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Who Are True Voters? Village Elections and Women's Participation in Voting in Rural China[1]

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Summary
Although national voting statistics show that more than 90 percent of individuals in rural China vote, there is concern that women are excluded from casting their own ballot in some village elections and do not fully participate in others. The purpose of this paper is to provide an empirical basis for understanding the voting behavior of women in rural China. Our work also seeks to assess the determinants of the voting patterns of women. To accomplish our objectives, we used a set of household-level survey data that includes information on the voting records of more than 3,000 villagers (both men and women) in 100 randomly selected villages across China. According to our data, while voting protocols and the patterns of voting among villagers differ between villages and over time, there are still gaps in the coverage of groups of individuals in rural China. Some of the largest gaps occur in the case of women, migrants, and migrant women. Many women still do not fill out their ballot, nor do they put their own ballot into the ballot box. Policy-wise, the results suggest that China's election officials need to increase their efforts to promote more regular voting procedures to insure that women truly cast their own votes.

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Officials in China claim that voting rates in rural village committee elections are high. According to the White Paper on "Democracy Construction in China," on average, more than 80 percent of voting-age adults in China voted during the latest round of village committee elections; in some regions, the voting rates were claimed to exceed 90 percent (State Council, 2005). During a recent national conference on the analysis of village committee elections, officials from the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) reiterated the praise for the high turnout in voting (Yunnan, 2008). The national average voting rate was reported to be 90.97 percent. In some provinces, such as Zhejiang, MoCA's website reports that the voting rate in 2005 exceeded 95 percent (MoCA, 2006).

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If voting rates in China are, in fact, as high as reported, this is an important finding, since it is generally acknowledged in the political science literature that the process of voting itself can be constructive, even when election systems in developing countries are imperfect (Diamond and Myers, 2000). In assessing the quality of village committee elections in China, few scholars will contend that the current set of elections are perfect (that is, they may be less than competitive and may be subject to manipulation—Chen and Zhong, 2002; Shi, 1999; O'Brien, 1994; 2001). However, according to many scholars, such as Manion (1996), Horsely (2001), Liu (2000), and Diamond and Myers (2000), regardless of the overall nature of an election, the process of voting itself can be a good thing. In communities with elections that play a legitimate role in choosing a leader (known henceforth as *villages with good elections*), when people vote, they are exercising their right to choose the community head and are gaining voice in the process of managing their lives. In communities with elections that do not matter (i.e., when the election was marked by actions that could be construed as illegitimate, unfair, and/or uncompetitive, or in *villages with poor elections*), despite the absence of a direct and immediate influence on local governance, it can be argued that since most people are voting, going through the motions of an election is still a process that is creating "experience with elections," at least. In the long run, the process of voting itself is thought to be useful in some cases, bringing about change to the way the communities choose and replace their leaders and creating an electorate that will gradually be able to participate in the governance of their own communities.

Unfortunately, the reportedly high voting rates are assumptions, and not facts. While there has been a great deal of work on village committee elections in China, almost none of it has been based on large-scale, systematic, and nationally representative datasets. It is even noted in the literature that one of the problems with many studies on China is that they use small samples and often rely on case studies and anecdotes for their evidence (Pastor and Tan 2000). Most studies that have been carried out by sociologists or political scientists tend to be carried out in several villages or in a single province—for example, a small set of villages in the Beijing area (Chen and Zhong 2002); fifteen sample villages in Liaoning and Fujian (O'Brien 1994); 34 villages in Shaanxi (Kennedy 2002); or case studies in Zhejiang (He and Lang 2000).

In most of the previous studies, the nature of the samples does not provide researchers with a basis for gauging voting rates and overall participation either. Whenever scholars have collected data on voting rates at village committee elections (e.g., Shi 1999; Chen and Zhong 2002), they have tended to use simple counts of votes and rarely tried to obtain data on the detailed process of who actually fills out the ballot, whether the person whose ballot was filled out by another person was consulted about their opinion, who actually physically put the ballot in the ballot box, and what procedure was followed for casting a proxy vote. Arguably, however, it is just as important (or even more so) to understand how a person voted (i.e., to document the

entire process of voting) as it is to understand the ratio of the ballots that end up being cast to the voting-age population of the village.

The need to understand the nature of the process of voting in the village—both how the votes are cast and who actually casts them—is important for the same reason that the voting process itself is inherently important. If the voting process in villages that have seemingly good elections is, in fact, flawed, then the legitimacy of a community's leaders may only extend to part of the voting population or a small minority of those who cast valid ballots. Likewise, if the voting process in villages that have poor elections is flawed, then the basic argument for even carrying out the elections is undermined; people are not gaining experience in a constructive way, but instead are learning about a corrupted process. Since it may be possible to use some set of policy measures to design and execute better voting procedures, if they are found to be flawed, it is important for the future of China's village elections that scholars and officials have a clear understanding of the voting process.

To clearly understand the voting process, three specific objectives are pursued in our paper. First, we seek to identify patterns (and trends) of voting behavior and develop ways to measure real (not nominal) participation in the voting process. Second, we analyze who is voting and who is not (and document the process by which their votes are cast). Third, we seek to understand the determinants of their voting behaviors from both individual characteristics of women and village-level voting protocols. Finally, from a policy viewpoint, we try to provide some suggestions about promoting women's real participation in village elections.

Because these are such ambitious objectives, we are obliged to limit the scope of our work in this paper. While there are many different steps in the procedures that constitute an election in rural China (from the setting up of election committees to the nomination process and ballot counting), we shall only focus on one aspect in this paper—the process of voting. In other words, our analysis focuses on village committee elections in China from the moment the ballot is distributed to the voters to the moment it is put in the ballot box. To simplify the analysis further, we assume that there are three steps in the process: filling out the ballot; being consulted about the vote (when one's ballot is being filled out by someone else); and casting the ballot (or the actual physical act of placing the ballot in the ballot box). We also examine the process by which those who are not in the village on election days are able (or unable) to cast a proxy ballot.

To achieve our objectives, the rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the second section, we introduce the survey data. In the third section, we use our data to describe recent progress in the emergence of village committee elections in China. In the following section, we present the results of the analysis, while the final section concludes the paper. Although the results are highly nuanced and differ across villages and over time, the fundamental finding of our study is that—despite progress and despite high nominal voting rates—there are still gaps in the coverage of groups

of individuals in rural China. Some of the largest gaps occur in the case of women, migrants,[2] and female migrants in particular. In many cases, large numbers of individuals in these groups are being systematically excluded from participating in the process of voting as a whole. Policy-wise, China's government needs to increase its efforts to promote more regular voting procedures to ensure that true participation in village committee elections is more widespread and does not systematically exclude groups of individuals.

Data

The data we analyzed are from a survey led by the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy (CCAP) in collaboration with the University of California, Davis and the University of Toronto. The survey was conducted in early 2005 using a randomly selected, almost nationally representative sample of 101 rural villages in five provinces in rural China (Jiangsu, Hebei, Jilin, Sichuan, and Shaanxi). The sample provinces were randomly selected from each of China's major agro-ecological zones. Five sample counties were then selected from each province by a two-step procedure. In the first step, the enumeration team listed all the counties in each province in descending order of per capita gross value of industrial output (GVIO). GVIO was used on the basis of the conclusion drawn by Rozelle (1996) that GIVO is a good predictor of the standard of living and development potential and is often more reliable than net rural per capita income statistics. In the second step, the five sample counties were randomly selected from each list.

After the county selection was completed, the team then chose the sample townships, villages, and households. Within each county, the survey team chose two townships by dividing each county's townships into two income categories ("well off" townships and "poorer" townships—also based on GVIO). One township was then selected randomly from each group (that is, we chose one well-off township and one poorer township in each county). Within each township, two villages were also chosen following the same procedure that was used in selecting the townships. Finally, the survey team used village rosters and its own counts (of households that were living in the village, but were not on the roster) to randomly choose eight households within each village. The survey included a total of 808 households.

The survey form was designed to collect information on many aspects of a village's governance, including each villager's participation in the most recent village committee election, the exact procedure by which an individual cast his/her ballot, and a comprehensive assessment of the "quality" of the village election. Questions were asked about when the most recent election had been held, whether or not each household member of voting age had participated, and if not, whether or not he/she

[2] Here "migrants" are understood to be villagers who work in cities more than six months a year. They have voting rights based on the Organic Law of Village Committees. Based on our data, about 28 per cent of villagers work outside their province; most of them did not participate in village elections.

had known about the election and had been in the village on voting day. At the conclusion of each day's survey activities (which also included intensive survey-based interviews with the village leadership—e.g., the party secretary; village leader; accountant; small group leaders; and key informants), the enumeration team made an assessment (by providing a score) of the nature of each sample village's election, including an assessment of the election's degree of competitiveness, fairness, and strictness (i.e., adherence to election protocol). We used this information to create a single variable called the *Nature of the Village Election*.

For this paper, we asked a series of questions in a special block of the survey that focused on collecting information on each villager's voting behavior.[3] In particular, if the individual voted, he/she was asked if he/she filled out his/her own ballot. If the answer was no, two additional questions were asked about who filled out the ballot and whether or not the individual was consulted about his or her opinion. Regardless of who filled out the ballot, each person was also asked whether or not he/she cast his/her own ballot (that is, whether or not he/she physically put the ballot into the ballot box). Finally, if the person did not vote, we asked whether or not he/she authorized someone else to vote on his or her behalf (i.e., cast a proxy vote) as well as how the proxy vote was authorized and whether or not the individual was consulted about his/her opinion. In other words, in assessing the nature of each person's participation, instead of asking if an individual nominally voted, we broke the voting process down into three components: the act of filling out the ballot; whether or not an individual was consulted about his/her opinion; and the act of putting the ballot in the ballot box.

Finally, the project team also gathered detailed information on other characteristics of individuals, their families, and villages. Among other details, the survey collected data on the levels of the age, education, and work status of each household member. There was also a comprehensive community-level survey with the leader of each village. From the community-level survey the enumerators obtained a number of village-level variables on each community's basic characteristics, which have been used in this paper—for example, net per capita debt, per capita land size, the share of the total village labor force that is engaged in migration or self-employed business activities; the distance between the village and township seat; and the distance between the two most remote small groups within each village.

In addition to the household-level survey, the survey team also convened 202 focus groups—two in each village. Six persons were randomly selected for each focus group; leaders of the village and their families were excluded. After a two-hour joint session that collected a great deal of "qualitative data" on each village's election procedure, each person who was part of the focus group answered a series of survey-based questions about the nature of his/her participation in the two most recent

[3] We asked all these details on voting participation in the household survey form.

elections. Following the household form, the respondents stated whether they voted or not, and if they did, they provided information on whether they filled out their own ballot, whether they were consulted or not, and whether they physically put the ballot in the ballot box. We believe that collecting a second set of data that includes the same variables from the individuals who were part of the focus groups could be instructive, because it will allow us to see if the nature of the responses changed after individuals were immersed in the intense discussion of village elections that occurred in the focus group itself. The focus-group respondents also supplied information on their own age, education, and work status.

Village Elections in China[4]

Village elections are becoming a common feature of China's villages. Elections of this type are now into their seventh to ninth round in most villages in China, implying that there have been more than five million elections in rural China since the late-1980s. Since the Organic Law of Village Committees was adopted in 1998, it has been China's policy that villagers select the members of the village committee by popular vote. By the end of 2004, more than 600,000 villages had village committees that were at least nominally elected (State Council 2005).

Despite the widespread emergence of village elections, there is a great deal of variation among communities in the way in which they implement the protocols of the elections. National laws and policies do not stipulate exact criteria for the selection of village leaders and they vary from place to place and from time to time (Morduch and Sicular 2000). In fact, when examining the empirical literature on China's local elections, it can be seen that there are large numbers of ways in which communities produce slates of candidates and election outcomes (Oi 1989; Chan et al. 1992; Potter and Potter 1990; Ho 1994; Kelliher 1997; Pastor and Tan 2000: 495). According to the literature and field observation, village elections are far from systematic even today despite continual efforts to improve election processes. As a result, the procedures by which village leaders accede to their offices are heterogeneous.

Hence, despite the progress made in holding village elections, no one has ever claimed that China's selection of local leaders works perfectly. Some leaders were still appointed to their office, especially in the early years, in part due to weak protocols. Even now, many outcomes of elections are suspicious. Researchers have widely documented that election irregularities are commonplace and "up-to-standard" villages are still in a distinct minority (O'Brien 1994).

Although there are problems, both the literature (e.g., O'Brien 2001) and our data demonstrate that the quality of village elections has improved in many ways since the

[4] There are two types of direct elections in China: the election of the Deputy to the People's Congress for choosing public servants to work in township/county governments; and village elections to select members of the village committee.

mid-1990s. In some villages, election procedures have been shown to have improved markedly (O'Brien and Li 2000). The percentage of villages that directly elect their leaders has also risen, increasing from 69 percent (1995-1997) to 83 percent (2002-2004—Luo et al. 2006). He (2000) has many anecdotes documenting novel and progressive ways that villages are improving their procedures.

Our data also show that progress is being made. For example, the percentage of villages that only use roving ballot boxes (typically thought to be a poor election practice) declined between 1998 and 2002 and 2002 and 2004, dropping from 21 to 14 percent. During the same period, the reported use of a more open nomination process also rose slightly.

Village elections, however, are still far from perfect. According to our data, in the most recent rounds of elections (from 2002 to 2004), the current leaders of the villages dominated the committees that organize all the village election activities. Thus, the party secretary was the leader of the village election committee in 81 percent of the sample villages. There are also few organized opportunities for candidates to openly discuss their views on village issues and their plans if they were to be elected; the candidates only held campaign speeches in 37 percent of our sample villages.

Due in part to such irregularities, the assessment of our survey team after spending intensive spells interviewing and conducting surveys in the sample villages is that most farmers hold a low opinion of the process of village elections and believe these are events that are only of marginal importance. More specifically, our assessment is that the election protocols were weak enough to allow for manipulation in 71 percent of the villages surveyed. Villagers believed their elections were legitimate in only 51 percent of the sample villages. Perhaps due to the perceived problems with protocol, when asked whether or not their elections were important in selecting the village's leadership, only 25 percent said yes. In our most general measure of village elections ("Overall, was it a good election that mattered?"), only 22 percent of the villages were felt to have had good elections.

Women's Voting Behavior in the Process of Voting

One source of incompleteness that heretofore has received little notice in the literature is the way that villagers are actually able to cast their ballot. In fact, in the few places in the literature where this issue has been raised, it was found that the actual practice of voting may deviate from the mandated procedures even more (Pastor and Tan 2000). In addition to concerns about roving ballot boxes, the process of casting proxy votes and secret individual ballots is discussed.

In fact, according to our data, the issue of casting secret ballots is not a very important one. In our survey, we asked whether or not individuals cast a secret ballot in the most recent round of elections. In the household survey, 95 percent of the 2,187 respondents who were eligible to vote said that when their ballot was being cast, they had believed it was being done "in secret."

Although it has received less attention in the literature, the issue of proxy balloting and, indeed, the entire process of casting a ballot—from the moment it is handed out to the voter to the moment it is put in the ballot box—may call for closer scrutiny. Based on our data, nominal voting rates in China's village elections are, indeed, high: nominal voting rates are about 90 percent judging by either the household survey or the focus group data (Table 1).

Table 1: Nominal Voting Rates in Village Elections (the Most Recent Election) by Province in China (in Percent)

	Total		Jiangsu		Sichuan		Shaanxi		Jilin		Hebei	
	FG[a] data	HH[a] data	FG data	HH data	FG data	HH data	FG data	HH data	FG data	HH data	FG data	HH data
All	92	87	96	92	89	85	98	88	99	89	77	78
Women	89	84	94	92	86	82	98	86	100	85	68	74
Men	95	90	97	93	92	89	98	89	98	93	87	83

Data source: authors' own data (household and focus group data).

[a] FG denotes data produced from the focus group sample, while HH denotes statistics produced from the household survey data.

In fact, nominal voting rates are high in most provinces. Importantly, these rates are found to be high for both men and women, although the nominal voting rate is rather higher for men than it is for women. So we see that our results are mostly consistent with the claims made by China's officials as well as other studies (such as Shi 1999; Chen and Zhong 2002).

As discussed above, however, a count of ballots may not be a very accurate measure of true participation. We should also consider who really votes and if the person's opinion is actually reflected in the ballot. According to our data, of all the people who nominally voted, when asked if they had filled out their own ballot, only about 80 percent said they had actually done so. The percentage was lower for women, married women, and especially for women migrants (Table 2).

Table 2: Voting Procedures by Gender and Migration Status in the Most Recent Elections in China's Villages (in Percent)

Variables (created from questions the focus group and survey respondents were asked)	Total		Women		Married women		Migrants		Female migrants	
	FG[a]	HH[a]	FG	HH	FG	HH	FG	HH	FG	HH
Participated in the election?	92	87	89	83	89	84	89	79	75	74
Did you fill out your own ballot?	82	75	72	63	71	63	82	82	50	74
If not, who filled out the ballot for you?										
Spouse	67	48	76	58	76	61	83	45	100	71
Child	10	22	6	20	6	21	0	10	0	0
Parent	4	10	4	7.27	4	5	0	35	0	29
Other[b]	19	20	14	15	15	14	17	10	0	0
Was your opinion elicited?	64	56	61	56	61	56	50	52	33	38
Did you put the ballot in the box yourself?	77	72	70	62	70	62	86	76	67	71
Did you put the ballot in the ballot box for someone else?	42	34	33	24	31	24	41	24	25	6

Data source: authors' own data (household sample)

[a] FG denotes data produced from the focus group sample, while HH denotes statistics produced from the household survey data.

[b] This category includes the following: granddaughter; another relative; neighbor; election organizer; small group leader; etc.

Likewise, of those who did not fill out their own ballot, the share that was consulted about their opinion (while their ballot was being filled out by someone else) was only about 60 percent. The percentage of women migrants who were consulted when their ballot was filled out was only 30 percent. In more than 60 percent of the cases, their ballots were filled out by their husbands without consulting them about their opinion. When asked if they had cast their own ballot, only 77 percent of the respondents said "yes." The number was even lower for women.

In order to measure the actual degree of participation in village elections with our data, we took the answers to the above questions, combined them, and identified six distinct "voting patterns." These patterns are defined by four steps, which can be represented by a four-digit code: x_1-x_2-x_3-x_4 (shown by four variables in the code).

The first digit/variable in the code (x_1) stands for whether or not the individual voted nominally or not (1 = voted; 2 = did not vote). The second digit (x_2) stands for whether or not the individual filled out his/her own ballot (1 = filled out ballot him/herself; 2 = ballot filled out by someone else). The third digit (x_3) stands for whether or not the individual was consulted when the ballot was being filled out (1 = consulted/filled out oneself), 2 = not consulted). And the fourth digit (x_4) stands for whether or not the individual cast the ballot him/herself (1 = cast ballot by him/herself; 2 = cast by someone else).

Using the coding system to create measures of voting patterns, we can create a number of measures of commonly observed ways of voting. For example, the code 1111 means that the villager voted completely by him/herself. We can call this a "real" or "complete" vote. In contrast, the code 1222 means that the individual only voted nominally (or that the person's opinion was not reflected in the vote). Whenever a code deviates from 1111, it does not necessarily mean that there was any misdeed. For example, the code 1211 means that although the individual voted in almost all respects (e.g., he/she was consulted and physically put his/her own ballot into the ballot box), the ballot was actually filled out by another person. Voting patterns such as 1211 can also be observed under strictly enforced election procedures outside China when the person with a right to vote is illiterate, for example. We also found that voting patterns were characterized by the code 1112 in certain cases we observed, e.g., whenever the individual prepared the ballot by him- or herself, but it was physically cast by someone else.

When examining our voting pattern codes, it becomes clear that although the nominal voting rates are high, the actual voting rates are lower (Table 3). In fact, only 74 percent of those people who nominally voted actually "participated fully" (that is, their voting pattern code was 1111). The rate of complete participation drops to 65 percent for women, while the rates of complete participation for young women and illiterate women are even lower—46 percent and 38 percent respectively.

What is even more worrisome is that the degree of complete participation actually decreased over time in our sample (Table 3 and Appendix1): it dropped from 79 percent during the three-year period from 1998 to 2001 to 74 percent during the three-year period from 2002 to 2004, for example. In the case of young women, the number of those whose voting pattern code was 1111 fell from 63 percent to 46 percent during the same period. In other words, less than half of the young women in our sample "voted completely" between 2002 and 2004.

Table 3. Voting Patterns of Different Groups in the Most Recent Election in China's Villages (from the Focus Group Dataset)

Cross-tabulation categories		Total number of observ. (number)	Code 1111[a] [voted completely]	Code 1112[a]	Code 1211[a]	Code 1212[a]	Code 1221[a]	Code 1222[a] [only voted nominally]
			(percent)					
All respondents	Full sample	979	74.16	9.6	3.68	7.15	0.31	5.11
By gender	Female	475	64.63	7.37	6.74	11.79	0.21	9.26
	Male	504	83.13	11.71	0.79	2.78	0.4	1.19
By gender (female) + age	<26	13	46.15	7.69	0	23.08	0	23.08
	26-35	100	70	6	1	9	0	14
	36-45	179	69.83	8.94	2.79	11.17	0	7.26
	46-55	127	56.69	7.09	14.17	13.39	0.79	7.87
	>55	56	60.71	5.36	14.29	12.5	0	7.14
By gender (male) + age	<26	7	100	0	0	0	0	0
	26-35	40	92.5	5	0	2.5	0	0
	36-45	123	86.18	9.76	0	2.44	0	1.63
	46-55	168	81.55	12.5	0.6	2.98	0.6	1.79
	>55	166	79.52	14.46	1.81	3.01	0.6	0.6
By gender (female) + education	Illiteracy	90	37.78	3.33	23.33	17.78	1.11	16.67
	1-6	218	65.6	8.72	3.67	10.55	0	11.47
	7-9	140	78.57	7.86	0.71	10	0	2.86
	>10	27	74.07	7.41	7.41	11.11	0	0
By gender (male) + education	Illiteracy	41	63.41	14.63	9.76	7.32	4.88	0
	1-6	213	84.04	12.21	0	3.29	0	0.47
	7-9	207	84.54	11.11	0	1.93	0	2.42
	>10	43	90.7	9.3	0	0	0	0
By female marital status	Single	5	60	0	0	20	0	20
	Married	459	64.49	7.63	6.54	11.76	0.22	9.37
	Lost spouse	10	70	0	20	10	0	0
	Divorced	1	100	0	0	0	0	0
By male marital status	Single	13	84.62	7.69	0	0	7.69	0

	Married	469	82.94	11.94	0.64	2.99	0.21	1.28
	Lost spouse	19	84.21	10.53	5.26	0	0	0
	Divorced	3	100	0	0	0	0	0
By work status	Farmer	810	72.84	10.25	4.2	7.41	0.37	4.94
	Migrant	67	85.07	2.99	1.49	2.99	0	7.46
	Self-employed	44	81.82	6.82	0	9.09	0	2.27
	Nothing	29	62.07	17.24	3.45	6.9	0	10.34
	Other	28	89.29	3.57	0	7.14	0	0
	Cadre	1						100

Data source: authors' survey.

[a] The codes describe different voting patterns. The digit positions in the four-digit codes have the following meaning: First digit: 1 = voted; 2 = did not vote. Second digit: 1 = filled out ballot by him/herself; 2 = ballot filled out by someone else. Third digit: 1 = vote was person's own decision; 2 = person was not consulted. Fourth digit: 1 = put ballot into ballot box him/herself; 2 = someone else put ballot into ballot box.

Our data also show that there were a significant number of individuals who only nominally voted (code = 1222) and that this number increased over time for some groups of individuals. Overall, five percent of the sample individuals only voted nominally. The rate is higher for women (9 percent), young women (23 percent), and illiterate women (17 percent) (Table 3). The number of those only nominally voting also increased over time (Table 3 and Appendix 1). To the extent that individuals' opinions were not reflected in their ballots and bona fide voting procedures were not adhered to, the process of voting in China appears to be undermining the usefulness of China's village committee elections.

Determinants of Voting Behavior

Because our analysis demonstrates that there are sharp differences among individuals and groups of individuals regarding their voting patterns, we shall seek to identify the determinants of voting behavior in this section. To do so, we shall conduct a multivariate analysis to explain *voting behavior* as a function of individual, household, and village characteristics. In our analysis, we specify four regressions to explain (a) whether or not an individual voted (at least nominally) during the most recent election; (b) whether or not an individual voted completely by him/herself; (c) whether or not an individual only voted nominally (1222); and (d) whether or not an individual made his/her own decision. To analyze the determinants of voting behavior, we specify voting behavior as a function of the following variables and groups of variables: (1) Voting Behavior = f (Gender; Age; Education; Migration Status; Nature of Village Election; Other Individual, Household, and Village Characteristics). Gender is a dummy variable that equals one if the individual is female and zero if male; Age is measured in years; and Education is measured in years of education. Migration status is measured as 1 if the individual was not present in the

village during the election and otherwise is 0. And, the Nature of the Village Election is a variable that measures the quality of the village election and is measured as mentioned above.

In addition to some of the main variables of interest, we also controlled for a number of other factors. "Other Individual Characteristics," for example, is a category that includes marital status (1 = married; 0 if not), self-employed status (1 = if the person entitled to vote works in his/her own family business; 0 if not), and wage-earner status (1 = works for a wage; 0 if not). "Other Household Characteristics" also includes the number of children, a dummy variable if any household member is a village cadre (1 = yes; 0 if not), and whether any household member is a party member (1 = yes; 0 if not). "Other Village Characteristics" includes net per capita income in the year in question, per capita debt, total population, percentage of minority population, per capita land, number of village-owned enterprises, percentage of migrant laborers, proportion of self-employed households, the distance of the nearest road from the village seat, the farthest distance between two small groups within the village, and the distance between the village committee and township seat.

To enhance the identification of some of our key variables, we did two things. First of all, for most of our variables (all of those for which there was time-varying information), we used observations concerning their level in 1997. In addition, in different subsets of our equations, we added county-level dummies to hold county-level effects constant. In other sets of equations, we added village-level dummies. Details of these variables are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Statistics from the Period of the Most Recent Election in China's Villages

	Focus Group Dataset		Household Dataset	
Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Voting Process Variables				
Did you vote?	0.92	0.27	0.86	0.35
Did you vote completely by yourself?	0.82	0.38	0.79	0.41
Nominally voted	0.33	0.47	0.37	0.48
Made his/her own decision	0.94	0.23	0.92	0.27
Individual/HH Characteristics				
Female	0.48	0.50	0.47	0.50
Age (years)	46.00	10.82	33.73	19.65
Educational attainment (in years)	5.75	3.35	5.08	4.11
Marital status (yes = 1)	0.94	0.25	0.60	0.49
Self-employed (yes = 1)	0.04	0.20	0.10	0.30
Wage earner (yes = 1)	0.09	0.29	0.21	0.41
Present during the election (yes = 1)	0.92	0.27	0.54	0.50
No. of children	2.15	1.14	0.66	0.96
Village cadre (proportion)	0.05	0.21	0.02	0.14

Party member (proportion)	0.12	0.33	0.046	0.21
Village Characteristics				
Net per capita income (Yuan)	1,446.09	780.19	1,465.31	759.22
Per capita debt (Yuan)	214.78	794.15	218.68	834.53
Total population	1,305.88	726.38	1,352.81	742.91
Percentage of minority population	4.40	14.58	4.38	15.26
Per capita land (mu)	2.17	1.94	2.05	1.89
No. of village-owned enterprises	0.32	0.78	0.30	0.75
Percentage of migrant laborers	10.81	10.39	11.39	10.84
Proportion of self-employed hhs	3.22	5.27	3.30	5.60
Distance of the nearest road from the village seat (km)	5.94	11.27	5.70	10.77
Furthest distance between two small groups within the village (km)	2.53	2.64	2.57	2.65
Distance between village committee and township seat (km)	5.23	4.13	4.98	4.01
Nature of Election				
Strictness (index)	3.00	1.20	3.03	1.21
Competitiveness (index)	2.43	1.14	2.41	1.16
Fairness (index)	3.09	1.08	3.12	1.09
Number of Observations	1,397		1,622	

Results of Multivariate Analysis

The results from regressions are consistent with the descriptive statistics (Table 5). Moreover, many of the results are reasonable. For example, the signs and levels of significance (in most cases) are consistent for all groups of villagers (regardless of gender status) when examining the coefficients on age and education levels. The results suggest that those individuals who are young and less educated tend to make fewer voting decisions of their own. Young and uneducated individuals tend to vote more nominally and make fewer decisions of their own, especially in the case of the equations that explain nominal voting behavior (columns 5 and 6) and the propensity of individuals to be involved in the voting decision (columns 7 and 8). The sign on the squared variable (for both age and education), however, suggests that the relationship is non-linear in many of the cases. When individuals become elderly, they also vote less, relatively speaking, and the positive effect of education on voting behavior is less pronounced for higher levels of education. In addition, our results also show that self-employed individuals vote less—perhaps since they are busier or their interests lie outside of the village—and when they do vote, they are less involved in the decision-making (that is, they vote less fully themselves and vote more nominally). Interestingly, party members not only vote more, but they vote more fully as well. While this may seem ironic (one interpretation is that Communist party members support democracy more!), party members are likely to be more diligent in carrying

out this duty, probably since village elections are nationally condoned (which is consistent with the sign in the "nominal vote only" equation in which it is shown that party members also vote more nominally, supporting the interpretation that they may just be going through the motions and following the requests of local officials and village leaders to participate in such elections).

Most importantly, the regression results show that women vote less than other groups in China's rural villages (Table 5, row 1). More specifically, they participate less (columns 1 and 2); vote less completely (columns 3 and 4); vote more nominally (and significantly so in the regression that includes county dummies—columns 5 and 6); and they are less likely to make their own decisions (columns 7 and 8). While we do not know exactly why this is the case, it is likely that gender norms are still embedded in China's village life and men tend to make more of the decision-making in certain community matters. In such a setting, if China wants all its villagers to gain experience of voting in elections and have their own voices heard, policies need to be made that will encourage women to exercise their right to vote.

At the same time, the results are consistent with the observation that migrants also vote less (row 12). Although there are migrants who happen to be in their home village during the election (which means our proxy for migration—the inverse of "present in village during election"—is not perfect), if presence in the village picks up a large part of the migrant effect, it is clear that migrants, like women, participate less (columns 1 and 2) and vote less completely (columns 3 and 4). Although interesting, this may be a natural outcome in part, since migrants are generally out of touch with everyday life in the village. However, policy may be able to play a role here by creating a set of proxy voting rules that could help keep migrants involved in the election process. Finally, if we look at women migrants (who are not shown here due to lack of space), we find that this group has the worst voting record of all. Importantly, these results, which draw on the data from the household survey, are substantively the same when the same model is run with data from the focus groups (also not shown here; the results are available from the authors).

Table 5. Probit Regression Results on the Determinants of Participation in the Most Recent Elections in China (HH Dataset)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Did you vote? (yes/no)		Dependent Variable: Did you vote entirely by yourself? (code 1111)		Dependent Variable: Only voted nominally (yes/no—code 1222)		Dependent Variable: Did you make your own decision? (yes/no)	
Female = 1, male = 0	-0.409	-0.468	-0.917	-1.030	0.261	1.834	-0.854	-1.173
	(3.61)***	(3.85)***	(6.37)***	(6.46)***	(0.62)	(1.92)*	(4.34)***	(4.67)***
Age when the most recent election was held (years)	0.045	0.040	0.039	0.047	-0.276	-0.203	0.117	0.117
	(1.84)*	(1.53)	(1.23)	(1.31)	(3.39)***	(1.25)	(3.12)***	(2.49)**
Age square	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	0.003	0.002	-0.001	-0.001
	(2.27)**	(2.02)**	(1.69)*	(1.52)	(3.30)***	(1.23)	(3.31)***	(2.58)***
Educational attainment (years)	-0.058	-0.012	-0.037	0.154	-0.384	-1.089	0.314	0.393
	(0.93)	(0.14)	(0.44)	(1.57)	(1.96)*	(2.00)**	(2.84)***	(2.80)***
Education square	0.003	-0.001	0.004	-0.008	0.023	0.073	-0.019	-0.024
	(0.73)	(0.11)	(0.56)	(1.17)	(1.68)*	(2.04)**	(2.44)**	(2.48)**
Marital status (yes = 1)	0.194	0.176	0.312	0.329	0.308	-2.324	0.150	0.508
	(0.97)	(0.80)	(1.24)	(1.19)	(0.50)	(1.53)	(0.48)	(1.29)
No. of children	0.028	0.073	0.108	0.043	-0.224	-2.076	0.193	0.120
	(0.45)	(1.06)	(1.47)	(0.53)	(1.06)	(2.36)**	(1.82)*	(0.89)
Self-employed (yes = 1)	-0.256	-0.255	-0.324	-0.269	1.077	1.995	-0.576	-0.558
	(1.75)*	(1.61)	(1.81)*	(1.36)	(2.39)**	(2.02)**	(2.56)**	(1.97)**
Wage earner (yes = 1)	-0.085	-0.163	-0.126	0.004	0.616	-1.893	-0.380	0.020
	(0.58)	(1.03)	(0.71)	(0.02)	(1.37)	(1.23)	(1.74)*	(0.07)
Village cadre (proportion)	0.599	0.531						
	(1.35)	(1.08)						
Party member (proportion)	0.522	0.583	0.608	0.675	0.551	4.548	0.283	0.049
	(1.90)*	(1.90)*	(2.13)**	(2.09)**	(0.76)	(2.46)**	(0.77)	(0.12)
Present during the election (proxy for migration)	1.656	1.732	1.434	1.757				2.626
	(8.58)***	(8.05)***	(2.85)***	(3.09)***				(3.85)***
Net per capita income	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	-0.001	0.041	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.07)	(2.07)**	(0.30)	(0.24)	(0.67)	(0.00)	(0.44)	(0.14)
Net per capita income square	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.67)	(2.04)**	(0.50)	(0.46)	(1.37)	(0.00)	(0.46)	(0.26)
Per capita debt	-0.000	-0.000	0.002	0.000	-0.001	0.468	0.000	-0.005
	(0.34)	(1.62)	(2.50)**	(0.84)	(0.33)	(0.00)	(0.90)	(1.10)

Total population	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	-0.000
	(0.13)	(0.70)	(0.87)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.00)	(0.46)	(0.26)
% of minority population	0.003	-0.004	0.099	0.045	-6.632	-232.936	4.238	9.404
	(0.67)	(0.55)	(3.13)***	(0.87)	(2.00)**	(.)	(2.68)***	(1.83)*
Per capita land	-0.078	-0.118	0.038	-0.001	0.100	-79.308	-0.036	-0.234
	(2.09)**	(1.57)	(0.59)	(0.00)	(0.25)	(.)	(0.30)	(0.27)
No. of village-owned enterprises	-0.002	-0.149	-0.107	-0.082	-0.260	30.962	0.158	-0.340
	(0.03)	(1.12)	(0.80)	(0.29)	(0.68)	(0.00)	(0.87)	(0.60)
Percentage of migrant laborers	-0.005	-0.011	-0.018	-0.019	-0.034	0.563	0.015	-0.012
	(0.88)	(1.14)	(2.26)**	(1.20)	(1.56)	(0.00)	(1.55)	(0.43)
% of self-employed households	0.001	0.040	0.014	0.013	0.073	1.968	-0.008	-0.001
	(0.13)	(2.82)***	(1.03)	(0.76)	(1.57)	(0.00)	(0.51)	(0.04)
Distance of the nearest road from the village seat (in km)	-0.001	-0.009	0.004	0.004	-0.080	0.081	0.021	0.046
	(0.23)	(1.43)	(0.56)	(0.45)	(1.74)*	(0.00)	(1.76)*	(1.88)*
Farthest distance between two small groups within this village (in km)	-0.012	-0.008	0.029	-0.004	-0.195	-8.964	0.072	0.076
	(0.46)	(0.25)	(0.90)	(0.10)	(1.25)	(0.00)	(1.27)	(0.86)
Distance between village committee and township seat	0.018	0.052	0.000	0.009	-0.005	15.053	0.032	-0.098
	(1.14)	(2.29)**	(0.01)	(0.32)	(0.08)	(0.00)	(1.24)	(1.35)
Constant	-0.664	0.100	-0.717	-3.824	6.390	-8.404	-1.494	-4.529
	(1.05)	(0.10)	(0.76)	(2.74)***	(2.58)***	(.)	(1.46)	(1.24)
Observations	1266	1179	875	681	142	105	998	473
Pseudo R-squared	0.17	0.24	0.26	0.29	0.39	0.71	0.30	0.37
County dummy	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Conclusions

It is hard to assess the progress in China's village elections. As in any country in which elections are just emerging, there are good ones and poor ones. In other research work (Luo et al. 2006), it has been shown that good elections seem to matter in terms of stimulating new investment as well as general community development. Therefore, it is important to begin to understand what makes for good elections; the

first step is to begin to measure the election process, which is what we have attempted in this paper.

According to our analysis, in which we assume that higher voting participation is meaningful in villages with both good and bad elections (as long as individuals actually vote), we see that there are still gaps in the coverage of certain groups of individuals in rural China. In other words, the process is not as good as it could be, because certain groups of individuals participate less than others. As our findings show, this is especially true of certain groups: women; migrants; and those with lower levels of education.

Our analysis suggests that concrete steps need to be taken to get individuals in these under-represented groups to participate in elections in a better way. This is likely to happen if election procedures improve. It should be borne in mind, however, that the low level of participation by women is a problem, holding the nature of the election constant. Therefore, to induce more women to vote, a campaign is necessary that urges women to vote, and rules are needed that make it more difficult for family members (e.g., husbands, fathers, and father-in-laws) to vote for the women in the family. The same is true for migrants in general and women migrants in particular. If this happens, even if elections in China are not perfect, they will be building a foundation for the future emergence of real democracy and civil participation.

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Appendix 1. Voting Patterns of Different Groups in the Previous Election in China's Villages (FG Dataset)

Cross-tabulation categories		Total number of observ. (number)	Code 1111[a] [voted completely]	Code 1112[a]	Code 1211[a]	Code 1212[a]	Code 1221[a]	Code 1222[a] [only voted nominally]
			(percent)					
All respondents	Full sample	934	78.59	8.14	3.32	6.21	0.43	3.32
By gender	Female	459	69.06	6.75	6.1	11.11	0.65	6.32
	Male	475	87.79	9.47	0.63	1.47	0.21	0.42
By gender (female) + age	<26	19	63.16	5.26	0	21.05	0	10.53
	26-35	135	76.3	7.41	0.74	9.63	0	5.93
	36-45	166	70.48	7.23	5.42	11.45	0	5.42
	46-55	109	56.88	6.42	12.84	12.84	2.75	8.26
	>55	30	76.67	3.33	13.33	3.33	0	3.33
By gender (male) + age	<26	5	100	0	0	0	0	0
	26-35	74	93.24	4.05	0	1.35	0	1.35
	36-45	113	92.04	6.19	0	1.77	0	0

	46-55	177	86.44	11.3	1.13	0.56	0.56	0
	>55	106	81.13	14.15	0.94	2.83	0	0.94
By gender (female) + education	Illiteracy	91	43.96	4.4	19.78	15.38	3.3	13.19
	1-6	209	70.33	9.09	2.87	11	0	6.7
	7-9	134	82.84	5.22	1.49	8.96	0	1.49
	>10	25	76	4	8	8	0	4
By gender (male) + education	Illiteracy	38	71.05	13.16	7.89	5.26	2.63	0
	1-6	198	87.37	10.61	0	1.52	0	0.51
	7-9	198	89.9	9.09	0	0.51	0	0.51
	>10	41	95.12	2.44	0	2.44	0	0
By female marital status	Single	5	40	0	0	40	0	20
	Married	444	69.37	6.98	5.86	10.81	0.68	6.31
	Lost one's spouse	9	66.67	0	22.22	11.11	0	0
	Divorced	1	100	0	0	0	0	0
By male marital status	Single	15	93.33	6.67	0	0	0	0
	Married	437	87.64	9.61	0.46	1.6	0.23	0.46
	Lost one's spouse	21	85.71	9.52	4.76	0	0	0
	Divorced	2	100	0	0	0	0	0
By work status	Farmer	780	77.31	8.85	3.72	6.54	0.51	3.08
	Migrant	66	86.36	1.52	1.52	3.03	0	7.58
	Self-employed	36	86.11	2.78	0	11.11	0	0
	Nothing	27	70.37	14.81	3.7	3.7	0	7.41
	Other	23	95.65	4.35	0	0	0	0
	Cadre	2	100	0	0	0	0	0

Data source: authors' survey.

[a] Codes describe different voting patterns. The digit positions in the four-digit codes have the following meaning: First digit: 1 = voted; 2 = did not vote. Second digit: 1 = filled out ballot by him/herself; 2 = ballot filled out by someone else. Third digit: 1 = vote reflected the person's own decision; 2 = not consulted. Fourth digit: 1 = put ballot into ballot box him/herself; 2 = someone else put the ballot into the ballot box.