest determinant of the quality of election implementation. This finding stands in contrast to a recent report by China's Ministry of Civil Affairs, which is responsible for village election oversight. They focus on village factions, bribery, and low voter turnout as more important obstacles to village elections than top-down "administrative interference."<sup>10</sup> This seems to indicate an unmerited shift from holding local government accountable for village election implementation to blaming local populaces for their own election problems. Yet, while some township leaders may be fairly blamed for poor election implementation, others deserve credit for good election implementation. A worthwhile question for further empirical research is what drives some townships to promote election law, while others undermine it and others are indifferent. Most likely, such research will require multilevel

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<sup>10</sup> See "中国村官选举“常态化”。”人民日报, 2008-1-9. ("The 'normalization' of China's village elections. People's Daily, January 9, 2008.) <http://www.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=121299>. For a translation by Michael Huang, see <http://en.chinaelections.org/newsinfo.asp?newsid=14717>.

survey and qualitative work over a larger set of districts. To date, my preliminary analyses of the available economic and social statistics on the counties in the Shandong and Henan Village Democracy Study have not yet revealed any statistically significant relationships.

Some bottom-up factors may also play a role in encouraging better election implementation, but the story appears complicated and could be illuminated by further research. While economic self-interest drives more participatory attitudes and greater closeness to village leaders, these democracy-enhancing advances do not seem to translate into more rule of law when it comes to elections. This finding is consistent with the idea that economically-motivated villagers may use other channels (like talking with leaders directly) to achieve their immediate objectives, rather than investing in the long-term solution of demanding better implementation of elections. To the extent this is true, then economic motivations should not be uniformly associated with an increase in demand for rule of law. Another possible explanation is that economic motivations might lead to greater demand for rule of law over elections, but less willingness of authorities to supply this. Further investigation of higher government motivations can help resolve this.

Similarly, although severe village fractures undermine participatory attitudes, they do not seem to systematically affect the implementation of elections. Yet, better education levels do seem to increase the quality of election implementation, although they do not enhance participatory attitudes and listening by village leaders. Altogether, these results suggest that the rule of law, at least in the arena of village elections, may be enhanced by bottom-up drivers. Yet, higher education levels—even when overall education levels remain moderate, around the middle school level—seem to support election implementation more than heightened inclination to participate or increased self-interest in local political outcomes. If this is so, then educational advances seem a surer path to building the rule of

law in a political arena than do social and economic changes. One question for further study is whether or not there is a threshold of education that provides the most benefits. A second question is why exactly education matters: for instance, is it that better-educated people are more capable; or it is that education somehow inclines people towards pursuing legal channels or systemic solutions, rather than informal or one-time solutions?

These conclusions about how the rule of law can be built around village election laws in China may also serve as hypotheses for exploration elsewhere. Are there initial reasons to think that these findings could extend to other arenas of law? There is some preliminary evidence from this study that the factors that influence the rule of law surrounding village elections law may also determine the rule of law around other democracy-enhancing legal reforms, like laws that regarding transparency and participation. In particular, preliminary analyses indicate that township authoritarianism and village education levels are also major determinants of village committee transparency, whereas economic self-interest in the village and participatory attitudes are not. Theoretically, this makes sense, as village election laws are like transparency laws and other democracy-enhancing legal reforms, in that they all demand a transfer of power from authoritarian leaders to the public. That such transfer of power may be quite consequential, even when implementation of election laws is incomplete, was shown in Part II above. Yet, clearly not all arenas of law share this implication; indeed, building the rule of law in other arenas might increase rather than diminish authoritarian power.<sup>11</sup> In short, it seems likely that growth in the rule of law can happen *without* encompassing the arena of democracy-enhancing laws. This is contrary to

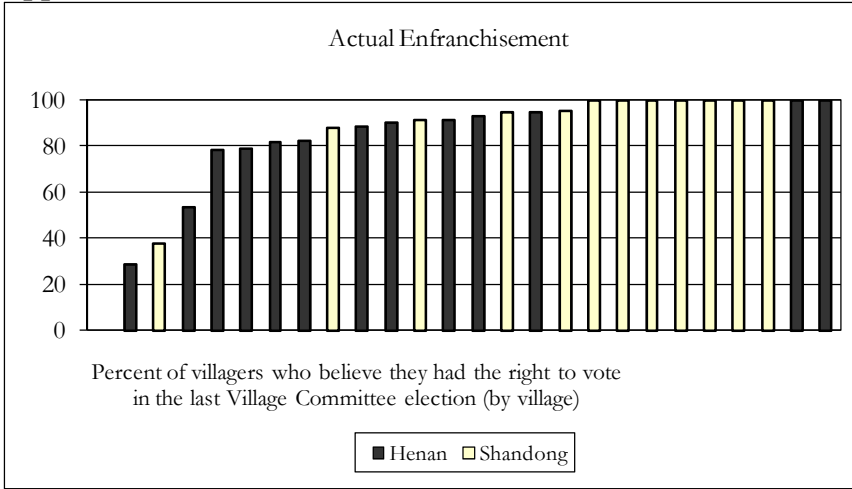
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<sup>11</sup> For instance, in current research on China, Mary Gallagher finds that the increasing use of the court system to resolve labor disputes corresponds to a decline in labor-related public actions and collective actions; and, whether intentionally or not, also to poorer outcomes for laborers and heightened state legitimacy (2008 working paper).

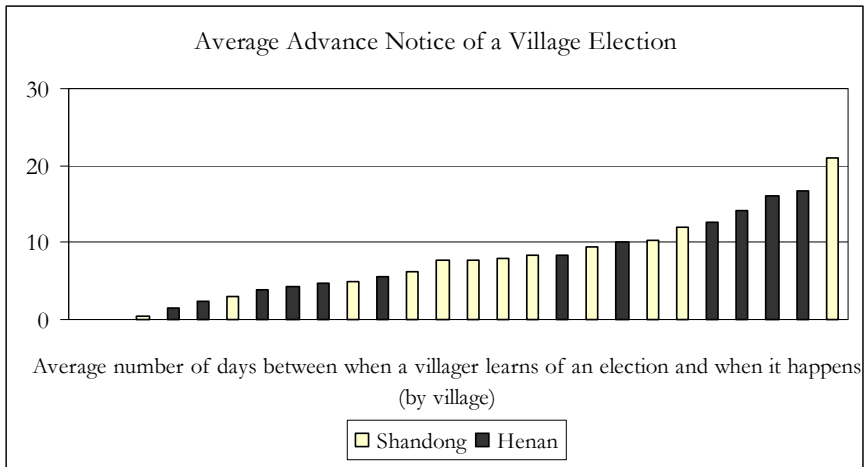
the hopes of some who promote the rule of law *as* democracy promotion. Yet, the rule of law may align with democracy promotion over the subset of laws, like electoral reform laws, that actually transfer authority from leaders to the public.

How likely is it that the findings of this study also apply to other authoritarian countries? China is marked by factors that may make top-down drivers especially important in building the rule of law over democratic reforms. These include its size, relative stability, relatively limited experience with democracy, and restrictive controls over civic and public spheres. It is possible that authoritarian countries that differ on these or other dimensions might find top-down driver less important in building the rule of law in a democracy-enhancing arena, but there are also reasons to expect that similar authoritarian dynamics are dominant. A good working hypothesis for broader research might thus be the conclusion reached in this study: that when it comes to democracy-enhancing reforms, building the rule of law is best done through enlisting top-down support, especially in less well-educated areas. The assumption that a self-interested, engaged public is able to effectively demand that political reforms be implemented, even when they have already been passed into laws, may be too optimistic in restrictive authoritarian contexts.

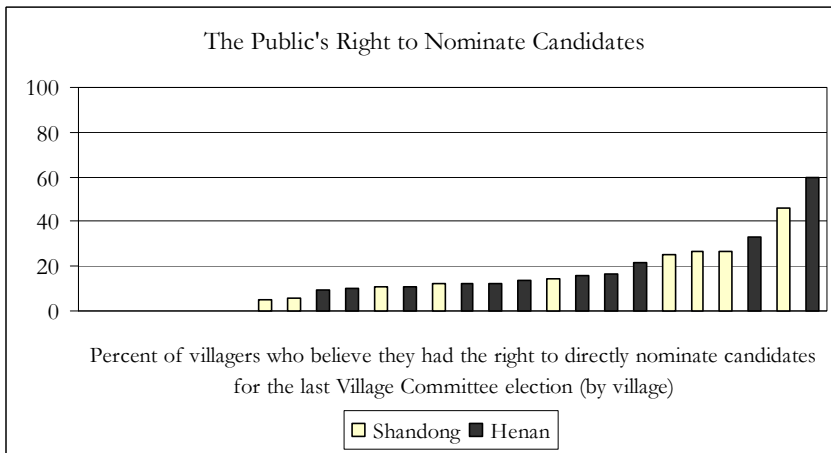
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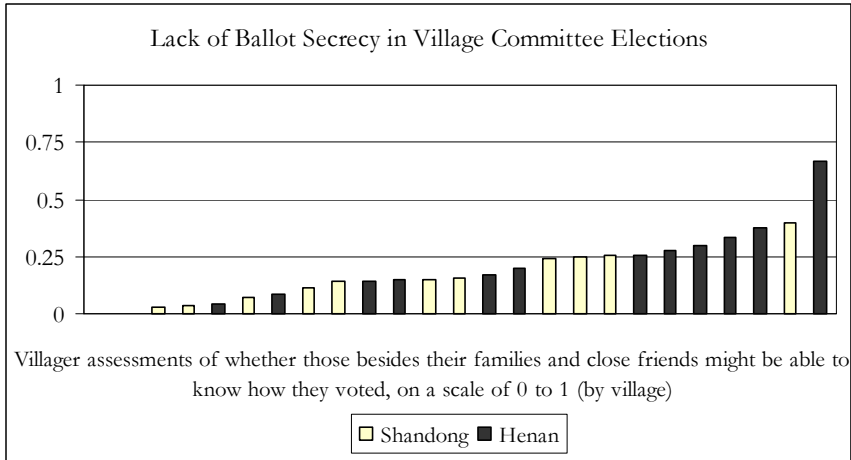
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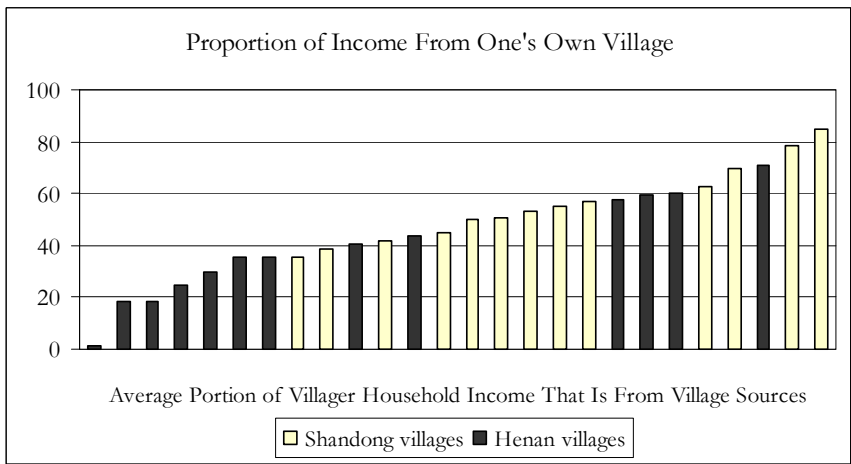
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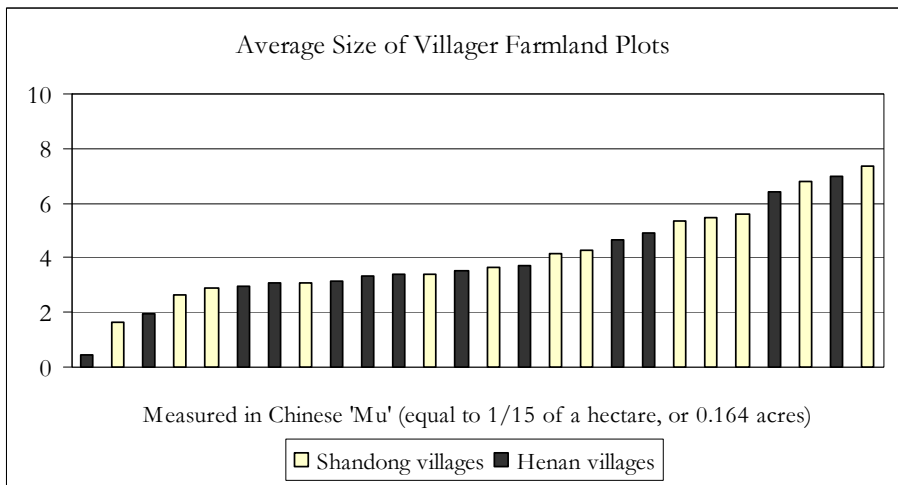
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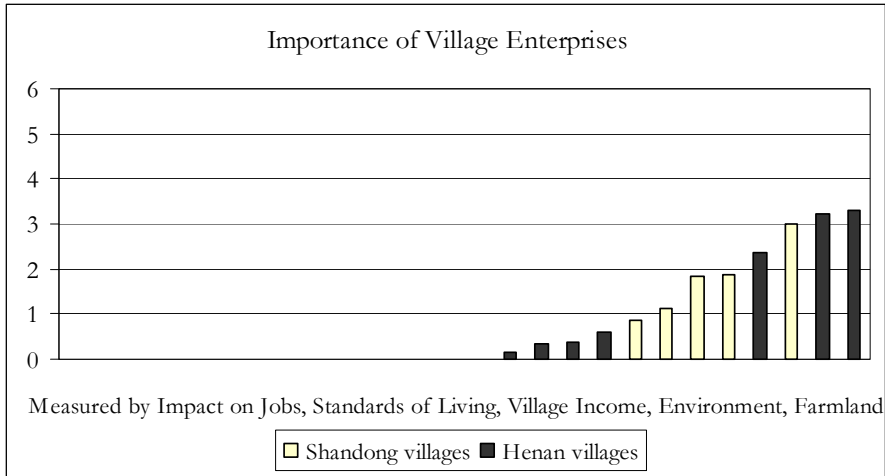
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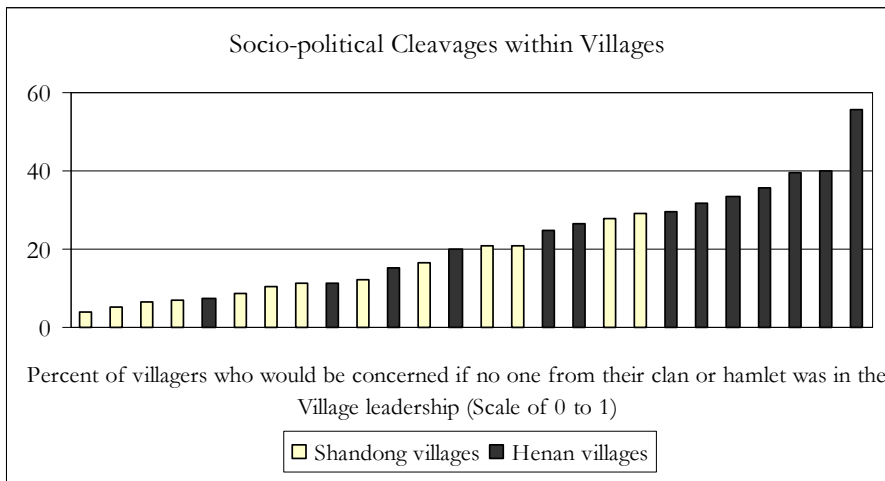
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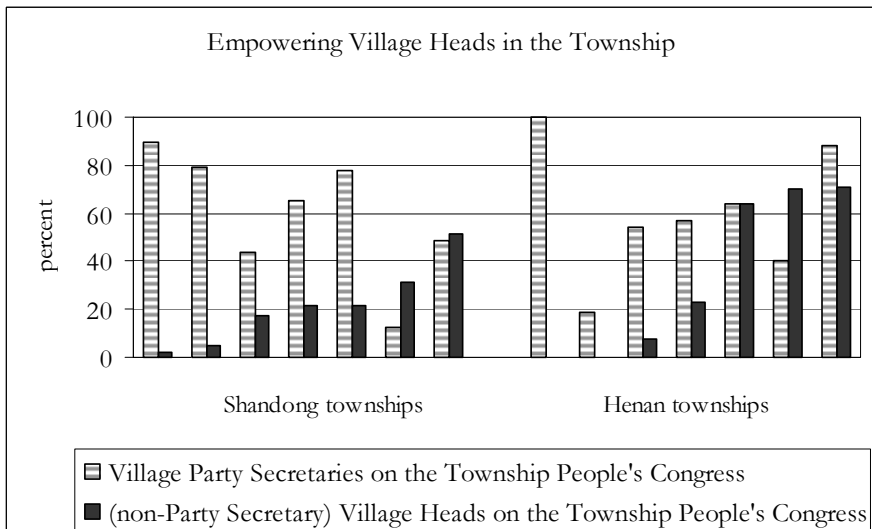
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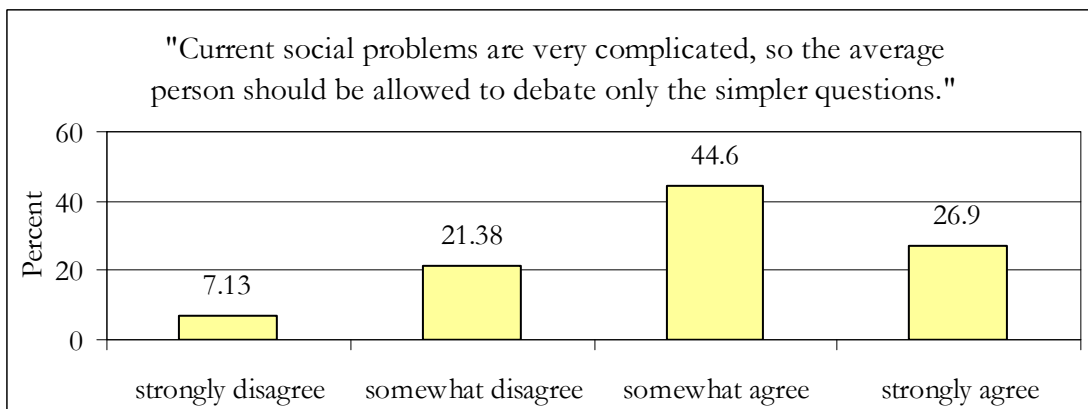
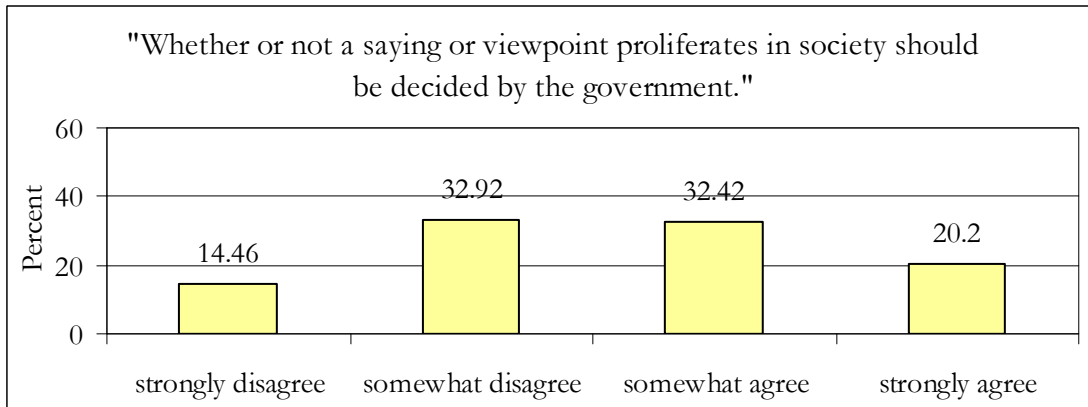
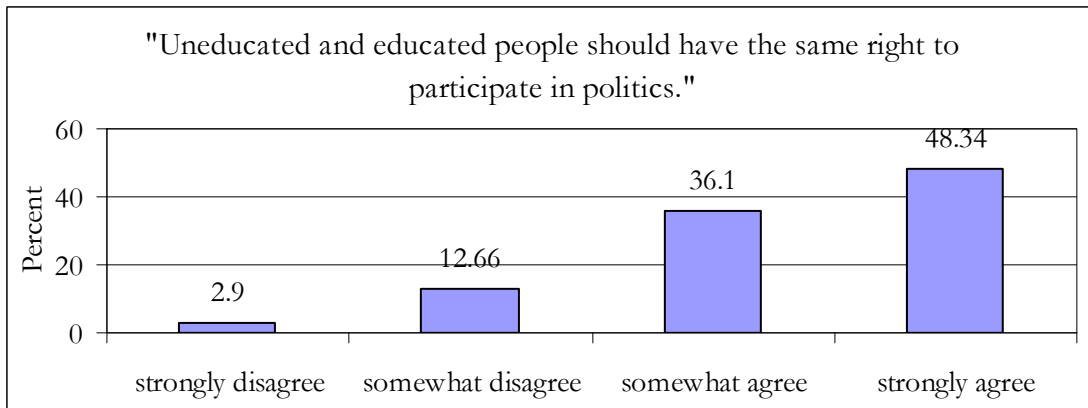
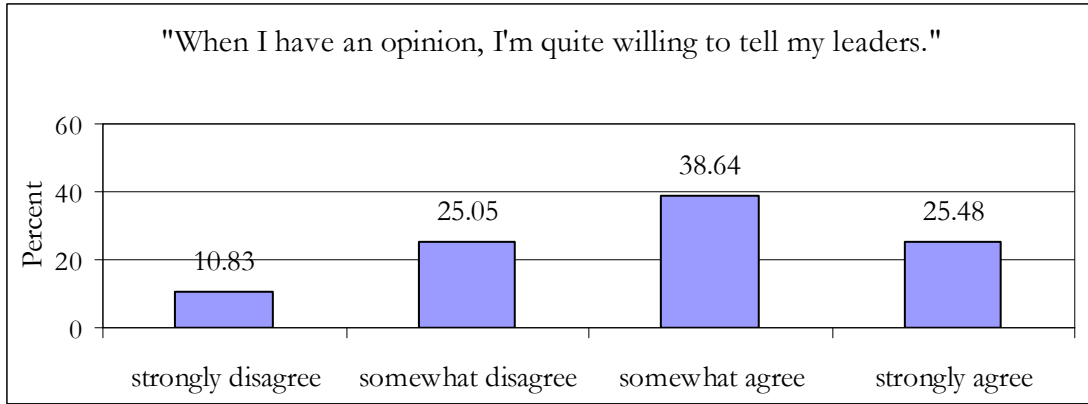
## Appendix H



## Appendix I



## Appendix J



## Appendix K: Survey Design

The Shandong and Henan Village Democracy Survey was implemented in three stages, beginning in November 2005, as a collaborative effort between Pierre Landry, Mayling Birney, and Shiru Wang of Yale University; and the Research Center on Contemporary China at Peking University. Stage One was an in-person survey of a random sample of individuals in Shandong and Henan. These individuals were selected through a geographic sampling technique that proceeded as follows: within each of the provinces (Shandong and Henan), seven counties were selected at random according to a population-density weighting scheme that made it more likely that densely populated counties would be selected. Within each county, a township was selected at random, again according to a population-density weighting scheme. Within each township, two geographic squares, delineated by GPS measurements, were randomly selected; and the dwellings within those squares were enumerated. In practice, the 28 geographic squares, 14 in each province, encompassed 26 villages, 13 in each province. This is because, in two townships, both of the selected geographic squares randomly happened to fall within the same large village. Within each of the dwellings included in the final sample, one resident was randomly chosen to be interviewed. Because the interviews were conducted in person and multiple attempts were made to contact each individual, the overall response rate to the survey is quite high, at about 65 percent. One township was resurveyed in November 2006, as some rural respondents had originally been inadvertently administered an urban version of the survey.

In Stage Two, qualitative interviews were conducted of the Village Committee Chairs (Village Heads) and Village Party Secretaries of the administrative villages included in the survey. Shiru Wang conducted these personally in November and December 2005. Knowledgeable residents were also interviewed about village facts and local politics, by the team leaders and enumerators in charge of the individual level survey. Information from these additional interviews provides a qualitative supplement to the leadership interviews.

In Stage Three, which took place in November 2006, all of the townships in the sample were re-visited; and a survey was administered to a senior township leader with the responsibility for overseeing village elections. At the same time, detailed election histories were collected on all the villages in the sample, through township and village official records where available, along with interviewing of local officials.

### Survey Questions Used to Measure Experiences with Village Committee Elections

The following measures were used to assess the quality of the latest Village Committee election, undermining of the latest election, and earlier elections experience. These measures were constructed from the responses to individuals' survey questions, specified below, or from information from qualitative interviews, as noted.

#### *Latest Election—Contestation*

Qualitative information from leadership interviews was used.

#### *Latest Election—Enfranchisement*

Responses to the following questions were used, in combination, to determine the percentage of villagers, by

*village, who believed they were welcome to vote in the election.*

C4. Have you ever voted in a Village Committee election?

C4a. Why haven't you voted? Is it because you don't have the right to vote, or for another reason? (*open-ended responses noted*)

C10. Did you vote in the last village election?

C10a. Why didn't you vote in the last village election? (*open-ended responses noted*)

#### *Latest Election—Voter Preparation*

*To assess the amount of notice of the election:*

C8a: How many days were there from when you first learned of this matter [the Village Committee election] and the formal vote?

*To assess familiarity with the village elections law:*

B6: Have you heard of the Organic Law on Villager Committees, which is the same as what is commonly called the "Villagers' Elections Law"?

#### *Latest Election—Nomination Openness*

C11: In the last election, could you directly nominate a candidate?

#### *Latest Election—Voting Process*

*To assess the secrecy of the ballot:*

C21: Other than your family and close friends, do you feel that other people might be able to know who you voted for?

*Measures used in combination to assess whether a candidate escorted a mobile ballot box:*

C19: In the last Village Committee election, did you vote at a mobile ballot box, or did you vote at a fixed ballot box?

C20: When you cast your vote, was a current candidate at the site?

*To assess public reports of tampering, fraud or ballot theft:*

Information from the qualitative interviews was used.

#### *Latest Election—Bribery*

C12b: Other than persuasive talk, sometimes people may use the following methods to influence how villagers vote; have you experienced any of these situations? (1) offers of free meals and drinks, (2) gifts or money, (3) promises of benefits, (4) threats of force, (7) other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

#### *Latest Election—Official Opposition*

E5: From your perspective, what was the attitude of the then-Party Secretary to the last election? (1) Was really supportive and promoted a good election process, (2) Tried to influence the outcome of the election, (3) Opposed the election, (4) Didn't care.

#### *Latest Election—Election Complaints*

C25: Did people have complaints about the election outcome?

*History of Elections—Number of Earlier Elections With Choice*

Information from the village election histories, collected in 2006, was compiled.

*History of Elections—Fixed Terms*

Information from the village election histories, collected in 2006, was used to assess whether an election with choice was held during the previous election round.

## **Survey Questions Used to Measure Socio-economic Village Level Variables**

This paper constructs measures on socio-political cleavages and the economic importance of the village to villagers. The questions behind these measures, which were included in the individuals' survey, are listed below:

*Socio-political Cleavages*

- D1: Would you be a bit worried if no one from your natural village was in the leadership of your administrative village?
- D2: Would you be a bit worried if no one with your family name was in the leadership of your administrative village?

*Economic Importance of the Village to Villagers*

*To assess how much of villagers' income is from the village:*

- D15: Last year, what percentage of your family income came from this village's land, village enterprises (including village-run and other types of enterprises), and its other resources?

*To assess the average size of villager farmland plots:*

- A4b: How many *mu* of farmable land does your family have?

*To assess the important of any village enterprises within the village:*

- D9: Does your village have enterprises with 10 or more workers (including village-run and other enterprises)?
- D9a: Your village's enterprises may provide people with some advantages and disadvantages. Do you think your village's enterprises have increased the work opportunities of villagers? Much more, relatively more, a bit more, or not at all?
- D9b: To what extent have the village's enterprises raised villagers' standard of living?
- D9c: To what extent have the village's enterprises raised the village leaders' standard of living?
- D9d: To what extent have the village's enterprises raised the village income?
- D9e: To what extend have the village's enterprises reduced the village's cultivated land?
- D9f: To what extend have the village's enterprises impacted the environment?

*To assess villager wealth:*

Average villager wealth was calculated from responses to the possessions index described below under Individual Characteristics—Wealth.

## Survey Questions Used to Measure Authoritarian Pressures

Responses to the 2006 survey of township leaders were used to assess township pressure on elections. The following questions were incorporated:

### *Township Pressure on Elections:*

*To assess whether townships target having 100 percent of Village Party Secretaries elected as Village Head:*

T18: At present, what percentage of Village Party Secretaries does the township hope to have concurrently serving as Village Committee Chairs?

*To assess whether townships admit to routinely suggesting candidates for the Village Committee elections:*

T8a: In the last round of Village Committee elections in this township, which department or leaders were responsible for suggesting the lists of candidates for Village Committee Chair?

*To assess the extent to which the township empowers its Village Heads relative to its Village Party Secretaries (by allowing them seats on the township People's Congress):*

T2: How many administrative villages are in this township?

T37: In the last township People's Congress election, how many Village Party Secretaries were elected as People's Congress delegates?

T38: In the last township People's Congress election, how many Village Committee Chairpersons, of those who were not concurrently Village Party Secretaries, were elected as People's Congress delegates?

*To assess whether or not the township has awarded Model Democracy status to a village in the survey:*

T5: Does this township have model elections villages?

T5a: Which villages are the township's model elections villages?

## Survey Questions Used to Measure Individual Respondent Characteristics

The following questions were used to measure individual characteristics of the respondents to the individual level survey:

### *Age*

A1. In which year were you born?

### *Party membership*

L2: Have you entered the Communist Party?

### *Gender*

*The enumerator noted the gender of each respondent.*

### *Education Level*

A3a. What is your highest level of schooling? (1) never went to school, (2) elementary school, (3) middle school, (4) high school or equivalent, (5) technical college, (6) college, (7) graduate school or higher

*Wealth—Possessions Index*

*The possessions index is the sum of the items that respondents own, out of the following possibilities:*

A9: Does your household have the items listed below?

- a. sewing machine
- b. radio
- c. camera
- d. black & white television
- e. color television
- f. VCR
- g. DVD/VCD
- h. electric fan
- i. air conditioner
- j. washing machine
- k. refrigerator
- l. bicycle
- m. motorcycle
- n. tractor
- o. truck
- p. passenger car
- q. telephone
- r. cell phone
- s. computer
- t. pressure cooker
- u. hot water furnace
- v. rice cooker
- w. microwave

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