ELECTIONS AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF ADOPTION OF GRASSROOTS ELECTIONS IN CHINA

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This dissertation investigates the relationship between elections and authoritarian rule with a focus on the case of China’s adoption of elections at the grassroots level. In this dissertation, I look at the incentives facing Chinese local governments in choosing between holding competitive elections or state-controlled elections, and how the selection of electoral rules shapes the public’s preferences over political institutions and influences the citizens’ political behaviors, especially voting in elections and participation in contentious activities. The overarching theme in this dissertation proposes that the sources and consequences of Chinese local elections are conditioned on the state-owned resources and the governing costs. When the amount of state-owned resources to rule the local society is limited, the paucity of resources will incentivize authoritarian governments to liberalize grassroots elections to offset the governance costs. The various levels of election liberalization will lead to different consequences in the public’s political behavior. An abundance of state-owned resources not only discourages rulers from sharing power with the local society, but also supplies the rulers with strong capacity to obtain loyalty from voters when elections are adopted. As a result, elections under authoritarian governments with an abundance of state-owned resources will see more loyalist voters than elections with authoritarian governments with fewer state-owned resources. In addition, the varieties of election practices will exert impacts on public opinion toward the authoritarian government: awareness of elections will enhance public trust in the government and decrease the public's intention to challenge the incumbents' authority while at
the same time increasing the public's faith in the institutions, thereby encouraging the public to adopt official channels to air their grievances. The analysis of the village-level as well as individual-level survey data and cases lends empirical supports to the argument. First, I find that the governing costs—measured by the size of labor force—are significantly and positively associated with the likelihood that local officials allow the villagers to freely nominate candidates. Second, I find that party members are more likely to vote in rural elections than urban elections while urban elections attract citizens with higher levels of democratic consciousness. The rural-urban divide in voter type indicates that the possession of economic resources by rural grassroots governments helps mobilize rural loyalist voters to participate in village committee elections, whereas the lack of such resources by urban governments discourages regime loyalist but encourage democratic voters to turn out to vote in urban elections. Third, I find significant evidence that citizens who are aware of grassroots elections are less likely to engage in contentious activities such as protest, strikes or demonstrations. Yet, the awareness of elections also encourages citizens to more frequently adopt, shangfang (petition), a government-sponsored conflict resolution mechanism, than those who are not aware of such elections. The implications of these findings suggest that the capability of state in controlling resources is vital to the success or failure of elections in stabilizing authoritarian regimes. The findings also provide an assessment on the substantial influence of the rural and urban grassroots elections in China's subnational democratization.
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By

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Overview

This dissertation attempts to investigate the relationship between elections and authoritarian rule with a focus on the case of China's adoption of elections at the grassroots level. Broadly, the purpose of this dissertation is to unravel the conditions under which elections, as a nominally democratic institution employed by the authoritarian leaders, are more likely to be liberalized as a result of autocrats' rational calculus, and how, in turn, the liberalization will sustain authoritarian rule. Specifically, I look at the incentives facing Chinese local governments in choosing between holding competitive elections or state-controlled elections, and how the selection of electoral rules will shape the public's preferences over the political institutions and influence the citizens' political behaviors, especially voting and protests.

In this dissertation, I empirically examine the sources and consequences of China's grassroots elections--namely, villagers' committee elections in rural areas and residents' committee elections in urban areas--using village-level as well as individual-level survey data to account for how these elections are determined by the local officials and how they affect the citizens' political participation in elections as well as contentious collective activities. The overarching theme in this dissertation is that the sources and consequences of Chinese local elections are conditioned on the state-owned resources and the governing costs when ruling the local society. When the amount of state-owned resources to rule the local society is limited, the paucity of resources will incentivize authoritarian governments to liberalize grassroots
elections to neutralize the governance costs. And the consequence of the liberalization is, according to the argument, citizens will develop democratic consciousness and be willing to participate in these relatively free and fair elections. On the other hand, an abundance of state-owned resources not only discourages rulers from sharing power with the local society, but also supplies the rulers with strong capacity to obtain loyalty from voters when elections are adopted. As a result, elections under authoritarian governments with an abundance of state-owned resources will see more loyalist voters than elections with authoritarian governments with fewer state-owned resources. Eventually, the varieties of elections with regards to the degree of state electoral control will exert uneven impacts on public opinion: Citizens who experience free and fair elections are more likely to be aware of elections while those who live under elections controlled by the state are less likely to be affected by elections because of their ignorance of elections. Awareness of grassroots elections, as the Chinese central government generally expects, will enhance public trust in the government and decrease the public's intention to challenge the incumbents' authority. However, the awareness also increases common people's belief in institutions, and as such encourages them to adopt official channels to air their grievances. The implication that can be drawn from the case, regarding public opinion toward the regime, is that, paradoxically, holding elections will prolong authoritarian survival by decreasing protests challenging the system but will pressure the authoritarian governments to be more responsive to social demands within the system. In other words, whether elections will postpone or facilitate democratization of authoritarian regimes still depends on the governments' capability to absorb social dissent within the system.

This dissertation incorporates the case of Chinese subnational elections into the developing
field of authoritarian elections and contributes to unravelling the micro-foundations of the way through which elections will be adopted as well as how they shape citizens’ political behaviors under authoritarianism. The findings in this dissertation suggest a complex picture of the relationship between local elections and authoritarian rule, which echoes the proposition that holding elections manufactures a dilemma for authoritarian governments—elections are useful to the governance, but also dangerous to the ruler.

Next, I first discuss the broad theoretical background of elections and authoritarian rule. I then specify the contribution of incorporating into the general theory the framework of this dissertation. After the theoretical discussion, I elaborate the justification of using China as a case in studying elections under authoritarianism. In the end of this introduction, I outline the rest of the dissertation.

1.2 Elections and Political Regimes

Authoritarian governments after World War II have become skillful and sophisticated in their ruling strategies, and one of the most common ways to govern is to adopt nominally democratic institutions such as elections. The third wave of democratization has sparked scholars’ interests in the countries that adopted democratic institutions but failed to move toward liberal democracy (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Huntington 1993; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2006; Case 2006; Diamond 2002; Geddes 2005). In fact, elections have been nearly universal practices around the world but not exclusively among democratic countries. If we take into account elections of any forms, be it direct or indirect, national or local, the number of countries that hold elections in 2015 accounts for almost the
entire world with only a small portion of countries that totally ban parties and elections. The countries resisting elections include Eritrea, which adopted an electoral law but postponed the plan of holding elections for more than thirty years. Qatar\(^1\), Oman, and Saudi Arab embraced monarchy and are under the strict rule of the Sultan or the King, the only law-making authority. Obviously, even the regimes that do not hold elections have electoral laws that legitimize the rule of government. Across the wide range of the democracy-autocracy spectrum, elections have been used across different types of regimes (see Figure 1.1). Therefore, elections are no more a symbol of democracy but more a tool for governing. Although scholars have had in-depth knowledge of the practices and consequences of elections under democracies, our understanding of authoritarian elections is still under development.

\[\text{Figure 1.1 Polity Score and Holding Elections by Country in 2015}\]

\(^1\) Qatar’s constitution stipulate legislature elections too, but elections haven’t been held.
Two broad puzzles are raised by extant studies of authoritarian elections. The first question involves the causes of the existence of authoritarian elections (Geddes 2005; Linz 1978; Svolik 2012). Indeed, intuitively, dictators should have no incentives to adopt institutions like elections to constrain their power or to confront them with political uncertainty that may eventually force them to share power with society. For this reason, adoption of elections by dictators is a political choice and also a politically interesting question for political scientists that requires explanation. The second question, following the first puzzle, concerns the profound effects of elections on authoritarian rule. Elections are an institution that reshapes the relationships between the government and citizens. Generally, with regularly held elections, citizens can voice their opinions about policies or replace unpopular officials by votes. In return, the governments’ accountability and responsiveness should be enhanced by elections under the pressure of electoral competition. In democracies, parties are the main vehicle channeling public opinion and preferences to the government through elections (Downs 1957; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). To win elections, political parties maximize the votes by offering policies supported by the majority of the population. The logic of democratic elections, however, does not hold in authoritarian regimes. With state resources at their disposal, authoritarian incumbents can employ a set of tools to manipulate electoral results to their own favor (Schedler 2002). Vote buying, candidate controlling, intimidation, and violence are commonly adopted by authoritarian incumbents to assure their electoral victory. As such, elections are powerless in holding authoritarian governments accountable since election competition under authoritarian rule is distorted. Nevertheless, the weakness of electoral institutions in constraining the power of authoritarian rulers does not mean elections have no substantial
effect on authoritarian rule. One important issue raised by scholars of electoral
authoritarianism has focused on whether the adoption of elections can facilitate democratic
transition in authoritarian regimes. Compared to countries not holding elections or holding
obviously unfree and unfair elections, countries allowing more competitive elections may be
more likely to implant democratic values within the society, which usually violates the true
intentions of the rulers, which is to stay in power. If this is the case, elections, particularly
competitive ones, may substantively increase the likelihood that a country will move toward
democracy. This possibility brings up the second conundrum that requires empirical
examination: if elections are used by authoritarian rulers to maintain their rule, even though
elections will undermine their power in society, what is the ultimate effect of holding elections
on authoritarian rule?

Conventional wisdom regarding economic and social modernization is one theoretical
approach to explain the relationship between elections and authoritarian rule. Modernization
theory proposes that elections are a sign that a country is moving toward democracy, which is
usually related to the country’s economic development and social mobilization (Lipset 1959;
Deutsch 1961). Following modernization theory, scholars may argue that elections should be
more likely to be adopted by authoritarian rulers as economic development reaches a certain
level where the rulers need to open elections as a way to govern the society. This was the case
in the first wave of democratization whereby monarchies were forced to adopt electoral
institutions to accommodate the public’s call for political participation. Bendix (1980) called this
is a process from rule by King to rule by people influenced by modernization. Also, elections
could help solve the legitimacy crisis and participation crisis in political development as the
economic system modernized (Binder 1971; Almond and Coleman 1960). To solve the crises, elections provide a way to satisfy the public's demands for political participation and, in so doing, legitimize the regime.

Despite modernization theory's elegance, there are at least two reasons to question the applicability of the theory in explaining the development of elections in authoritarian countries after the third wave. First, after the third wave of democratization, the adoption of elections is not a choice that stems from a natural evolution of social demands. Most of the countries choose to run elections not because of the improved education or the enriched society that expedites the public's call for political participation, the main causal logic of the modernization theory (Lipset 1959; Deutsch 1961; Przeworski 2000; Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Instead, many elections are instituted by the dominant rulers for certain political purposes, for instance to legitimize the popular support of the regimes, or for receiving foreign aid from international organizations that require minimum elements of democracy (Wright 2009; Brown 2005). Figure 1.1 has shown that elections have been a common practice around the world. Even those countries with low levels of democracy have elections. This suggests that elections have not been an institution specific to democratic countries, as predicted by modernization theory. Second, elections function differently in authoritarian regimes than in full-fledged democracies. In democratic countries, elections influence policy making via a bottom-up mechanism, in which citizens are able to express policy preference through voting. In authoritarian regimes, elections usually are rulers' tool to manage the society. For instance, authoritarian elections play a role in the government’s allocation of political or economic patronage (Lust-Okar 2009; Blaydes 2006). They can be used to recruit social elites in regions where the regime has a
weaker control over resources (Reuter and Robertson 2012). Even though under certain conditions elections can change policies in authoritarian regimes, it is the rulers who allow citizens to signal their dissatisfaction with the government (Miller 2015). As such, while elections in democracy carry out a specific function, elections under authoritarian rule vary across regions depending upon the purpose of ruler in using election to achieve political goals. Although the modernization theory has accounted for the adoption of elections in liberal democracies, it cannot fully apply to the authoritarian rulers' incentive in choosing elections as a tool.

1.3 Elections under Authoritarian Rule

Contrary to the modernization theory, emerging new theories to account for the relationship between holding elections and authoritarian rule rest on the assumption that elections do not automatically translate to the democratization of a regime. Students of Soviet politics and totalitarianism have long noticed the differences between authoritarian elections and democratic elections (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965). But not until the late 1970s were the differences studied systematically in political sciences (Hermet et al. 1978). Linz (1978), according to his observations of totalitarian elections in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy as well as authoritarian elections in Soviet Union and Communist countries, proposes that elections functioned as autocrats' legitimizing tools. Around 2000, many transitologists also realized that political transition processes, particularly those conceived of as democratic transition traditionally, have not necessarily led a country to democracy (Carothers 2002; Huntington
1993; Levitsky and Way 2002). These regimes are, borrowing Carothers’ term, “stuck” in the transition process and seemingly have little chance to further the democratic transition.

The new theoretical approaches, known as electoral authoritarianism, developed after 2000, have deemed elections as an instrument for promoting the survival of authoritarian regimes when elections can be manipulated by rulers. Many functional explanations of the existence of electoral institutions thus arise. For instance, elections play a role that enables dictators to signal the regime’s strength to opposition groups (Geddes 2005; Magaloni 2006), helping the dominant party stay in power. Elections also help rulers to co-opt social elites outside the political system and potential dissident social groups that would challenge the regime (Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008). To achieve this goal, autocrats use elections to distribute patronage among elites (Lust-Okar 2006), recruit politicians and make dictators’ power sharing commitments credible (Magaloni 2006). Eventually, elections will usefully assist the authoritarian rulers in collecting information about oppositions (Magaloni 2006; Brownlee 2007) or the public’s policy preferences (De Miguel et al. 2015).

Nevertheless, elections can backfire. They may facilitate the demise of authoritarian regimes when regime vulnerability is high or opposition forces can be united by electoral competition against the ruling coalitions in an authoritarian regime (Bunce and Wolchik 2010). Scholars also find evidence that party competition and elections may destabilize politics and promote regime transition (Gandhi 2008; Lindberg 2006; Howard and Roessler 2006). For example, Schedler (2009) argues that elections can trigger social movements in authoritarian regimes because elections reveal the vulnerability of the authoritarian regime. Shared
grievances, changes in the political opportunity structure, or weak institutions can become obvious when elections are held. Wright and Escribà-Folch (2012) find that although elections increase the stability of authoritarian regimes, allowing opposition political parties destabilizes politics because it brings in and motivates other elites to compete for power.

1.4 The Causes and Consequences of Adopting Elections by Authoritarian Rulers

This dissertation follows the strand of theoretical development in electoral authoritarianism and looks for the causes and consequences of the adoption of elections by autocrats. It proposes that elections are not independent to but will be inevitably conditioned by the government’s capacity to rule. Authoritarian leaders have no intentions to provide an institution to undermine their own power at hand. There are facilitating factors that can account for why authoritarian leaders are willing to adopt elections in the first place. The consequences, in turn, also depend on how the authoritarian leaders can manage the electoral outcomes without losing the legitimacy generated by electoral participation.

Current literature on electoral authoritarianism has not effectively addressed the issues of why elections are adopted by authoritarian rulers in the first place, and whether elections can strengthen or bring down authoritarian rulers. As discussed above, the existing notions have focused on the purposes of rulers in using elections. However, what is also important is the incentives of rulers to liberalize elections. Indeed, while elections can be used to intimidate domestic enemies, to allocate political resources, or to legitimize the regime, not all governments choose to run elections at the national level. For instance, there are no national election in several one-party regimes, such as China and Vietnam. There are varieties of
elections at the local level as well. In pre-democratization Taiwan, Mexico, South Korea, Chile, Brazil or current China, Singapore, Vietnam and so on, electoral politics differed to a huge degree across localities within each of these nations. These phenomena require further examination. This indicates that the incentives vary as the contexts in which authoritarian rulers were embedded change. This dissertation intends to uncover the conditions under which rulers are more likely to provide elections as well as the conditions under which elections can work to serve the rulers’ goal of political survival.

I propose that the causes and effects of the adoption of elections are conditioned by state-owned resources. The state-owned resources provide significant benefits to rulers and citizens. When rulers control rich and valuable state-owned resources, they should have no incentives to adopt elections. On the other hand, where there is a lack of such resources to govern society or the resources are not sufficient to satisfy social demand, rulers use elections as a tool to serve the purposes of legitimacy or recruitment of social elites.

From the same theoretical logic, one expectation is that the abundance or absence of state-owned resources also affect the outcome of rulers’ strategic use of elections. With higher amounts of resources, authoritarian governments are able to manipulate elections in an efficient way. Indeed, as Greene (2007) has insightfully demonstrated in the Mexican case as well as in other dominant party regimes, the public resources controlled by the government, such as state-owned enterprises and bureaucratic budgets, can facilitate the incumbent party’s manipulation of elections such as buying votes, providing patronage benefits, or threatening to stop funding certain groups. These tactics largely keep authoritarian rulers in power. The theoretical framework partially is in line with this argument, and the China’s case is used to test
whether the logic holds true in other types of authoritarian regimes. In particular, one-party regimes with no party competition require further empirical examination.

Living under authoritarian control, citizens’ perception of elections should have some political impact on authoritarian rule. Whether these elections will have any effects on political transitions is a difficult question to answer (Gandhi 2015). This question has been a long-term debate, with one group of scholars supporting elections’ destabilizing and democratizing effects (Lindberg 2006; Howard and Roessler 2006; Schedler 2009; Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012) whereas another group argues for elections’ stabilizing and strengthening effects (Gandhi 2008; Magaloni 2008; Linz 1978; Malesky and Schuler 2011). If we can observe variation in electoral adoption across units in a nation, which is expected to be determined by the amount of state-owned resources controlled by the local government, we should be able to observe a variation in citizens’ opinions toward elections as well. When elections are held under authoritarian control, citizens may decline to participate in elections as a way to express their opinion; when elections are perceived as free, citizens may participate in elections more often. As such, whether authoritarian rule will be undermined or strengthened by elections is a question of how the public perceives the adoption of elections. The relationships between public opinion, elections and regime stability will also be tested in this dissertation using China’s survey data.

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2 More details of this debate is discussed in chapter 3.
In sum, the theoretical mechanism this dissertation attempts to establish can be graphed as Figure 1.2. This dissertation employs China as a case to empirically test the causes and consequences identifying in the theoretical argument. Below I discuss why China is an often excluded but could be a theoretically rich case that helps us understand the relationships between elections and authoritarian rule.

1.5 Why China?

Chinese central authorities have allowed grassroots competitive elections since 1987. That was the year that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decided to experiment with competitive elections for village committee elections in rural areas. The hope was that this experiment would serve as an innovative way to restructure rural politics, over which the Communist Party was losing control at that time. The rural villager committee elections were further codified in the Organic Law, which makes the implementation of elections officially a national event. Around 2000, several city governments experimented urban grassroots election in communities as well. The residents' committee elections, generally equivalent to village committee elections in rural areas, have been held in several coastal provinces such as...
Shandong and Shanghai, and more and more urban local governments have begun to conduct the same type of elections.

Elections are not trivial but have been encouraging meaningful changes to Chinese local politics. For instance, studies have shown that elections do hold local officials accountable (Manion 1996; Luo et al. 2010; Wang and Yao 2007) and many in-depth interviews have demonstrated that local officials are using elections as a tool to stabilize society (Kennedy 2010). In 1993, the violent and widespread peasants' riots against a highway tax occurred in Renshou County, Sichuan province. But the same tax was collected by a neighboring county government without peasants' resistance because the neighboring county held free elections (Wang 1997). Many villagers have well understood the lawful status of villagers' committee elections and protest against village officials who fail to provide competitive elections (Chen 2012; O'Brien et al. 2006; O'Brien 1996). Even today, local social unrest in China still tells the story that elections matter. In the 2011 Wukan event, where more than ten thousand villagers participated in protests against the governments' unauthorized sale of lands, one of their major goal was to have a free and fair village election for selecting their own local leaders.

The public in China also appreciates that elections could help resolve social grievances. In 2011 in Fuzhou city, Jiangxi province, an aggrieved citizen who had experienced home demolition twice protested against the government by using suicide bombing of government buildings. This event received the public's attentions. Many citizens commented online that elections may eventually help this tragedy from happening by granting ordinary people the

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3 For some English sources of this event, see the CNN report http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/05/26/china.blast/index.html?hpt=T2, accessed date April 30 2017
right to air their preferences over policies. The reaction of the public encouraged many people to participate as independent candidates in the 2011 county-level congress elections. Although these candidates eventually were labeled by the regime as "illegal" and removed from the ballot, it shows that local elections do have substantial effects on the public and on the authoritarian leadership in China.

While recent emerging attentions have been paid to China as a case illustrating electoral politics under authoritarianism (Landry et al. 2010), China is an often-appreciated case in its importance to studying authoritarian elections. Scholars of electoral authoritarianism exclude China as a case, largely because the Communist Party remain the strongest, single authority in Chinese politics. Yet, precisely because of the dominance of the CCP, China can be a critical case to the study of elections and authoritarian rule. Even under one party rule, Chinese officials still have incentives to share power by conducting elections, suggests that elections have become an important governing tool for the CCP and not just window-dressing. This makes China an important case for theory to account for the role of elections under authoritarian rule. The Chinese Communist regime has displayed its authoritarian resilience (Nathan 2003; Wang 2006). It can strongly resist political change that threatens the authoritarian regime. How do elections play a role in a strong authoritarian regime such as China? Would China’s strength in resisting political change involve the use of electoral institutions? Examining these questions may help us understand how authoritarian rulers strategically adopt elections and how, in turn, elections may stabilize (or destabilize) the regime.

In addition, the regional variation in the implementation of election rules in China provides a laboratory to test propositions on the relationship between authoritarian rule and
elections. Subnational analysis can help us understand the micro-foundation of the mechanism through which elections affect the behavior of authoritarian rulers and ordinary citizens. This subnational variation can be shown by survey data. Figure 1.3 and 1.4 picture the variation by province in the implementation of elections, based on the Chinese General Social Survey in 2010 and 2013 respectively\(^4\). Both surveys have surveyed more than ten thousand respondents selected by using stratified probability sampling. The large sample allows us to draw a map to show the variation across provinces in China.

\(^4\) Using data from different years to draw the map is because the two data sets provide different set of questionnaires of interest.
One can intuitively identify some patterns from the graphs. For instance, we see that economic development could not be the main reason resulting in variation in electoral implementation. As shown in figure 1.3, the percentage of public's awareness of elections does not reach its peak in regions with highest economic development, like southeastern coastal provinces. Instead, people who live closer to Beijing are more likely to perceive elections as democratic. The pattern is more interesting while looking at the regional variation in the percentage of people perceive grassroots elections as free and fair. Figure 1.4 shows that the percentage of citizens who answered that their community elections are nominated and
elected by the residents and not CCP control. The map illustrates regional variations in electoral control by the CCP across Chinese local governments. The contrast of Figure 1.3 and Figure 1.4 indicates that there is a huge gap between the implementation of elections and the actual liberalizing of these elections. Compared to cross-national research designs that frequently encounter issues involving unobserved variance across countries, analyzing the subnational variations in China has the advantages that the culture and political institutions and many other confounding effects have been hold constant across subdivisions in China.

Despite the fact that many comparativists deem Chinese local elections, as intrinsically different from elections in other authoritarian regimes that allow party competition and sometimes face the hazard of central leadership turnover, the causes and consequences of the adoption of completive elections do not differ between China and the rest of the authoritarian countries. The incentives for authoritarian rulers to adopt certain institutions are generally similar, namely political survival: they prefer to stay in power (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). Therefore, what can account for variation in electoral institutions across political subdivisions in China should have something in common with the reasons other authoritarian regimes adopt elections as well, given their preferences for sustaining authoritarian rule. This dissertation, therefore, attempts to use China as a critical case to uncover the relationships between elections and authoritarian rule.

It should be noted that while the findings in this dissertation doubtlessly apply to China, they at best provide suggestive guidance to the research of the rest of electoral authoritarian regimes. Perhaps the principle reason is that China's elections are not held nationally and limited in political influence. Note, for instance, Diamond put China in the category of closed regime instead of hybrid regime (Diamond 2002).
regimes, given that China does not allow competitive elections at national level yet. In other regimes marked by electoral authoritarianism, even in many one-party dominant regimes such as Soviet Union and Vietnam, direct elections at national level are allowed. For instance, in Soviet Union, national elections for the congress of Soviet Union—the Supreme Soviet—were regularly held. However, there was one candidate for each seat, and the Party determined who would be on the ballot. In Vietnam, the 1992 Constitution has entitled the public to elect the national congress, though the party still have a say in candidate nomination. While these elections are not truly competitive and are still under the control of the ruling party, as national events, they are expected to play roles in national politics, which is not a feature that can be observed from the China’s case.

Admitting the limitations of this research in drawing implications to the whole population marked by electoral authoritarianism, this dissertation contributes to our knowledge of authoritarian elections at the local level, unravelling the micro-foundation of the effects of elections on authoritarian governance. Current research on electoral authoritarianism mostly compares different regimes or countries or focuses on a specific country as a case to generate theoretical arguments for cross-national analyses (to name a few, Jordan on clientelism by Lust-Okar (2006) or Mexico on dominant party survival by Magaloni (2008)). Few studies have looked at the variation within a regime. The discussion in this dissertation that builds the knowledge about elections and authoritarian governance in local China can contribute to the understanding of regional variation of electoral politics in single-party regimes.
1.6 Map of the Dissertation

The rest of this dissertation is organized by three empirical chapters and a concluding chapter. The second chapter will begin with the analysis of the reasons of why there is variation in election implementation at subnational level in China. Specifically, in the chapter, I look into the adoption of electoral rules in Chinese villager's committee elections and account for the varieties of electoral rules across the country. The significant puzzle is that some villages chose to liberalize the elections by allowing ordinary villagers to nominate candidates whereas other villages maintain strict government-control over who can run in elections and electoral outcomes are manipulated by local party leaders. I argue that this variation is due to rational choices by local officials. According to the reasoning of the rational choice approach, two groups of factors, contribute to the variation in electoral rules across political subdivisions in rural China. The first group of factors is concerned with local officials' cost-benefit calculation: local officials' incentives to maintain their economic privileges in controlling village-run enterprises will increase the likelihood that the village election will remain under authoritarian control, while the higher cost of buying off local support will enhance the probability the village election will be liberalized. The second group of factors, regarding external constraints on local officials, proposes that powerful upper level government control and strong social groups will motivate local officials to abandon electoral controls and embrace democratic and competitive elections since those two factors will decrease the expected benefits of controlling village elections, as far as the interaction between the local officials and the ordinary villagers and non-political elites is concerned.
The third chapter will discuss the differences in the voting patterns between urban and rural China. Rural and urban areas in China hold grassroots elections in the community level units. As discussed in the second chapter, these elections vary in the implementation of electoral rules. Even under this variation in electoral rules, there is a systemic variation between urban voters and rural voters. In urban area, voter turnout is quite low and citizens lack incentive to participate, while in rural areas voter turnout is high and villagers are passionate about electoral participation. What factors could explain this variation? According to the theoretical argument, state capacity is a key to voting. Since the public does not expect that authoritarian elections will influence policy making, there should be no surprise that people do not go out to vote under authoritarian rule. Yet, with strong state patronage capacity, citizens have incentive to vote because of the expected economic benefits from the government. I test this argument using survey data form China in 2013 and find empirical support for the proposition that voters in rural areas are essentially different from voters in urban areas, where local governments have lost their capacity to control substantial patronage resources.

The fourth chapter evaluates the consequences of the variety of electoral rules in terms of regime stability. Specifically, the chapter investigates the behavioral outcomes of public awareness of elections. Since elections vary across localities, not all citizens have equal chances to perceive elections. This unevenness of awareness of elections provides an opportunity to test whether holding elections can quiet the public or arouse citizens' interests in further democratization of the regime. Using the 2010 Chinese General Social Survey data, I find that the public's awareness of elections is significantly correlated with higher trust in government and lower likelihood that an individual will participate in contentious activities, such as protests.
or strikes, which are considered anti-regime behaviors. However, I also find that awareness of elections is significantly correlated with higher probabilities that people will use official channels to air their grievance. The findings suggest that elections may have not just a stabilizing effect as far as public opinion is concerned. Elections may eventually pressure governments to institutionalize the existing channels of grievance resolution when people who are aware of elections are more likely to adopt these mechanisms rather than protests to resolve their grievances.

In the last chapter, I summarize the findings in this dissertation and discuss the contribution of these findings. The findings in this dissertation directly speak to the current academic interests in elections under authoritarian rule. This dissertation also contributes to our understanding of Chinese politics with regard to the adoption of relatively free and fair grassroots elections since 1987. Specifically, it builds explanations based upon the subnational variation within China. Future research may apply the same logic and framework to the phenomenon to subnational electoral authoritarianism, particularly what has been emerging in present Russia (Reuter and Robertson 2012).
CHAPTER 2

CHOOSING DEMOCRACY IN CHINA? EXPLAINING WHY LOCAL OFFICIALS ALLOW ELECTORAL UNCERTAINTY IN THE CHINESE VILLAGE COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

2.1 Introduction

In 1987, China adopted the Organic Law of the Villagers Committees (Organic Law), stipulating that villages have to hold village committee elections and allow rural residents to elect their village committee members and village head. The so-called grassroots political reform has been widely viewed as rural democratization. Yet, because the Organic Law does not clearly specify the operational rules for village party officials to implement rural elections (O'Brien and Li 2000), a variety of electoral rules have emerged. With discretion to decide what electoral rules would govern their elections, some village party leaders decided to open electoral competition while others chose to strictly control candidate nomination and electoral outcomes. This raises a question: what are the factors that incentivize rural Communist Party leaders to select a set of electoral institutions that would lead them to lose dominant control of the local committee?

In this chapter, I propose a theoretical framework to explain this puzzle. I argue that the different choices of electoral rules can be linked to the cost/benefit calculations of rural party elites and the strategic responses of rural party elites in the interaction between party and non-party elites. Specifically, the argument is grounded in a rational choice explanation: when local party elites do not expect controlling elections to be beneficial but instead rather costly, they will choose electoral rules that allow electoral uncertainty. Furthermore, the decision to allow for electoral uncertainty is associated with the interaction between party elites and non-party
elites: if both sides have an incentive to select an institution that allows for electoral uncertainty, then those institutions will be adopted.

Based on the theoretical argument, I identify several factors that are conceived of as determinants of electoral rules in rural China. First, greater local economic resources should increase the incentive of party elites to control elections because that control provides them with control over the allocation of benefits of local economic growth. Second, a larger electorate will decrease the probability of the presence of free elections, given the high costs for buying off local supporters. Third, I argue that social cohesiveness will push party elites to give up control of village elections since it reduces the cost for local non-party elites to oppose the dominant control of local benefits by party officials. Finally, stronger control by higher authorities over village affairs is expected to motivate party elites to abandon their dominance in rural elections because they might incur costly punishments from higher levels of government, should they have to crack down on dissidents. In addition to the illustrative case study, the arguments are tested using survey-based data, and they receive some empirical support. The empirical evidence implies that the cost of local patronage may be the main concern of local party elites’ choice between competitive versus non-competitive elections.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. First, I review existing research on elections in authoritarian China to identify how this study can contribute to existing knowledge. Second, I will introduce a theory to explain the choices of party elites between competitive vs. noncompetitive electoral rules. Then I derive testable hypotheses. Third, I present the data and variables employed in the analysis. In the fourth section, I will discuss the empirical results and
the potential caveats in the statistical analysis. The last section provides conclusions and discussions about some theoretical implications for future study.

2.2 The Choice of Electoral Institutions in Authoritarian Countries and China

2.2.1 Elections in Authoritarian Countries

A growing body of literature has highlighted the prevalence of elections in authoritarian regimes, yet there is a lack of explanation for the paths and choices that authoritarian regimes make between the variety of electoral rules available to them. Political scientists have made great contributions, through cross-national or case study analysis, to understanding why elections exist in authoritarian countries. Elections, they argue, serve to stabilize incumbents’ rule by showing the power of incumbents, co-opting the opponents, providing information or helping lower the cost of democratic transition (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Magaloni 2006; Lust-Okar 2009, 2005; Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012). Within the study of authoritarian election, the question of how authoritarian elections vary remains underexplored. As Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) have insightfully pointed out, scholars rarely identify the variance in electoral rules under authoritarianism.

Studying the variety of Chinese rural elections provides an opportunity to fill this theoretical gap. The variety of electoral institutions in rural China exhibits a natural experiment on political elites and their institutional choices. Without political challengers to the power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), when the local Communist Party elites decide to hold elections, their best choice presumably should be to fully rig elections to avoid losing control.

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6 A review of this topic, see Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009)
over local affairs. However, the variety of electoral rules implies that under certain conditions local party elites choose some other set of electoral institutions that allow political competition or, at least, electoral uncertainty concerning the outcome of the election. Studying the variety of electoral rules in rural China enriches the authoritarian election research by revealing the conditions under which authoritarian incumbents (in this case, CCP officials) manipulate election rules in ways that allow them to demonstrate a greater willingness to share power.

Moreover, the existing literature on authoritarian elections mostly looks at only the national level. The literature on electoral issues at the local level is relatively sparse. This study contributes to this field by accounting for how local elections can vary with different incentives facing local elites.

2.2.2 Village Elections in Rural China

Village government is the lowest level of political unit in rural China used to be governed by village Communist Party branch. Before the central government allowed village committee elections, village committee members were appointed by rural party branches to implement CCP policies such as the one-child policy and taxation. After 1987, village committee elections authorized village committee members to cope with village affairs with village Communist Party branch, creating a dual power structure. According to Organic Law, village committees are self-governing units that should be produced through villagers’ voting in competitive, free and fair

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7 The Organic Law specifies that rural Party organizations should “guide” (jidao) the villagers to implement elections.
elections. Many China watchers have praised the allowance of rural elections as the beginning of the creation of Chinese rural democracy.

It should be noted, however, that holding village committee elections is a survival strategy of the CCP central leadership to solve the issues emerging from rural governance in 1980s (Shi 1999b:1-22; O’Brien and Li 2000; Tan 2004). Since the economic reform liberalized the movement of peasants and brought considerable job opportunities in the market, the rural area became unstable. An official report shows that, after 1979, the Party had difficulty recruiting members and in 1992 a government document revealed that about 30 percent of the CCP cells in the countryside were reported as “collapsed” (Pei 1995:75). The rural elections therefore are designed to recruit new leadership through popular voting in the hope of dealing with the political turbulence and rejuvenating local Party organizations. Elections also can help the central authority to assess the popularity of their rural cadres. Failure to be elected to the village committees signals the unpopularity of officials, according to which the CCP can effectively manage its cadres (He 2012). The case study of Alpermann (2001) finds elections do facilitate the implementation of difficult policies such as one child program and taxation.

Moreover, though backed by the CCP central leadership, holding competitive elections receives little supports from local officials in the onset of electoral reform since 1987. Local officials, especially the village and township cadres, were reluctant to implement competitive elections (Kelliher 1997: 65). Although the institution of village elections was codified in the constitution, provinces established their own rules and ordered township governments and village party branches to implement elections (Alpermann 2007). As administrators, village
party officials manipulate these rules to prevent unfavorable results.\textsuperscript{8} Field research has identified many types of electoral manipulation in rural area. For example, village officials monitored the voting process by not using secret ballot, monopolized the nomination of candidates, used roving boxes to only engage supporters in election, or directly called off elections (Elklit 1997; Niou 1999; Lu 2012; Chan 1998).

Holding competitive elections has drastically improved rural governance (He 2012; Tan and Xin 2007). Competitive elections have made rural officials accountable in policy implementation (Manion 1996; He 2003), implanted democratic values into rural culture (Zweig 2002), increased public expenditures and public good provision by rural governments (Brandt and Turner 2007; Wang and Yao 2007; Meng and Zhang 2011; Martinez-Bravo et al. 2011).

Despite the importance of competitive electoral rules in rural area, there has been little systematic analysis and theory building on why rural officials decide to allow electoral competition (Lu 2012).

2.2.3 The Variety of Village Electoral Institutions

For the causes leading to the variety of election implementation, previous works suggest two factors: economic incentives and social forces. Each argument has received inconsistent support. Economic incentive explanation proposes that economic growth could be a force that liberalizes rural elections. O’Brien (1994) reports that economic development fueled village party officials’ desire to remain in power and equipped them with increasing financial resources.

\textsuperscript{8} The time of implementation also varied but roughly after 2002 Tibet had their own electoral law all provinces has stipulated elections in China.
to do so. Similarly, Niou (2003) reports that competitive elections (cha’e xuanju) occur more frequently in rich villagers than in poor ones. Hu (2005) also finds a positive effect of rural industrialization on the implementation of competitive elections. However, Epstein (1997:418-419) has observed another pattern that medium-level economic development provinces have fiercer electoral competition than others. This point has been further demonstrated by Shi (1999a), who uses data from a nationally representative survey and reports that low and high levels of economic growth are associated with increase low likelihood that the elections will be run by multiple candidates, while most competitive elections located in the middle-developed villages. Oi (1996a) also reports a negative relationship between economic growth and electoral competitiveness, arguing that wealthy villagers are busy at business activities and have no motivations to partake in elections, which lowers the pressure for rural democratization. On the contrary, agricultural economy oriented villages will see intense competition in elections because farmers and their families’ demands were highly involved in land use and the village committees control the irrigation facilities and fertilizer resources.

Scholars also find social forces, such as rural kindship groups or clans, matter in the implementation of elections. Economic reform helped to revive village kinship networks that the Communist Party tried to destroy in Maoist era. Although scholars find the resurgences of traditional social groups can positively promote local industrialization (Peng 2004), their political role is more complex. According to a comparison of two villages by Yu (2000), a strong clan that is able to allocate local resources may decrease competitiveness in village elections. Similarly, Manion (2006) reports that clan dominance is negatively related to the prospects of democratic elections. She finds that multiple clans can water down the single clan dominance
and lead to healthy competition in elections. Also Lu (2012) systematically analyzed survey data in 2002 and 2005 and argues that having competing clans is associated with the quality of elections, measured by whether the elections followed the democratic rules stipulated by the Organic Law. However, a strong clan may help villagers to resist the undemocratic practices of rural officials. Tsai (2007) and Xu and Yao (2015), for instance, find that if village leaders come from the dominant clan, they are more willing to provide public goods, such as roads, schools and hospitals to ordinary villagers. According to a systematic analysis, Xiao (2001) reports that the presence of clan can help enhance the fairness of elections.

While existing research has built a tradition to look for competition in rural elections, there has been no scholarly agreement on when local officials will be willing to give up electoral control. As many scholars have noticed, the evidence in rural elections may be too ample to be conclusive (Manion 2009; Lu 2012; Niou 2003). To explain the variation of electoral institutions, a causal theory concerning party officials’ decision making is necessary. This chapter tries to fill this gap by proposing a rationalist framework to explain the incentives local officials face to loosen electoral control. In light of existing research, I build a rational explanation that helps us specify (1) what incentivize rural party officials to give up electoral control, and (2) what are the causal mechanisms behind party officials’ concession.9

9 Of course, factors other than local officials’ incentives, such as historical legacy of democracy, or being governed by a strongman (Oi, 1996), would as well urge the adoption of competitive elections as villages have had prior experiences of elections or as rural party officials fear no competition from other elites. For instance, Huaxi village in Jiangsu province, where the village party secretary, Wu, successfully industrialized the local economy and, as a strongman governing the village, does not worry about the loss of power. Being repeatedly reelected into the village committees, Wu’s governance in the village for more than twenty years would be a case exemplifying that strongmen are not subject to structural constraints such as resources and electoral institutions. The historical influences and strongman effects are important to local politics, especially in rural China. Due to the limitation of the scope of this chapter and the available data, however, I will only focus on rural party officials’ incentives but leave the historical and strongman explanations to future research as more fine-grained data are available. My purpose in this chapter is to identify the factors that encourage local officials to implement competitive elections,
2.3 Rural Party Elites’ Rational Choice of Electoral Rule

This study addresses the question of why local party elites in rural China choose different electoral rules even if they may lose dominant control over village affairs. As a rational actor, the decisions that political elites are determined by two features: self-interest incentives and external constraints. The self-interest factor—the benefits/cost calculation of local party elites—propose that elites’ goal is to maximize the benefits in choice of electoral rules. Since it is party elites in rural China who decide electoral rules for their jurisdiction, their cost/benefit calculation apparently determines the choice to control or to liberalize elections. The external constraints involve strategic interaction between party and nonparty officials: the party elites’ perception of how local non-party elites will react in reaping local benefits through elections is important as well. By nonparty elites, I mean those social or economic elites, such as successful businessmen or lineage group leaders, that have emerged from economic reform and have capacity to pursue political power and economic resources in the village (Takeuchi 2013). The interaction between local non-party elites, particularly the elites from clans or other social organizations, and party elites is imperative to understanding the dynamics of Chinese rural elections (O’Brien and Han 2009; Lu 2012). I model this in the second half of the theory.

2.3.1 Public Resources, Patronage and the Choice of Electoral Institutions

There is no doubt that political elites set up the rules of game in electoral politics (Boix 1999). Even in democratic countries, incumbent party elites have incentives to change electoral

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but not “the only” factors that determine local democracy. Being unable to control historical and strongman factors does not sabotage my argument in this chapter.
institutions to favor their reelection (Colomer 2004; Benoit 2004; Bawn 1993; Geddes 1991; Ishiyama 1997; Boix 1999). Rural China is no exception. Rural party elites\textsuperscript{10} set up the rules of game with their own self-interest in mind, particularly when electoral outcomes will affect these party elites’ control over valuable village assets, especially village collective enterprises. When rural party officials choose to control elections, they thus not allow competition for these resources, which means their role in the village will remain the same as the past, a provider of goods and services. But when they are open elections to the villagers or other elites, they can recruit the able persons (\textit{neng ren}) to help implement policies or offer resources for village governance, with a cost to share the existing economic resources of the village. As a rational leader, a party official calculates the benefits and cost before deciding whether elections should be open. I specify the situation below.

For two reasons, I use nomination rules to identify the differences among electoral rules for. First, the nomination process is one of the most important institutions to determine election results. If party elites do not allow individuals other than party officials to nominate candidates, the electoral outcome is predetermined by party elites. I call this rule \textit{party nomination process}. On the other hand, if the election is run through a public nomination process, by which every villager is entitled to nominate candidates, the presence of potential competitors will increase uncertainty surrounding election results. In rural China, an institution that maximizes the number of candidates is called \textit{primary nomination process (Hai Xuen)}\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{10} By local party elites, I specifically refer to elites who are working in village or township Communist Party branches and have the final decision-making power on village affairs, including the implementation of election

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Hai Xuan} was first adopted by \textit{Beilaohao village} (北老嚎村) in Li Shu county Jilin province in 1986 and the CCP writes this institution into the Organic Law in 1998.
The two nomination processes represent the choice between the lowest level of electoral uncertainty (party nomination) and the highest level of electoral uncertainty (primary nomination) in the following analyses.

Two additional conditions are worth mentioning. First, elective office is a profitable position for elites. The Organic Law clearly specifies that village committee members and heads have the power to participate in, decide, and distribute the benefits resulting from decisions involving village assets, including village-run business, village land, other assets (Article 5, Organic Law of the Villagers Committees). Thus, being an elected village committee member means having access to valuable village economic resources. Additionally, rural electoral politics has been characterized as pork-barrel politics (Oi 1996a; Luo et al. 2010; Hillman 2014; Takeuchi 2013). Party elites distribute certain amounts of money and redistributive resources as patronage or private goods payoffs to residents in exchange for their political supports in elections. The essence of patronage politics is crucial to the survival of political elites and dominant political regimes (Greene 2007; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). Therefore, electoral politics is not cost-free for rural party elites; it requires that elites buy off social consent. This characterizes politics in rural China. Nonparty elites also look for political opportunities to share the benefits. For instance, reports have shown that in elections, candidates will publicly or privately claim they will give material benefits to villagers if they win. They do so by reaping returns from participating in village economic affairs after winning positions in village committees (Luo et al. 2010; Wei 2009).

Based on the conditions spelled out above, I specify a simple utility function for party elites in rural China: \( U = \Pr(w)(B-P) \), in which \( \Pr(w) \) is the probability of winning elections; \( B \) is the
benefits party elites will receive from winning, and P is the amount of patronage or cost party
elites must pay to buy political supports. According to this formula, higher value of (B-P) should
be associated with higher probability that rational party elites will choose the electoral rules
that promise that they or their agents will be elected. When profits are high, party elites will
hope Pr(w)=1 to reduce uncertainty and maintain all benefits, (U= B-P). On the contrary, when
(B-P) is low and even negative, party elites will have less incentive to control the elections and
otherwise will choose primary nomination to neutralize the high costs (U=0). As a consequence,
the conditions that determine costs and benefits in elections explain party elites’ motivations in
choosing electoral rules. Hence, considering the economic resources and patronage politics in
rural China provide explanations for party elites’ decision to control elections or allow
nominations by non-party members.

First, after agricultural reform in 1978, rural industries sprouted. Villages and township
governments established their own collective business (Township and Village Enterprises, TVEs
or Village-owned enterprises, VOEs). These village-own enterprises not only grew rural
economy and help merchandize village lands, mines, or other natural resources; they also
provide revenue and financial resources to rural governments by generating revenues that
village officials can distribute as benefits. Since VOEs are owned by the village, namely the
collective, both village party branches and village committee members have the power to run
village corporations. It gives party elites incentives to control village elections because if the

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12 The logic here is fundamentally in line with the notions of political economy that deem state owned resources as
the key to authoritarian regime survival. Green (2007; 2010) argues that the decline of state public resources and
fiscal accounts for dominant parties’ breakdown in elections. Similarly, the theory here proposes that the public
resources will affect party elites in one party regime local politics as well.
village head and committee members are not from the local party elites’ camp, competition over local resources takes place, and the party’s dominance over the use of local economic resources will vanish. Indeed, the conflicts between village committees and party branches frequently occurred when the two leaderships are competing economic resources. Guo and Bernstein (2004) documented several conflicts and find that financial decisions on VOEs and the use of land are sources of political impasse in villages, which eventually require mediation by the township government. Thus, to maintain control over resources, party elites would prefer to predetermine the electoral outcome in their own favor. Using party nomination procedure thus should be observed in villages with higher value stocks of village economic resources, such as a well-developed village-run business. One famous case is the richest village in China, Huaxi village in Jiangsu. The village party secretary Wu has been in a leadership position of both the village party branch and the village committee for more than 20 years, and the purpose of this is to control the village enterprises that have a market value in the billions:

Hypothesis 1: Villages with VOEs that generate high amounts of revenue will be more likely to run elections by the party nomination process, while villages with lower revenue from VOEs will be more likely to run elections by the primary nomination process, all else being equal.

To decide between the two alternative sets of election rules, party officials need to be able to estimate the cost of winning office (P), which can be viewed as the patronage costs to buy off local support. This patronage cost can simply be identified as the size of the local electorate. The logic is simple: if there is a large electorate in a village, there will be large demands that party elites have to meet (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). Indeed, although village cadres can arbitrarily decide the use of economic resources, they are responsible for multiple tasks as well. They must provide infrastructure, administer difficult directives from the
central authorities (such as implementation of one child policy), levy of taxes and fees. In addition, after economic reform, village party elites face larger pressure from the society. The life in rural area has been greatly improved, which increases the willingness of ordinary villagers to actively participate in elections. Affluent villagers or successful businessmen have challenged the local CCP by asking to run for offices in village committees. To maintain the CCP control thus becomes considerably costly. When the local electorate is large, the cost to pay naturally increases and village party elites’ incentives to buy off political supports accordingly decrease (Takeuchi 2013).

Hypothesis 2: Villages with a larger electorate are more likely to run elections by primary nomination process while villages with a smaller electorate are more likely to run elections by party nomination process, all else being equal.

2.3.2 The Interaction between Non-Party Elites and Party Elites

As previous studies have pointed out, in deciding electoral rules, rural party elites also need to strategically consider other political actors, such as social groups, clans or even upper-level authorities (Lu 2012; Zhou 2010; O’Brien and Han 2009). O’Brien and Han (2009) contend that village elections are embedded in a situation, where social forces can exercise their powers to influence elections, while they have not identified how the interaction with these players influences village party officials’ choice of which election system to implement. In this section, I model this interaction to account for the factors that may encourage rural party elites to allow electoral competition.

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13 Rural taxes have been cancelled by the central government in 2006. But the village government has a right to levy fees, while doing so required approvals from upper level government for every project that will charge villagers.
In this strategic game model, the choice between party elites and non-party elites is determined by three elements: the amount of patronage, the cost of opposition, and the cost of repression, which lead to two major choices of electoral rules: party nomination and primary nomination. Simply put, according to the game, the equilibrium outcomes suggest the following: as the opposition cost for social forces decreases and as the repression cost for the government increases, village party officials run competitive election (in this case, elections with primary nomination) to avoid conflicts with non-party elites.

To construct a patronage game model of the interaction among local elites in rural China, I employ an extensive form of a strategic game, which can appropriately show the historical development of institutional choice by village party elites. Although local non-party elites in China do not have the power to influence party elites’ final choice on electoral institutions, they could employ other instruments, such as organized protests, complaints, or disobedience to affect the electoral choices of party elites. Village non-party elites might impose political pressure on party elites to force party officials to offer other institutional alternatives, besides those which the party controls completely. In rural China, social stability is one of the most important political tasks that village party officials must achieve, and officials failing to maintain stability are usually removed from office by township or county governments.

For an extensive game, I consider that there is a historical process of the development of electoral institution choices in rural China. Party elites make the first move by either choosing the party dominant nomination system or the primary nomination (again, the party dominant nomination allows only party branches to nominate candidates while the primary
nomination allow all villagers to nominate candidates, including non-party members). In the second move, village non-party elites, such as heads of clans or businessmen, choose either acceptance of the party elites’ choice, or rejection of it. If there is no consensus between party and non-party elites after the second move, party elites make a final decision about which nomination institution to adopt.

Before spelling out the model, it should be noted that this game relies on several assumptions. First, I assume that local party elites and non-party elites are the principal actors in rural politics. This means that I do not consider the potential roles of all ordinary villagers in this patronage game. The second assumption is that party elites and local non-party elites have differing goals in choosing electoral institutions. Although non-party elites may be ideologically consistent to party elites, their preference regarding election rules is not in line with party elites’ preference since non-party elites want the same benefits from rural elections that party elites want. For instance, village businessmen and clan leaders always have incentives to control over the village resource for their own use, which means they do not really pursue any type of democratization but tend to take over village managerial power through opposing party officials’ monopoly of the village businesses (Yao 2013, 2012). Finally, I assume that party elites’ resources for patronage are fixed, which allows simplification for this game by only considering the relationships between patronage and the costs paid by non-party elites and party elites.

With these assumptions, several elements affect the strategic choices of party elites and local non-party elites in the game. First, suppose $\alpha$ is a fixed amount of resources possessed by party elites and $k$ is the spending totals for buying off local elites. Second, because this game develops through histories, both sets of actors decide the move by evaluating the decisions
made by other players. When party elites decide to repress nonparty elites’ choice, they face repression cost, denoted by $s$; when nonparty elites decide to oppose party elites’ decision, they incur costs, $c$, a cost paid by everyone who puts in effort against the government’s decision. For example, if party elites choose $X$, local elites choose $Y$, the cost for party elites is $s$ and for local elites is $c$. In the third move, if party elites choose $X$ which is opposite to $Y$, both parties suffer double costs.

Consider that there are two major choices: party dominant and primary nomination rules. Under party dominant nomination, party elites can freely choose the candidate they like, thereby paying nothing to buy off local elites and keeping all the resource they have\(^\text{14}\), in which $k=0$. On the contrary, if the institutional choice is primary nomination system, the party has to pay local elites to gain their support for political survival, in which $k>0$. Thus, if both reach a consensus on the party nomination system, the payoff for party elites and local elites is $(\alpha, 0)$. If both agree on the primary nomination system, the payoff function is $(\alpha - k, k)$. When the two sets of actors reach a different outcome in the first and second move, party elites need to make a final decision in the third period. If party elites accommodate the demands of local non-party elites, the game ends with both parties paying the costs once. If party elites insist on their choice in the first period, the game ends with both parties paying costs twice. Solving this game, the pure-strategy subgame perfect equilibria can well account for the institutional choices. There are several possible subgame perfect equilibria in this game, depending on the relationship among $k$, $s$ and $c$ (see Appendix A for the formal solution of this game). The game

\(^{14}\) Note that the patronage for local non-party elites is not the same as the patronage for general rural voters we identify in the first section. The amount of patronage $k$ specifies the exclusive benefits for local non-party elites.
can be graphed as Figure 2.1.

First, when patronage $k$ is greater than the cost of opposition $c$ and the cost of repression $s$, there is no incentive for party elites to choose the primary nomination rule in the first place and therefore non-party elites will also choose the party dominant nomination. The subgame perfect equilibrium indicates that the result will be that party elites and non-party elites both choose the party dominant nomination as long as $k > s$.

In this game, the choice of the primary nomination system is the equilibrium under the condition that $k < s$ and $k > c$. That is, when repression costs are high and the opposition cost for local non-party elites is relatively low, the best strategy for party elites and non-party elites is to choose primary nomination rule because the payoffs for each is better than other choices. The subgame perfect equilibrium predicts that the outcome as the primary nomination system.
The equilibria of this game between party elites and non-party elites provide some theoretical implications for observing Chinese rural elections. First, when the opposition cost of \( c \) is low, to the extent that \( k > c \), the probability of the choice of primary nomination process will be higher. This suggests that there are social factors involved in the choice of electoral rules in rural China. The cost of repression also plays a role in determining electoral rules. When the repression cost goes up, the probability of choosing the primary nomination system will be higher.

Table 2.1 Summary of Extensive Patronage Game Predicted Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( k &gt; c )</th>
<th>( k &gt; s )</th>
<th>( k &lt; s )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party dominant nomination</td>
<td>Primary nomination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| \( k < c \) | Party dominant nomination | Party dominant nomination |

Note: \( k \) is the amount of patronage, \( c \) is the opposition cost of local elites, \( s \) is the repression cost of party elites when facing opposition.

As far as the interaction between rural party elites and non-party elites is concerned, the game suggests that village party elites will not always choose to control elections. Instead, a straightforward prediction from the game is that party elites’ decision to open elections is facilitated by two conditions: (1) the cost to non-party elites of opposing party elites is low, and (2) the cost to party elites of repressing non-party elites’ opposition is high. The first one echoes the literatures arguing the positive effect of clans in rural democracy (Manion 2006; Lu 2012). There has been a strong consensus that social organizations, such as clans, associations, or unions, can coordinate and mobilize individuals to facilitate collective actions (Olson 1971). Political scientists also argue that social organizations can lower the cost of social movement and improve the quality of democracy (Putnam et al. 1994; Lichbach 1998). It thus is not surprising that the presence of clan social organization is a factor that can lower the cost of
opposition and thereby increase the chance that rural party elites will allow electoral competition.

Hypothesis 3: The presence of strong social organizations, such as kinship groups, clans or associations, will increase the probability for a village to run elections by the primary nomination process while the lack of strong social organizations will increase the probability for a village to run elections by the party dominant nomination, all else being equal.

As for the second factor, unlike democratic countries in which politician faces punishment from electors if they repress the public, in China local officials are responsible to upper level authorities. Village party officials will not be punished by the villagers if they repress the local dissent, while they will face serious punishment as township, county or even provincial governments decide to remove them from offices. Therefore, when conflicts between rural officials and villagers occur, a frequent way for villagers to “punish” the officials is to deliver their complaints to the upper level governments. In some cases, villagers even need to travel a long way to Beijing. As such, the cost of repression for rural party officials mostly comes from how the upper level authorities can monitor local officials. For instance, in the 1980s, township governments were weak in monitoring village officials’ behavior, which made the electoral reform poorly implemented. After 1990, rural issues became major concerns of the CCP and the pressure from upper level governments forced many villages to liberalize elections (Wang 1997). Thus, the cost of repression largely comes from the punishment of upper level governments.

Hypothesis 4: Villages closely monitored by upper level governments are more likely to run elections by the primary nomination while villages loosely controlled by upper level governments are more likely to run elections by the party dominant nomination, all else being equal.
2.4 The Case of Wukan

The case of Wukan events in 2011 highlights the dynamics of a village with noncompetitive elections transitioning to a village with competitive elections. Wukan villagers opposed local corrupt cadres and successfully forced local officials to adopt democratic elections. The story began in 2011 September 21, when a group of young people saw a real estate developer surveying a piece of village land, suspecting the local officials were selling village land for their own profits.\(^{15}\) The presence of the real estate staffs infuriated villagers, who then accused village party secretary Xue of corruption with businesses and land expropriation. What is more, in September 28, Xue manipulated an election, using roving boxes and fake ballots, and claimed his reelection as village committee chair (SinaNewsCenter 2012). Shortly the angry villagers gathered en masse and stormed in the village committee office. Protestors then argued that village elections of past decades were illegal and illegitimate. Thousands of villagers marched on the upper level Lufeng city government with banners to ask for the return of land and for democratic elections. The city deputy secretary Tsai showed up in front of the protestors and accepted the petition letter, promising to inspect the case carefully. The next day, reportedly 200 policemen came to crack down on the unrest, and the confrontation led to injuries among both protestors and local police. Meanwhile villagers elected their own acting council members to represent the village in negotiations with the government.

On November 17, the already fleeing village party secretary Xue and the village

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\(^{15}\) Wukan is a relatively affluent coastal village in Guangdong province with around 12000 of population but more than half of villagers were working outside the village. Because of its proximity to coastal cities, Wukan was developed and industrialized right after the economic reform.
committee chair Chen were deposed from office. But villagers were still discontented with the unanswered issues about land. The protest leaders organized another demonstration directed toward the city government. The deputy mayor promised again to file the case and provide investigation results about village land in the following weeks. However, on December, the city government started to blame the protest activists and arrested five protest leaders, which escalated the conflict. The conflict suddenly became a war-like confrontation with villagers building barricades to keep the official staffs from entering the village, and the police besieged the town to force villagers to yield. The death of one arrested village leader, Xue Jinbo, peaked the riot. The event suddenly was well-known internationally and shocked the CCP central authority. The provincial leader Wang Yang expressed his serious concern and sent his deputy, Zhu, with a work team to the village, directly meeting with village elected leadership to negotiate an agreement. Villagers and the CCP eventually reached an agreement and settled with a widely known “democratic” election on March 2012.

The scene behind the Wukan event helps us identify the conditions where a competitive election is a final equilibrium under the interaction between local officials and electorate. First, the village party elite Xue controlled and managed village collective assets for decades, particularly land and the village-owned company, Wukan Habor Industrial Development Corporation., He sold off a considerable amount of village land without consulting villagers, generating huge profits\(^{16}\) (He and Xue 2014). Because of the huge economic interests, Xue has no incentives to provide democratic elections for village committees. As one senior villager

\(^{16}\) In 1993 when the company was established, 2112 acres of land were sold by 700 million RMB (He and Xue 2014:129).
recalled, the election experience she had is that village party officials carried the ballot box to only few families to collect ballots. In the past, no one would complain because most of villagers were working out of town. Therefore, the size of electorate was relatively small and did not impose governance pressure to the village party branch. This situation changed after 1996. Reportedly, from 1996 to 2011, the population grew from 8700 to 13000\textsuperscript{17} and the demand for land was largely provoked by an increasing electorate. In addition, young villagers who worked outside the village were returning because of the harsh job market in large cities. When they came back and found the sale of land deprive them of opportunities for housing and planting, they expect to receive certain compensation. However, Xue paid a tiny amount of compensation from the considerable sale of collective land\textsuperscript{18}. This triggered the protests against the illegal sale of collective assets. From the case, the collective asserts and small size of electorate have incentivized Xue to continue to implement rigged elections. Yet, although the increasing population became a catalyst for electoral reform, the movement will not succeed without the other two crucial factors: the well-organized collective action and the mounting political risks of instability for local officials.

One factor that forces the CCP to adopt competitive elections in Wukan is the villager’s strong organizational capacity. The cost of collective action was sharply decreasing by the use of technology and the village organizations, which scholars have considered as a strong civil society (Lagerkvist 2012). Early in 2009, a group of Wukan young villagers established an online forum to discuss the corrupt behaviors of village party officials. The number of member joining

\textsuperscript{17} See http://magazine.caijing.com.cn/sjcontent/79051.shtml

\textsuperscript{18} Reportedly every family received only 550 RMB compensation during the two decades. See Peng (2012) and Hua et al. (2016: 2134)
the forum went up to one thousand in 2011 (Zhang and Zeng 2015). This not only facilitated the flow of information but also gave training for protest leaderships. Between 2009 and 2011 the members carefully organized several petitions to Beijing, hoping the central authorities would notice the land expropriation issue in Wukan. The petition ended up fruitless, but these experiences lowered the cost of collective action in the future and provided members with valuable experiences they could apply for the 2011 demonstrations. Other social organizations also offer nonparty elites to mobilize supporters against the government (Hou 2013; Hu and Lan 2013). For instance, during the standoff of Wukan, village social organizations, such as existing clans, the acting village council, the women’s unity association, and the senior villagers’ association functioned effectively to mobilize villagers, to organize self-government, and to provide legal advice. For instance, one nonparty elite, Lin Zulian, used clan networks to ask for donations of rice or other food resources from rich villagers when the village was besieged by the police. These organizations eventually constituted a significant force against village party officials’ dictatorship.

Another factor is the intervention from upper level government, particularly the provincial government. In many cases of local disturbance, rural party officials chose to violently repress villagers, sometimes with the assistance of township or county governments. In the Wukan incident, the village government could have repressed the protestors with support from the city deputy secretary Tsai. However, the cost of repression had been raised too high for them to afford when the upper level government intervened. Media is one catalyst for increasing the cost of repression by forcing provincial authorities to intervene in favor of the villagers (Hess 2015). Young villagers sent photos of everyday situations of the conflict to the
outside world through the internet. Many foreign reporters, guided by villagers, sneaked into the village. These reporters interviewed villagers, recorded police attacks, and delivered information to the public. Thanks to the internet and social media, the news of Wukan protest spread throughout the world, including China.\footnote{The information was censored in China on the heels of the end of the protests.} This widespread news shocked the central leadership, who decided to intervene in the protest. The village party secretary Xue and village chief Chen were soon demoted by upper level government right after their own investigation. Monitored by the provincial government, the newly appointed village party officials implemented competitive elections. The Provincial Party secretary Wang Yang also commented that the 2012 election after Wukan protest is not an institutional innovation, but an election strictly following the rules stipulated by the Organic Law. The provincial government even drafted Recommendations for the Re-Election of the Wukan Village Committee to support the implementation of competitive elections (Hua et al. 2016: 2143). Obviously, the Wukan’s case shows that the presence of the upper level government has restricted village officials’ discretion to use repression, which could jeopardize their political careers. Under these conditions, village officials needed to make a policy concession to allow competitive elections to villagers.

The case of Wukan illustrates the conditions in which a village party official will or is forced to allow electoral competition. The four factors—village collective assets, the size of electorate, the organization capacity of villagers, and the upper level government control—are particularly highlighted in this case. I next employ village-level survey data to examine whether the argument holds in cross-sectional analysis.
2.5 Statistical Analysis

I use the Chinese Household Income Project (CHIP) 2002 data set (Shi 2002) to test above hypotheses. The CHIP 2002 data set is a survey-based cross-sectional data set conducted in 2002, covering individual, household, and village level questionnaires. Within the data set, the Village Administration Data is used to measure the variables of interests. In the CHIP 2002 Village Administration Data, 961 village representatives were interviewed and asked questions about village economic statistics, information on village heads, as well as details regarding their village’s organization.

I employ the nomination processes—primary nomination or party nomination—to measure the difference in electoral rules. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, a logit regression model is utilized to test the hypotheses. In addition, because the data are collected across county governments where there are multiple villages in the same county being surveyed, the expected effects will be correlated with the group for each county. To deal with this correlation, clustered standard error is used to calculate the statistical significance.

2.5.1 Dependent Variable

This study concerns how party elites choose electoral rules that allows for electoral uncertainty and competition. To measure the difference in electoral rules, the dependent variable is the manner by which candidates are nominated in village elections. In the CHIP 2002 Village Administration Data, the measurement for control of candidate nomination can be directly coded by looking at whether or not villagers are allowed to nominate candidates in elections. Specifically, the survey asked that “Can the candidate for the village committee
members be nominated directly by the villagers?” and answers were coded as “1” if the
respondent said “yes” and “2” if the respondent said “no.” To construct a binary variable, I
simply recode the answer as 1 if the respondent answered yes while 0 for no. This
measurement evaluates the nomination processes. According to our theoretical argument, “1”
equals the primary nomination process since villagers are allowed to nominate candidates to
run elections, while “0” equates to the party nomination process in which no electoral
uncertainty exists because villagers possess no rights to decide who is going to run in the
election. Of the 960 villages that answered this question, 104 villages (10.83%) adopted the
party dominant nomination in elections and 856 villages (89.17%) allow their residents to
nominate candidates.

2.5.2 Independent Variables

Hypothesis 1 proposes that the amount of a village’s revenue determines village party
elites’ incentives to control elections. A wealth of revenue leads to the party dominant
nomination process. To operationalize the amount of revenue in a village, I use two economic
statistics as the measures for this hypothesis. The first one is a village’s total collective revenue.
This variable shows how party elites assess local benefits. The information about total
revenues, however, may be not a direct measure for the economic power and resources, which
local party elites can access. I use a second measure — a village’s collective operating revenue
— which indicates the amount of revenue collected by village-owned enterprises. This figure
can be compared with the first measure to test the local benefits hypothesis. Both variables are
continuous numeric variables calculated in thousand-yuan. The lowest revenue for both
variables is 0. The village with the highest total collective revenue is 27,360,000 Yuan while the village with highest total collective operating revenue is 25,760,000 Yuan. According to Hypothesis 1, a negative relationship between the two explanatory variables and the dependent variable is expected.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that a larger electorate will be associated with higher probability that primary nomination will be chosen by village party elites. Yet in the data set, there is no measure of the number of eligible voters. A better alternative to measure the size of electorate is the size of the labor force since laborers are those who are of working age with urgent desires for patronage, such as jobs, salaries, or family benefits. This matches with the theoretical argument that the amount of patronage is the inherent cause for party elites to control elections. I therefore use the size of the labor force of each village as a measure of the size of the electorate. In the sample, the village with the smallest labor force is 42 individuals while the highest is 4,813 individuals. I expect this variable is positively correlated with the adoption of the primary nomination rules.

Hypothesis 3 specifies the mechanism by which social cohesiveness lowers the opposition cost for local nonparty elites and therefore increases the probability that party elites choose primary electoral rules. I argue that the number of clans, kinship groups and local voluntary associations will play a role in the choice of electoral rules. There is no available information on the number of social organizations in this data set. There is, however, a subjective evaluation of the respondents on whether the village government needs to balance the different interests of villager groups when determining village affairs. Using this question, I create a measure that is coded as 1 when respondents answer “no” when being asked if the
interests of villager groups are taken into account in decision of village affairs, 2 when the answer is “sometimes”, 3 when the answer is “often” and 4 when the answer is “it is required.” According to the theory, this variable is expected to increase the probability of the occurrence of primary nomination.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that village party elites will be more likely to choose the primary nomination when they are under powerful control by upper level authorities. I evaluate the extent of upper-level authority control of village affairs by looking at the annual frequency of inspections conducted by upper level government. Should the upper level government closely monitor the village, then the upper level official will frequently inspect the village. This measure is directly derived from the data set, and the lowest number of inspections from upper level government is zero while highest number is 50. The theoretical expectation is that the likelihood of choosing the primary nomination rule would increase as the number of inspections increases.

2.5.3 Control Variables

Several variables will be included in the analysis in order to control for confounding effects. First of all, the distance between a village and its township government is controlled. The distance is an important factor for township governments to connect with villages and it is also frequently used in analyzing village elections (Shi 1999a). The second control variable is economic development, with which rural democracy in China is highly associated (O'Brien 1994; Oi and Rozelle 2000). The level of village economic development is expected to exert positive influence on the choice of competitive elections. I use net income per capita (in thousands of
yuan) as the measurement of economic development. For all villages, income per capita ranges from the lowest statistic of 0.111 to the highest number of 15\textsuperscript{20}.

Table 2.2 Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomination Rule</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Collective Revenue</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>202.484</td>
<td>1157.155</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Collective Revenue from VOEs</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>89.095</td>
<td>1030.989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Number of Labor Force</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>910.721</td>
<td>622.864</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Group Interests</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>3.205</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Inspection by Upper Gov.</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>3.161</td>
<td>4.538</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Township Gov.</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>4.971</td>
<td>5.731</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Per Capita</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>2.469</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Village Party Head</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.409</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level of Village Party Head</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>2.583</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Salary of Village Party Head</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>344.39</td>
<td>373.691</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to controlling for village features, I also add three control variables about the personal characteristics of village party elites. First, I add age of village party elites to control for the potential generational effects on their political choice. The code rule for age of village party head is: (1): 29 and below; (2): 30-34; (3): 35-39; (4): 40-44; (5): 45-49; (6): 50-54; (7): 55 and

\textsuperscript{20} I drop 6 observations that the net per capita income in a village is zero because zero may be not accurate information. The results, however, do not change with the dropped observations.
above. Second, the educational level of party officials may be associated with their perception and understanding of the Organic Law, which will encourage rural party officials to allow electoral competition. I include educational level in the model to control for the effects of political knowledge. Finally, the monthly salary of village party leaders will be added to see if the difference of salary determines their willingness to control village elections.

2.6 Empirical Results

Table 2.3 shows the results from the logistic regression. I have hypothesized that the use of primary nomination will be correlated with (1) the values of village owned enterprises, (2) the size of electorate, (3) the presence of social organizations and (4) the monitor by the upper level governments. In the cross-sectional analysis, only the second hypothesis receives strong empirical supports (P<.05). The model shows that the size of electorate, measured by the size of labor force, exerts significant positive effects on the choice of primary nomination. The size of the labor force is positively correlated with the presence of primary nomination, suggesting that a larger electorate is associated with greater willingness of party elites to adopt an electoral institution that allows electoral competition. The predicted probability calculated using the coefficient is shown in Figure 2.2. The probability is about 87% that a village with a very low labor force is likely to adopt primary nomination. The probability, on the other hand, will increase up to almost 98% when a village has a total of 5000 laborers, holding all other variables at their means. In general, the second hypothesis gains empirical support from the regression analysis.
Table 2.3 Logit Estimate for Village Nomination Rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nomination Rule</th>
<th>Coefficient (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Collective Revenue</td>
<td>-0.0003 (.0003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Collective Revenue from VOEs</td>
<td>0.0007 (.0004)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Number of Labor Force</td>
<td>0.0004 (.0002)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Group Interests</td>
<td>0.176 (.1631)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Level Gov. Inspection Visits</td>
<td>0.0868 (.0509)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Township Gov.</td>
<td>-0.0174 (.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Per Capita</td>
<td>0.0698 (.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Village Party Head</td>
<td>-0.0063 (.0794)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level of Village Party Head</td>
<td>0.1408 (.163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Salary of Village Party Head</td>
<td>-0.0005 (.0004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.7943 (.9401)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 777, Wald chi2(df=6) =20.96, Log pseudolikelihood = -246.94089

Note: Dependent variable: 1: villagers are allowed to nominate candidates; 0: villagers are not allowed to nominate candidates. Robust standard errors clustered on county groups in parenthesis. *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

The first two variables Total Revenue and Total Revenue from VOEs are the measure for the benefits village party elites expect to obtain in controlling elections. They measure their incentives to choose the party nomination system instead of the primary nomination system. The two variables, however, fail to reach .05 significance level in the relationship with the choice of nomination methods. shows two divergent effects of village revenue on the selection of nomination rules. The variable measuring the monitor of the higher-level government—Upper Level Government Inspection Visits, and the variable measuring whether party officials
concern with social organizations in their village, *Villager Group Interests*, fail to reach .05 significance level too. From the model, other control variables are not statistically significant. This could be due to the constraints of the data, in which village officials usually give positive answer to policy implementation and decreases the variation of the dependent variable that accounts for how rural officials implement elections. But even with this limitation, we can conclude that a large size of electorate strongly encourages village party officials to choose competitive electoral rules.

![Figure 2.2 Predicted Probability for Total Labor Force](image)

The finding that the total size of the labor force is significantly and positively associated with the adoption of the primary nomination rule has suggested that the size of electorate would have substantial effects on local official cost-benefit calculations on choosing between electoral rules. Despite the significant relationships, one critique could question the validity of
using the number of labor force as a proxy to measure the size of electorate. Analytically, in the data set the size of total labor force has been the most appropriate measure for the size of electorate since it reflects the voting age adults who have needs in patronage in the village, as I have discussed in the measurement section. There is, however, potential measurement error in using the size of labor force if the local officials provided the statistics that include the non-adult labor force, which may bias our results by overestimating the size of labor force. I therefore conducted a robustness check for the relationships between the size of electorate and the choice of electoral rules by using the number of total population. The result remains positive and significant ($p < .05$), providing consistent support to the argument that the size of electorate will increase the incentive of local party officials to choose primary nomination rule.

2.7 Conclusion

The Chinese Communist Party has long pursued a stable society to survive the authoritarian rule. Rural democracy is undoubtedly a strategy to accomplish this goal. Chinese former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in 2012 openly vowed to make village committee elections an authentic channel for villagers’ opinion and claimed that rural democracy is not realized without a democratic electoral procedure. It seems an urgent task for the CCP to understand how and why elections were implemented democratically in rural China.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the factors that lead local authoritarian elites to choose electoral rules that allow for competition. I hypothesize that the choice of party elites in setting up electoral rules is influenced by four factors: total village economic output, size of the local electorate, social organizations, and higher-level CCP control. The Wukan’s case in 2011
illustrates how the four factors have substantial effects on village officials’ decisions in choosing competitive elections, while the cross-sectional evidence shows the most powerful and consistent factor I can conclude is the size of electorate.

The policy implication, according to the theory and empirical evidence in this chapter, is that one way that Chinese central authority can improve democratic electoral procedures in rural China is to enlarge village electorate by combining small villages, since the size of electorate consistently exerts a positive impact on village officials’ choice of competitive electoral rule. In addition, if social organizations have positive effects as well, combination can help increase the number of social groups in a combined village that help create party elites’ incentive to provide competitive elections too. Chinese central government in 2004 has adopted a policy to relocate and combine villages in order to rearrange village economic assets and reconstruct village infrastructures. With this experience, the central government can employ the same strategy to improve village democracies.

Besides structurally influencing the village population, the CCP may also adopted a strict monitoring mechanism on village party officials. It can on the one hand scrutinize villages’ accounting statistics, and on the other politically pay for more inspections on the village officials. These activities impose pressure on village officials to avoid corruption and repression, which creates a conducive environment to democratic elections.

Theoretically, this topic deserves more sophisticated empirical analysis and theory building. First, the variance in electoral rules in rural China is larger than what I have learned in this chapter. The available data do not allow me to depict a full picture of the variety of adopted electoral rules. For the variety, Lu (2012) provides a solution by looking at whether the
electoral rule follows Organic Law. Future works can employ the same criteria to refine the data quality. Second, as O’Brien and Han (2009) have pointed out, “access of power” is as important as “exercise of power” when it comes to the research of rural elections. Interestingly, a lot of anecdotes and reports find that even when village party officials allow electoral competitions, many village party officials are still being elected by villagers into village committees, in which case competition is not equal to political transition. This phenomenon is similar to what scholars have called “subnational authoritarianism” which national democratization did not cause any local leader turnover, a phenomenon frequently found in Latin America and Post-Communist regimes (Gibson 2005; Gervasoni 2010; Behrend 2011; Reuter and Robertson 2012). How the varieties of electoral rules influence the path that rural democratization plunges into subnational authoritarianism deserve scholarly attentions.
CHAPTER 3

PATRONAGE CAPACITY AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION UNDER AUTHORITARIANISM:
ASSESSING VOTING IN CHINESE VILLAGERS’ COMMITTEE AND RESIDENTS’ COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

3.1 Introduction

In nearly four decades of reforms after 1978, one of the most remarkable political changes in China is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allows competitive elections at the grassroots level. In rural China, villagers elect their leaders for villagers’ committees (VC) and in cities, urbanites vote in community residents’ elections (RC). Some scholars claim that these basic-level elections have built a foundation for China’s future democratization (Horsley 2001; Carter Center 1998). Yet, Chinese scholars, media, and writers have long reported a noteworthy rural-urban difference in political participation. In rural areas, villagers are particularly enthusiastic about taking part in village elections, but in urban communities, citizens tend to stay away from the voting booth. While elections have engaged hundreds of millions of people in a democratic process in the vast rural areas, they seem relatively stagnant and slowly progressing in cities. China watchers comment that this phenomenon depicts a more promising future for democratization in rural areas than in urban areas (Zheng 1997; Wang 1997).

Despite the significant rural-urban divide in electoral participation, the meaning of this divergence to China’s local democracy remains underexplored. A voluminous literature on village elections and a growing body of work on the urban residents’ elections have accumulated, but systematic comparisons of the two are relatively few. Although several in-depth and illuminating field observations by scholars point to the institutional difference
between VCs and RCs (Benewick et al. 2004; Xiong 2008; Wang 2016; Xu et al. 2010), their focuses are sociologically on community studies, but not on the essential differences between VC and RC elections.

This chapter explores the different patterns of electoral participation between rural and urban residents. Following the literature explaining Chinese voting behavior, I distinguish two types of voters: loyalist and democratic voters. I propose that the rural zeal in elections is due to VC governments’ strong capacity to mobilize loyalists to vote in elections, particularly in state controlled elections, while voter apathy in urban elections is resulted from the RC governments’ lack of the equivalent power to cultivate loyalist voters. Therefore, only democratic voters find incentives to vote in urban competitive elections for the purpose of pursuing democratic values. The proposition is tested using Chinese General Social Survey 2013 data. The data shows villagers have a higher turnout rate than urban citizens. But, as expected, in VC elections rural people are more likely to vote in state controlled elections than are urban residents. The finding also suggests that villagers’ electoral participation has nothing to do with their democratic consciousness but is significantly associated with Party membership. In contrast, urban turnout is highly correlated with democratic consciousness but not Party membership. The evidence demonstrates that the rural and urban democracies are highly divided, and the two types of voters are separated. These findings suggest the need for a reexamination of existing rural and urban progress towards grassroots democratization in China.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I briefly review the literature about electoral participation in China. Then I introduce the history and development of rural and urban elections. Third, I discuss the urban and rural transition as well as how the transition paths will
affect the differences between rural and urban voters. Following the discussion, I explore the patterns of electoral participation using CGSS 2013 survey data. The results of the empirical analysis will be presented in the fourth section. I conclude with discussion of the implications of the findings for policies and theories.

3.2 Village Committee and Residents’ Committee Elections

After China overhauled the collective economic and political system beginning in 1978, the old basic-level organs that the Communist regime employed to control society were gradually replaced by two grassroots units: villager’s committees (hereafter VCs) and resident’s committees (hereafter RCs)\(^\text{21}\). Villager’s committees were established in 1982 by the CCP as a means to reorganize self-government for peasants to solve the disturbance in the countryside after the rural commune system collapsed (O’Brien and Li 2000; Shi 1999b). VCs are the bottom level administrative units, directly governed by township governments. A similar policy was initiated in the cities as well. In the late 90s, the CCP expanded the function of existing urban community RCs, authorizing RCs to mediate residents’ disputes and provide services such as security and social welfare. RCs thus can be regarded as an administrative unit equivalent to VCs. RCs are overseen by the street offices (\textit{jiedao banshichu}), an urban government organization equivalent to the role of township government in rural areas.

The CCP has institutionalized democratic elections in villagers’ and residents’

\(^{21}\) According to the statistic from the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Republic of China, in 2015, the total number of grassroots organizations is six hundred eighty-one thousand, with 581 thousand villager’s committees and 100 thousand resident’s committees. In 2015, 160 million of voters participated in elections in 165 thousand of grassroots organizations (http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjgb/201607/20160700001136.shtml).
committees, empowering these organizations to be genuine self-governing organizations. VC elections began in 1987 as an experiment for recruiting rural elites into village governments and was officially promulgated in the Organic Law in 1998. Electoral reform has also proceeded in urban area. In 1999, Qingdao city in Shandong first adopted direct elections for citizens to vote for their residents’ committee members. Since then, large cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen emulated the same institutional reform and allowed competitive elections in their RCs with the hope that elections could solve emerging popular grievance resulted from increasing social inequality in urban area (Derleth and Koldyk 2004).

The VC and RC elections are institutionally different from Maoist-era elections. During Mao’s rule, elections were ritualized events as they were in Soviet Union (Linz 1978). Elections only functioned to monitor people’s loyalty to the government as well as to propagate the Communist Party’s ideology (Townsend 1969; Burns 1978; Chen 2000). Participation in elections was mandatory and coercive, and citizens who did not vote in elections were deemed disobedient and could be punished or fined by the Party (Townsend 1969). Therefore, only courageous political dissidents would abstain from voting to signal their discontent with the election institution (Karklins 1986). Post-Mao reform has abandoned the coercive mobilization approach that forces citizens to go to the voting booth, choosing instead to liberalize electoral institutions. In the VC and RC elections, the Organic Law mandates elections to adopt democratic elements. For example, village elections are required by law to be competitive among multiple candidates (cha’e), transparent (Gongkai) and fair (Gongpin). The Organic Law of Residents’ Committee does not strictly stipulate that urban committees must have
competitive elections, but many cities have borrowed the experiences from village elections and institutionalized those democratic rules in the urban committee elections.

VC elections have received more scholarly attentions than RC elections. The reason seems to be twofold. First, village elections started earlier than RC elections and spread into the entire rural area rapidly because of their promotion by the CCP. By contrast, RC elections came relatively late, beginning in 2000, and have not been pushed by the party in all cities. Second, rural elections see more engagement and competition than urban elections. Field observations and survey data usually show that rural residents care about village elections. Village elections have also generated great change in rural areas, such as enhancing rural officials’ accountability or helping implant democratic ideology in peasants (Zweig 2002; Tan and Xin 2007). In urban residents’ committees, however, RC elections, unlike their rural counterparts, seem to play a limited role in local governance. It could be that citizens show no interest in engaging in RC affairs (Ma et al. 2000) or urban people rarely go out to the ballot booth, and many of them even are not aware of elections (Gui et al. 2009; Gui et al. 2006). If this is the case, how do we explain the significant rural-urban divide?

3.3 Explaining Voting in China

Elections in China are fundamentally distinct from the ones in western democracies because there is no party competition in China. Political scientists normally view citizens in authoritarian countries as passive in elections.22 In authoritarian countries, the incentive to vote

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22 In fact, citizens do participate in elections and the turnout rate is quite impressive. According to CGSS survey data, in 2003 only 19 per cent of citizens responding have voted in the last elections. This number goes up to about 44 per cent in 2005 and remain relatively stable around 45.
has been minimized since elections will not lead to leadership turnover or policy concession. Therefore, scholars point to the necessity of regime mobilization in explaining voter turnout in authoritarian elections (Linz 1978; Burns 1978). Yet the mobilization argument does not explain voting behavior in China, where compulsory voting was eliminated after 1978. Since the CCP no longer forces citizens to participate in VC and RC elections, what factors incentivize citizens to turn out to vote?

Existing explanations describe two types of voters concerning where the election is truly competitive. One type of voter is the democratic voter. Shi (1999c) argues that citizens, particularly those who are promoting democratic values, are likely to participate in county-level congress elections when they expect electoral competition among multiple candidates. Using survey data, Shi (1997, 1999c) finds that Chinese voters have significantly higher levels of democratic orientation and stronger anti-corruption sentiments. Ordinary Chinese, he argues, have been using competitive elections “to signal their evaluations of local officials to the authorities, to remove unpopular leaders from their posts, or to damage their careers” (Shi 1999c: 1119). Recent research lends empirical support to the argument that voters prefer clean and competitive elections. For instance, Su et al. (2011) and Zhang et al. (2015) report that when villagers see elections are fair, they vote. Landry et al. (2010), using a rural sample, find that villagers’ perception of high electoral competitiveness significantly encourages turnout and their willingness to run for office in VC elections.

Another type of voter is the loyalist voter. This argument contends that China’s elections are not free from CCP control and still subject to manipulation by local officials. In state controlled elections, only citizens who remain loyal to the regime are willing to go to the
trouble to cast their votes (Chen and Zhong 2002). For instance, Zhong and Chen (2002) and Chen and Zhong (2002) find that Chinese citizens who vote in local people’s congress elections are likely to be those who show strong supportive attitudes toward the Communist Party. According to this argument, voting is no more than a habitual behavior that regime supporters had in the Maoist era (Kwong 2008). Contrary to the democratic voter argument, the loyalist voter argument implies that citizens who value and promote democracy have no incentive to participate in these elections because elections are fake and carry no substantial policy influences. Recent empirical studies also report that loyalists are usually participants in elections. In addition, they are active in persuading or mobilizing neighborhoods to vote (Guo and Sun 2014; Xiong 2008). Other evidence comes from regime trust. Tao et al. (2011) find that individual trust in village government and the institutions significantly increases the willingness to turn out to vote, which also suggests that psychological affection for the regime encourages voter turnout.

Despite the contrast between loyalist voters and democratic voters, empirical studies have not discussed whether the differences between the rural and urban environments will correlate with differences in voter type. The state can strongly influence citizens’ political choices and economic lives, which will impact their voting behavior. Furthermore, existing theories on Chinese voters have not talked about the differing dynamics that produce loyalist versus democratic voters. It is reasonable to believe that voting is not just an activity for satisfying psychological or expressive values but also for tangible benefits. Rationalists have argued that expected returns play a role in ordinary citizens’ decision to vote or not vote (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Downs 1957). Loyalty or democratic values are not cost neutral but can
easily be affected by economic interests, particularly citizens’ economic autonomy from local officials and/or employers. This links the voting behavior of Chinese voters to the state capacity: loyalty or democratic values can be a function of the power of the state to distribute patronage resource in exchange for political support.

3.4 State Patronage and Voting Under Authoritarianism

Political scientists have pointed out that, in authoritarian elections, voter loyalty is determined by the amount of patronage the ruling party is able to offer (Magaloni 2006; Chandra 2007; Lust-Okar 2009; Blaydes 2006). When the authoritarian incumbent can afford to distribute large amounts of patronage from the government resources, such as public employment, or state-owned enterprises, the ruling party will usually maintain power with landslide victories in elections. However, when the ruling party is unable to provide the public with patronage benefits, or the public resources available for patronage are decreasing, voter loyalty to the dominant party will gradually decline and the dominant party politics will eventually collapse (Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007). In Mexico and Taiwan, for example, the failure to offer patronage to the public undermined the dominant party’s control and facilitated the breakdown of the authoritarian regime, leading to democratization.

Patronage is particularly useful in elections that are under control of local governments, like in many elections in China. In state-controlled elections, electoral outcomes have been determined by the government. The government thus pays no cost in monitoring voters and encounters no commitment problems (Stokes 2005) because there are no alternative parties to which voters can defect. The government can identify political supporters by simply identifying
who has voted in elections and who has not, rewarding the former and punishing the latter. For instance, before democratization Taiwan enjoyed this advantage because the government controlled elections and local elites and the party machine could easily mobilize residents and monitor their voting choices in elections. Citizens who failed to participate in elections usually suffered the cost of losing patronage resources, such as jobs, facilities or business opportunities. In China, local party members and political activists are usually mobilized to participate in state-sponsored activities as well (Dickson 2016).

Someone might question the applicability of electoral authoritarianism theory to the case of China, for multiparty competition is not yet allowed by the Chinese government. This concern is reasonable, but in fact, in China, loyalists, such as party members, are embedded in patronage-loyalty networks just as their counterparts are in other systems marked by electoral authoritarianism. They seek out material patronage in exchange for their political supports. As Dickson (2016: 246-254) reported in his national survey data, the current generation, including the new (1992-2014) and early reform generation (1979-1991), of party members no longer put an emphasis on ideology or on their belief of the CCP as their motive for joining the party. They join the CCP because it helps their career or can raise their social status and income. As such, patronage is a substantial tool for local officials in China whose goal is to maintain political support and social stability in their jurisdiction for the purpose of their own political survival.

Table 3.1 incorporates loyalist voters and democratic voters into a patronage-resource-election-types framework. It shows how different voter types would be incentivized by the patronage and electoral institutions. First, when the local governments have the resources to maintain loyalty, loyalists are mobilized to vote in both state controlled and competitive
elections. On the other hand, since democratic voters prefer competitive elections, when they perceive that the local governments can use their patronage capacity to buy off political supporters, they may lose interests in participating elections. Therefore, even when elections are perceived as competitive, in elections where states have a strong power to influence the outcomes, citizens with high levels of democratic orientation will abstain from voting, just as they do not turn out to vote in state-controlled elections. Second, when the state’s capacity to mobilize loyalist voters is weak, loyalist will choose not to participate. Under this environment, we may see that elections only attract democratic voters to turn out to vote when the elections are competitive, but neither loyalist nor democratic voters have incentives to participate in state controlled elections.

Table 3.1 Electoral Control, Patronage Resource and Electoral Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State owns many patronage resources</th>
<th>State owns few or no patronage resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competitive elections</strong></td>
<td>Loyalists participate</td>
<td>Loyalists do not participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic voters avoid</td>
<td>Democratic voters participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State controlled elections</strong></td>
<td>Loyalists participate</td>
<td>Neither loyalists nor democratic voters participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic voters do not participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This framework helps explain the difference between urban and rural elections. In urban areas, the local governments gradually lost their ubiquitous control over the society as a result of the reforms beginning in the Deng Xiaoping era. But in rural areas, the administrative villages maintain a strong role in resource redistribution locally. Given the different types of the government, two distinct patterns of political participation have developed in the two areas. Below I discuss how the rural-urban divide emerged and how the divide has shaped electoral politics.
3.5 Rural-urban Divide after Economic Reform

Using the framework to explain the rural-urban difference in electoral participation, I argue that loyalist voters are more likely to vote in VC elections than RC elections because the rural governments possess patronage resources that can be used to maintain political loyalty among their constituents, but RC governments do not have those resources, nor are their constituents as dependent on the local government for their well-being. The role of grassroots governments in resource redistribution experienced huge changes after the post-Mao economic reforms. In 1978, at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party, the CCP officially announced the abandonment of the collective system and its embracement of market economy. From then on, the Communist Party abandoned centralization policies, loosening its micromanagement of the individual lives of ordinary citizens. On the one hand, in urban areas, worker mobility was activated to encourage urban industrialization and to lower the labor cost for attracting foreign investment. On the other hand, in rural areas, the agricultural reform relinquished the collective farms and adopted household contract system that allowed peasants to keep their share of crops to trade freely in the market in order to motivate agricultural production. The economic reform, however, has different influence in the role of the government for urban and rural regions.

3.5.1 The Decline of Resource Control in Urban China

The power of urban local governments decayed right after the economic liberalization reforms of the 1980s and the weakening of urban party cells. During the Maoist era, urban residents were tied to their work units (danwei), a term that referred to all urban organizations
such as schools, hospitals, factories and the like. Work units were controlled and embedded in the Communist Party hierarchy (Lü and Perry 1997). Work units assigned jobs, determined salary, and allocated basic social services for their employees and their family members. These units also fulfilled important functions such as propagating the Communist ideology and regularly assessing urban residents’ loyalty to the Party. In the Maoist era, urban residents were dependent on the work unit for all aspects of their economic well-being, and this relationship created an organizational mechanism for the CCP to control the population in cities (Walder 1988). After economic reforms of the Deng era, the markets for jobs and goods were suddenly liberalized, and spatial mobility for citizens increased. Work units no longer had the strong redistributive and social welfare functions – the “iron rice bowl” -- for urban residents, which heavily undermined the power of the party cells and local party units to control urban Chinese individuals. Meanwhile, the CCP reformed the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) by strategically restructuring small state own businesses and allowing them to reorganize. In 1990s, facing market competition, these relatively small state-owned businesses failed to make enough revenue to sustain themselves (Xie and Wu 2008). Consequently, they either were privatized or directly shut down after bankrupt. The reform of SOEs caused a large number of SOE workers to lose their jobs, forcing them to seek employment in private firms. Jobs in private firms do not include the “iron rice bowl” of social welfare benefits (e.g., housing, health care, schools for their children) that SOEs provided their workers. Urban workers’ economic dependence on the state eroded accordingly.

23 Work units generally were categorized into three types: party/government agencies (dangzheng jiguan), public service units (shiye danwei), and enterprise units (qiye danwei).
3.5.2 The Resurgence of Patronage Power in Rural Area

The reforms in rural areas tell a different story—the government’s redistributive power was strengthened as reforms proceeded. In the Maoist era, rural areas were governed by communes, a collective unit composed of production brigades whose task was to organize peasants in farming activities. Like work units, communes and production brigades managed everyday affairs of peasants. They filled a myriad of functions, including work assignment, distribution of commodities, and the provision of irrigation systems or public facilities. They also circulated and enforced CCP policy directives. In 1978, agricultural reforms restructured rural governments. The CCP reorganized communes as township governments and reassigned production brigades to be administrative villages. While the agricultural reform decollectivized the commune, township and village government still owned considerable collective resources. Started at 1980, the number of township and village enterprises (TVEs) grew rapidly. The emerging TVEs became an important force to industrialize rural areas, which at the same time preserved the rural governments’ economic function in market competition (Oi 1996b). TVEs provided the village government officials with resources readily at hand that they could distribute to villagers in return for their political support. First, TVEs allow village governments to offer jobs to residents. TVEs absorb considerable amounts of the surplus labor that was released after the dismantling of collective farms and the distribution of commune farmland to individual households under the “household responsibility” system. In 2003, TVEs have hired around 136 million of rural residents (Cai et al. 2008) and the statistic has reached its peak in 2011 when 162 million were employed by TVEs (China Labour Statistical Yearbook 2013 2013). In provinces where collective economy highly developed, such as Jiangsu, TVEs usually
employed more than 30 percent of rural nonfarm labor forces in rural areas. Although the development of TVEs has slowed down (Naughton 2007:286-293), these enterprises remain strong influences on the economy and social life of rural communities. Second, TVEs generate financial revenues that can be used to distribute cash to villagers or to build roads, public schools and other facilities. Since village assets, such as TVEs and farm land, are owned by the village collective (jiti), village governments have the authority to decide how to allocate village assets and the revenues generated from these sources. Therefore, unlike urban local governments, economic reforms in rural areas have meant that village governments have experienced a strengthening of their ability to control residents' behavior.

3.5.3 Rural-Urban Divide and Elections

The divergence of rural and urban transitions has had a profound impact on grassroots elections. In urban areas, the decline of work units directly weakens the urban residents’ dependence on RC governments. As such, citizens usually do not care too much about political affairs related to their communities. Having no stakes in urban government, citizens naturally have no motive to engage in public affairs, such as elections (Gui et al. 2006; Ma et al. 2000). RCs are also limited in their functions. For the CCP, RCs are organized to facilitate urban governance (Read and Chen 2008). The 1990’s Organic Law stipulates that the tasks of RCs are basically to propagate governmental policies, mediate residents’ disputes, or maintain community local security and public facilities. But these tasks provide no substantive material benefits to urban dwellers. Some scholars have argued that the function of RCs could be weaker than those of unions. To prevent unemployed urban workers from causing
disturbances, the CCP intentionally maintains the union’s function in providing a social safety net for workers (Lau 2001). When the SOE workers are dismissed, unions send members to visit them, assist them with job searches, and even give emergency funds. Compared to the official trade unions, RCs can only provide limited assistance and very rare material benefits.

In contrast, village governments have become increasingly important to villagers as the economic reforms in rural areas have evolved. Village governments managed village owned enterprises and other collective assets, which motivates villagers to get involved in local political affairs. For example, villagers who need agricultural assistance will see elections as an allocation mechanism, which activates their inventive to participate in elections. After observing more than 200 villages, Oi and Rozelle (2000) report that villages possessing agricultural resources experienced higher levels of electoral participation than those that did not have those resources.

Table 3.2 Voting in VCs and RCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural Villagers’ Committees</th>
<th>Urban Residents’ Committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive elections</td>
<td>Loyalists participate</td>
<td>Loyalists do not participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic voters avoid</td>
<td>Democratic voters participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CCP controlled elections</td>
<td>Loyalists participate</td>
<td>Neither loyalists nor democratic voters participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic voters do not participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Village governments are willing to offer valuable resources in exchange of political loyalty as well. Using survey data, Luo et al. (2010) and Brandt and Turner (2007) find that villages have developed systems of pork barrel politics where voters can use turnout to signal their demands to the governments for public goods provision. A famous case is found in the
south of Jiangsu. There, strong TVEs developed after the rural economic reforms were implemented, political participation became quite fervent as well. Consider a current case: *Huaxi cun*, one of the richest villages in China. The VC in *Huaxi cun* reportedly owned collective assets worth over 300 million dollars. The VC government allowed villagers to “invest” in the village-owned enterprises and allocated the shares of profits to villagers every year. Under this condition, rural residents become “stakeholders” in the village. With rich patronage resources, the *Huaxi cun* elections create strong motivation for electoral participation. Expecting to obtain the opportunities for local patronage, such as jobs, money, or the chance to have a priority for promotion in village enterprises, villagers are highly loyal and supportive of the government in elections. The village leadership never turns over, with the same person, Wu Renbao, serving in this position for more than twenty years. Survey data from south China also reports that villagers’ attentions to the shared bonus from collective businesses strongly influence their choice to vote (Guo 2003).

It thus is not surprising why urban voters have no incentives to vote in RC elections. Urban citizens, particularly those have life experiences in work units or state-owned business, may have been wont to receive benefits provided by SOEs. As SOEs privatized, local community governments fail to provide the same benefits citizens received from SOEs. The unions as an alternative serve the economic function that offers social welfare safety net benefits to laid-off workers and urban citizens. In other words, the breaking of the “iron rice bowl” has seriously dampened urban voters’ enthusiasm for local elections, especially those loyalists who would expect to receive material returns from their electoral participation. In addition, unlike VCs, RCs do not control revenue and job generating resources, such as city-run enterprises or the power
to distribute lands. Without these resources, RCs’ patronage capacity is naturally weak and not enable them to engage local voters in any sort of clientelist electoral politics. VCs, as have discussed, in contrast to RCs, own considerable economic resources that empower them to mobilize loyalist voters. RCs’ weak control of resources and VCs’ strong patronage capacity has been a major source of rural-urban difference in electoral participation.

To sum up, after economic reform, RCs have been heavily weakened while VCs’ redistributive functions are growing. Given this path divergence, I argue that because VCs are capable of providing patronage, they can maintain loyalist voters for electoral support. On the contrary, due to the lack of redistributive power, RCs only attract democratic voters when competitive elections are held. Neither loyalists nor democratic voters have incentives to vote in RC elections under control of the local officials. To examine this argument, I test the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: VC governments are more capable of mobilizing voters in state controlled elections than are RC governments; therefore villagers will be more likely to participate in state controlled elections than urban residents.

Hypothesis 2: VC governments are more capable of mobilizing loyalists to vote in elections than RC governments; therefore loyalist voters are more likely to vote in VC elections but they do not turn out to vote in RC elections.

Hypothesis 3: Democratic voters avoid VC elections but they vote in competitive RC elections; therefore democratic consciousness will have no impact on voting choice in VC elections but is positively associated with voter turnout in RC elections.

3.6 Data

This chapter contends that rural elections are marked by loyalist voting while urban elections attract democratic voters when elections are competitive. To investigate rural and
urban voters, I use the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS 2013) dataset, a national survey conducted in 2013 that used stratified probability method to determine the survey sample and interviewed respondents who are 18 years old or older. The response rate is 72.17% and the final number of valid observations (respondents) is 11438. The data collection was administered by the National Survey Research Center at Renmin University of China (NSRC) and was released in the middle of 2016. CGSS is a prestigious data set and widely used in academic analysis by scholars from within and without China. Using CGSS is analytically advantageous in the study of voting behavior in China for two reasons. First, the CGSS contains a national sample, allowing us to see the complete picture for the Chinese voters. In doing so, we avoid a potential bias toward a certain region or a specific city and village. Second, the CGSS facilitates a comparison of voting behaviors between rural and urban elections. The CGSS data collect a large number of observations (more than ten thousand) so the sample size is not an issue when analyzing the rural and urban population separately.

3.6.1 Voter Turnout

The dependent variable of interest is voter turnout, which is directly derived from the dataset using the questionnaire that asked respondents “Did you vote in the last community resident’s committee or village committee election?” If the answer is yes, I code it as 1, otherwise 0.

Do rural villagers vote more than urban dwellers do? Table 3.3 shows that turnout rate in VC elections is 60.57% while turnout in RC elections is 36.07%, representing a significant 24 per cent difference that requires explanations (chi square=633 and p<.05).
Table 3.3 Voter Turnout in VC and RC Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Vote</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RC Elections (%)</strong></td>
<td>4,174</td>
<td>2,355</td>
<td>6,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(63.93)</td>
<td>(36.07)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VC Elections (%)</strong></td>
<td>1,725</td>
<td>2,650</td>
<td>4,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(39.43)</td>
<td>(60.57)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,899</td>
<td>5,005</td>
<td>10,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(54.1)</td>
<td>(45.9)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.2 Electoral Control

The first hypothesis proposes that rural residents vote in both state controlled elections and democratic elections while urban people only interest in democratic elections. I measure election control using individual evaluation on the elections. There can be various approaches to control and manipulate elections (Schedler 2002). In China’s grassroots elections, owing to the ambiguity of electoral law, the local Party branches have latitude to set up the various rules to manage elections. They rig elections for multiple reasons. Some local officials insist “the CCP leadership” (dangde lingdao), allowing no nonparty members to run for or serve in elected offices. In other locales, incumbent officials do not want their own privileged economic position and opportunities for rent-seeking (i.e., corruption) to be taken away by competitive elections (Halpern 1991; Chen and Zhong 2002: 181-183).

Local officials manipulate elections in two ways: to ex ante control candidates and to ex post control the person being elected. Predetermining the candidate list is the most common form of electoral manipulation. In many local elections, party officials do not provide nomination rights to the residents. Instead, they nominate their preferred people as candidates or nominate only one person per office. In the early 1990s, rural elections saw no electoral competition (deng’er xuanju), with only officially approved candidates running for office (Elklit...
1997; O’Brien 2001; Lu 2012). Even in elections with multiple candidates, the candidates were chosen by the party. Some were asked to lose the election while some were designated to win. Candidate control sometimes also involves monitoring election procedures. For example, many rural party officials do not set up a voting booth or fail to adopt secret voting rules when carrying out elections (Pastor and Tan 2000; Carter Center 1998). They do so to monitor each individual ballot, and make sure their preferred candidates will be obvious on the ballot for villagers to pick. Another way to rig elections is to manage electoral results arbitrarily. In some local elections, the party officials prevent candidates they do not favor from serving on the committees by rejecting their election on an ideological basis. To justifiably denying the electoral results, officials often claim that these candidates have developed an ideology that is inconsistent to the Party or assert that these persons violated state policies, such as birth control or corruption, in the past (Wei 2009). The official authority empowered them to control the electoral outcomes even though the person is elected through a democratic process.

I use the questionnaire “do you know how the villagers’ committee or residents’ committee formed?” Respondents are offered five options: (1) "VC/RC members are directly nominated and elected by residents; (2) " VC/RC members are elected by residents but the CCP has final decision for the appointment of VC/RC members"; (3) " VC/RC members are directly assigned by the CCP”; (4) “VC/RC members are nominated by the CCP and then elected by residents; and (5)"don’t know." These options account for how resident perceive the procedure of grassroots elections. Obviously, people who choose (1) believe that the electoral procedures

24 The wording in Chinese here is “the higher-ups” instead of “the CCP.” However, the CCP is the only authority that to review and approve the personnel in the government, thus for citizens, the higher-ups obviously mean the CCP.
are on their own and free from the Party manipulation. Those who choose (2) perceive that the upper level authority can determine the government members no matter the electoral result is, which is an outcome control strategy by the CCP. (4) means another type of strategy, which as discussed is the candidate control. (3) usually means no election at all occurring in the unit they reside, but it also could mean that the election is ritualized and noncompetitive as elections in Maoist era. I reorganize the order of these options by simply recoding 1 equal to (1), 2 equal to (2), 3 equal to (4) and 4 equal to (3) and 5 equal to (5), which makes it convenient for interpretation because, aside from 5, 1 to 4 represent an order from perceiving free elections to perceiving no elections.

Despite the order, I view this measure as a categorical variable. The theoretical expectation is that rural villagers who experience state controlled elections (categories 2 and 3) will vote as much as villagers who see elections are free from the CCP control. In urban area, the expectation is that citizens who perceive the election as under control of the CCP will not turn out to vote.

Table 3.4 shows that urban RC governments are less likely to be produced by free election procedure than are VC governments: Surprisingly, the vast majority in both RC and VC elections don’t know how elections are conducted. This may be interpreted in two ways. First, the public lack political information about or have no interests in grassroots elections. Grassroots elections are not held on a specific schedule. Local governments implement elections for their conveniences. Not a national event, grassroots elections could be easily ignored by ordinary Chinese who do not frequently pay attentions to local politics. Second, the majority of “don’t know” could be due to ordinary Chinese’ reluctance to talk about politics
with strangers because of the sensitivity of political issues involving the government (Shi 1997, 1996). Whatever reason is the true reason, the respondents who answered “don’t know” provide important information for citizens’ political awareness. Although the majority of respondents answered they don’t know how elections are conducted, the numbers of observations for other categories are enough to allow for statistical inference. 13.89 per cent of urban residents answer that their RCs are directly elected by the people, which is almost 8 per cent less than rural villagers. However, it is hard to tell whether the CCP controls RC elections more strictly than VC elections. The percentage of respondents who perceive the election outcome as controlled by the party is very similar in both rural and urban elections: 2.95 percent of rural respondents versus 3.17 percent or urban respondents. So is the percentage for elections with candidates controlled by the CCP.

Table 3.4 Perceived Electoral Control in VC and RC Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Free</th>
<th>Outcome control</th>
<th>Candidate control</th>
<th>No elections</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RC Elections</strong> (%)</td>
<td>964 (13.89)</td>
<td>220 (3.17)</td>
<td>493 (7.1)</td>
<td>156 (2.25)</td>
<td>5106 (73.58)</td>
<td>6939 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VC Elections</strong> (%)</td>
<td>974 (21.76)</td>
<td>132 (2.95)</td>
<td>348 (7.77)</td>
<td>55 (1.23)</td>
<td>2,967 (66.29)</td>
<td>4,476 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (%)</strong></td>
<td>1,938 (16.98)</td>
<td>352 (3.08)</td>
<td>841 (7.37)</td>
<td>211 (1.85)</td>
<td>8,073 (70.72)</td>
<td>11,415 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.3 Loyalist Voters

I use *Party Membership*—individuals’ affiliation with the party—as a measure to identify loyalist voters. This measure has been widely used in previous studies (Chen and Zhong 2002;
Landry et al. 2010). This information is from the question that asks respondents' membership status in the Communist Party, Communist Youth League, or other democratic parties. This variable is coded as: 1. Party member; 2. Youth league member; 3. Democratic party member; 4. no membership. The expectation is that party membership has significantly positive effect on voters in VC elections but not in RC elections.

3.6.4 Democratic Voters

To evaluate whether people vote along with their democratic orientations, I adopt the similar idea to what Shi (1999c) used. I create the Democratic Consciousness variable by generating a zero to three measurement from three questions asking respondents’ opinions about democracy. The first question is "whether you agree with the statement that democracy is the government for the people." The second question asks, "whether you agree with the statement that only when ordinary people have a say to decide important national or local policies can democracy be possible." The third question asks, "whether you agree with the statement that only when ordinary people have the right to elect their own representatives to discuss important national and local issues can democracy be possible." Respondents score one point when they agree with each of these questions. If they disagree or answer “do not know”, they score zero on that question. This generates a three-point variable, and the higher a respondent’s score, the more democratic the respondent’s political orientation is believed to

25 Democratic parties are a general title for United Front Democratic Parties. These Parties are subordinate to and managed by the CCP. The function of their existence, according to the Law, is to represent the pluralist interests in the society. These parties have no independent authority from the CCP.
be. I expect that democratic consciousness is significantly positively associated with voting among urban citizens but not with rural people’s voting behavior.

It should be noted that although theoretically loyalist voters and democratic voters are turning out to vote for different reasons, the distinction between the two types of voters, in reality, is not as stark as the theory may suggest. For instance, crosstabulation of party members and democratic consciousness shows that approximately fifty-three percent of party members score three—the highest level—in their democratic consciousness (see Appendix B). This may suggest that there is another category—democratic loyalist voters, or specifically, democratic party members—that will have somewhat mixed behavior in electoral participation. The existence of the third category confirms research that finds that many people join the Communist Party not out of any deep commitment to the party ideology, but for personal gains such as career advancement or opportunities (Dickson 2016; Dickson 2003). As the theory has spelled out and the findings will show in the analysis, since VCs control considerable economic resources and RCs do not, Party members are more likely to vote in VCs than in RCs. This suggests that Party members are self-interested in pursuing their careers in urban areas as RCs control no substantial resources that may keep their loyalty to the local governments. This also suggests that “democratic party members” in urban areas may be a driving force that promotes local democracy out of their self-interested reasons. A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it will be promising for future research to theorize this particular category and unravel their behavior patterns in China’s local politics.
3.6.5 Control Variables

Some theoretically relevant variables are added to the model to minimize omitted variable and to account for the current state of knowledge on Chinese voting behavior. Employees in the government could be vulnerable to the incumbent political authority. I control Employment Status by particularly looking at whether working in the government increases one’s propensity to vote. The data contains information about the agricultural and nonagricultural jobs of the respondents. I recoded them as follows: 1. the employees in the government (including the Party, military and public services); 2. villagers' or residents' committee; 3. Business employees; 4. self-employed; 5. farmers; 6. unemployed. In addition, Union Membership is controlled. Union membership remains a salient identity for laborers, particularly in urban areas with large numbers of unemployed and migrant workers. I expect that being a union member should increase the chance that an individual to be aware of election rules and therefore incentivized to vote.

Several personal traits are controlled for as well. Research on voting behavior in democracies has found that voter turnout is associated with several personal characteristics. Among these important features, I add Gender, Age, Minority Status, Education, and Income as control variables. Gender will be coded as 1 if the respondent is male, and 0 for female. Age is taken directly from respondents' age in 2013. Following the previous research that finds a curvilinear relationship between age and voter turnout, in which older and younger people are less likely to participate in elections, I also add a squared term for age in the models. Minority groups may find elections unattractive, particularly in coastal provinces because the Han ethnic group is always the majority. Those who are not Han Chinese will be coded as minority group
members in comparison to majority of Han Chinese. Education level has long found to be a positive determinant of voter turnout among Chinese (Shi 1999c). I control respondents' education level by constructing an ordinal variable, from 1 to 5, in which 1 is no education, 2 is elementary school or lower, 3 is high school, 4 is college, and 5 is graduate and above. Income can be a financial resource to determine individual choice to participate in elections. An increase of income may stimulate citizens to engage in politics, or provide them leisure time and other economic resources to engage in politics. Therefore, a higher level of income could have a positive effect on voter turnout. I use logged personal income as a variable to control for the potential variation of political tendency between different class groups. The descriptive statistics are shown in Appendix B.

3.7 Empirical Analysis

Since the dependent variable is binary—vote or not vote in VC or RC elections -- I use a binary logit model to estimate the coefficients. To examine the rural-urban divide in voter participation, I estimate three models. The first model includes the entire sample, which provides the pattern of Chinese voting behavior. The second and the third models account for rural sample and urban sample separately, which can be used to compare the voting intentions in VC elections and in RC elections.

Table 3.5 shows the models for the entire sample and the samples for urban and rural population. The first model represents the general voting pattern of Chinese in grassroots elections. For electoral control, it is not surprising that ordinary Chinese vote less in elections where the CCP controls the candidates than in free elections.
Table 3.5 Logit Estimates for Voter Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is VC or RC formed?</th>
<th>All Elections</th>
<th>VC Elections</th>
<th>RC Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elections but the CCP decides the final outcomes</td>
<td>-0.0684 (0.144)</td>
<td>-0.436 (-1.78)</td>
<td>0.0794 (0.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections but the CCP nominates candidates</td>
<td>-0.331** (0.101)</td>
<td>-0.308 (-1.81)</td>
<td>-0.347** (-2.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No real elections</td>
<td>-1.350*** (0.171)</td>
<td>-1.320*** (-4.27)</td>
<td>-1.321*** (-6.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>-1.571*** (0.0655)</td>
<td>-1.470*** (-14.22)</td>
<td>-1.614*** (-18.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCs</td>
<td>0.810*** (0.0597)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The CCP affiliation</th>
<th>CCA</th>
<th>VC/RC employees</th>
<th>RC employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCP member</td>
<td>0.163* (0.0827)</td>
<td>0.504* (2.38)</td>
<td>0.137 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth League member</td>
<td>-0.121 (0.654)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-0.067 (-0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Parties member</td>
<td>-0.0494 (0.155)</td>
<td>-0.768** (-2.85)</td>
<td>0.324 (1.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Consciousness</td>
<td>0.0724** (0.0252)</td>
<td>-0.0601 (-1.55)</td>
<td>0.172*** (4.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.0427 (0.0493)</td>
<td>0.155* (1.99)</td>
<td>-0.039 (-0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.118*** (0.00947)</td>
<td>0.127*** (9.01)</td>
<td>0.118*** (9.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age square</td>
<td>-0.001*** (0.0001)</td>
<td>-0.001*** (-7.98)</td>
<td>-0.001*** (-7.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han ethnicity</td>
<td>0.046 (0.0824)</td>
<td>0.229* (2.03)</td>
<td>-0.202 (-1.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>0.060 (0.0351)</td>
<td>0.245*** (4.45)</td>
<td>-0.057 (-1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>0.004 (0.00841)</td>
<td>-0.009 (-0.69)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union membership</td>
<td>0.351*** (0.0810)</td>
<td>0.126 (0.41)</td>
<td>0.413*** (4.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>VC/RC employees</th>
<th>RC employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VC/RC employees</td>
<td>1.625*** (0.266)</td>
<td>1.038 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private business employee</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>0.631***</td>
<td>0.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>0.334**</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.347***</td>
<td>0.306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. The dependent variable is binary: 1: vote in the VC or RC election; 0 otherwise. VCs is binary: 1: VC election; 0 RC election.

The voter turnout in candidate-control elections is around 7 per cent lower than in free elections. However, there is no significant difference between voting in free elections and in elections where the CCP controls the outcome of the elections. Considering the meaning for this answer, one explanation is that Chinese voters care about free electoral procedure but do not mind CCP control. When answering that the CCP controls the final electoral outcomes, people do not necessarily think that the electoral procedure is fraudulent. This finding can be interpreted to mean that the election process is more important than the election outcome.

Ordinary Chinese who are aware of elections are willing to vote in elections that they believe have a free and fair procedure, but they abstain from voting when they think the choice has already been controlled by the CCP. Compared to controlling the candidate nomination, however, the fact that the CCP monitors the final electoral outcomes does not discourage voting. The evidence shows that citizens will participate in elections even though they believe the CCP has authority to overrule the election results. One implication is that free electoral procedure is an important variable to explain turnout in authoritarian countries (Lehoucq 2003;
Su et al. 2011), as it is in liberal democracies (Birch 2010). For all citizens, urban or rural, when they see no real elections or when they do not know what the process is to form their VC or RC governments, they have the lowest incentives to vote.

A comparison between the VC (model 2) and RC elections (model 3) shows that residents in the two regions vote differently regarding electoral control. In model 1, the variable VCs refer to a dummy variable for VC elections. The coefficient suggests that, as previous shown, rural people participate in VC elections more than urbanites do in RC elections. The predicted probability that country people vote in VC elections is 16 per cent higher than it is for city residents in RC elections.

The comparison confirms the first hypothesis that argues that rural villagers are more likely to vote in state controlled elections but urban citizens do not. In VC elections, villagers do not have a preference over whether or not elections are free. The probability of turnout for VC residents among free elections and elections controlled by the CCP are not significantly different. However, interestingly, RC residents also have incentives to vote in elections that are controlled by the CCP, but they are less likely to vote without the right to nominate candidates. The likelihood that urban people vote in RC elections is 7 per cent in comparison in free elections compared to those where all candidates are assigned by the Party (see figure 3.1). This pattern is in line with the first model derived from the entire sample. In a nut shell, while the data suggests that villagers’ committees proportionally hold more free elections than urban residents’ committees, and villagers do participate more than urbanites, the analysis on voting behavior shows that villagers do not particularly prefer free elections, while urban people stay
away from candidate controlled elections. In other words, rural-urban divide cannot be inferred to represent a higher level of democratization in rural areas than in urban areas.

The second hypothesis proposes that VC governments are able to mobilize loyalists, so that party members are more likely to vote in VC elections while not in RC elections, where the local government has no resources to distribute as patronage. This hypothesis is confirmed as well. Party membership has strong effects on voting in rural area but not in cities. In VC elections, the predicted turnout rate of party members is 10 per cent higher than that of people who do not have any party affiliation. But in RC elections, party members do not vote at a higher rate than ordinary citizens. However, interesting, in rural elections, members in democratic parties are less likely to turn out to vote than are ordinary villagers. This probably is because the members who belong to democratic parties are mostly politically and economically dependent upon the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) instead of the village government, which decreases their incentive to participate in elections.26

The models also provide support for the third hypothesis that democratic voters do not vote in rural elections but they do in urban elections. In Model 2, the coefficient for Democratic Consciousness shows that in VC elections, the level of democratic consciousness has no effects on villagers’ choice to vote or not. But in RC elections, an increase of one level of democratic consciousness is associated with a 3.3 per cent higher probability of voting. This clearly supports the proposition that rural voters are less likely to be democratic but urban citizens vote because of their high level of democratic consciousness.

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26 There is no youth league member within the rural population in this sample, which is why the coefficient is blank.
One can see some interesting patterns when comparing urban and rural voters regarding other characteristics. First, gender differences remain an important predictor for turnout in rural elections but not in urban ones. In VC elections, the likelihood that male villagers will vote is 3.2 per cent higher than the likelihood for a female villager voting. Previous works concerning women political rights also report that women usually are not active in voting (Howell 2006; Jennings 1997; Pang and Rozelle 2010). This indicates that the tradition cultural value that women should not be involve in public affairs still prevails in rural China.

Interestingly, education level significantly influences voting behavior among the rural population but plays no role among urban voters. According to Figure 3.1, a one unit increase in education level will boost the probability that villagers vote by 5 per cent. This could be a function of villagers with higher education being more informed by the government and, therefore, more motivated to participate.

Not surprisingly, union membership is a strong predictor for voting among urban populations. In urban areas, unions replaced the conventional work units as the provider of a social safety net for urban workers and the unemployed. This relationship informally empowered union organizations with the capacity to mobilize urban workers. Since the connection between union and urban residents is strong, it is reasonable to expect that union membership will enhance the prospects of an individual voting in RC elections.

Other variables also suggest a significant distinction between rural and urban elections that require more attention for future research. Government employees do not vote at higher rates than people who are employed in other sectors. In urban areas, RC employees and farmers vote more than government employees. Either way, this shows that government
employment is not a motive for citizens to be mobilized to participate in elections. This change is particularly apparent after market liberalization, which gave citizens more freedom to look for better job opportunities outside of the state-owned sector of the economy. Finally, ethnicity makes a difference among rural but not urban voters. Non-Han Chinese are more likely to vote in rural elections but are not any more or less likely than Han Chinese to vote in urban elections. Among the other demographic factors, only age exerts a consistent effect on voting, indicating that older and younger Chinese are less likely to participate in elections than middle-age Chinese.

![Figure 3.1 Predicted Probability of Voter Turnout in Chinese Grassroots Elections](image)

**Figure 3.1** Predicted Probability of Voter Turnout in Chinese Grassroots Elections
Overall, the analysis shows a clear divergence in voting patterns among rural and urban voters. The pattern is clear: rural voters are more likely to be loyalist voters rather than democratic voters. By contrast, urban voters are more democratic oriented. Rural voters have no preference between the CCP manipulated elections and free elections, while urban voters stay away from elections where the candidates are controlled by the CCP. As I proposed, this clear-cut distinction between rural and urban voters can be attributed to the path divergence during economic reform: village governments have the capacity to provide patronage benefits in return for votes, whereas urban governments have lost their access to resources to resort to patronage in elections.

3.8 Conclusion

China has implemented elections at the grassroots level for more than thirty years. But the democratic experience in China is not monolithic. Rural and urban areas have gone through divergent paths in democratic transition. Because rural governments have developed stronger redistributive capacity than urban governments, rural VC elections become attractive to loyalist voters. By contrast, with the dismantling of SOEs urban governments have no substantial redistributive capacity. RC elections thus elicit no loyalists but entice democratic voters to participate.

As for the question of whether rural democracy has proceeded farther than urban democracy, the answer is clearly “no”. While rural villagers participate more than urban residents, they do not do so because of a commitment to democracy. Instead, villagers may be motivated by patronage resources that local government can offer in return for their
participation in elections. As the analysis suggests, rural people vote more in state controlled elections and rural population do not attach their democratic value to electoral participation, while urban voters mostly have high levels of democratic consciousness. These sharp differences inspire a rethinking and reevaluation of Chinese rural and urban democracies.

Nevertheless, the differences between rural and urban democracy may have profound implications to the longevity of Communist Party rule and for the future pathways of democratization in China. In his discussion of modernizing societies, Huntington (2006) famously points out a gap will develop inevitably between political attitude and behavior in the cities and those in rural regions. He argues that “the stability of a government depends upon the support which it can mobilize in the countryside” (Huntington 2006:433). This statement nicely depicts the divergent development of urban and rural democracy in China. As I have shown in this chapter, rural elections can be an avenue to gathering political supports while urban elections provide individuals who are higher democratic oriented with an institution to express their demands. This divide, from Huntington’s insights, could have been a stabilizing force for the CCP authoritarian rule. Future research can evaluate whether the rural-urban divide has prevented potential large-scale social conflicts from occurring in China.

There are some limitations to the analysis and scope of this chapter. This chapter does not investigate voting in each individual community because of the lack of community level data that could help further diagnose whether the patronage capacity of self-governments may change the residents’ incentive to vote. Future research can employ village-level data to test whether government expenditure or the revenue of village owned enterprises significantly increase voter turnout. It is also interesting to see, in rural area, whether the patronage
resources and public goods, such as road constructions, public schools or other facilities, will correlate with turnout rate.

Despite these limitations, the rural-urban divide nevertheless is not trivial and will continue to evolve, via the socio-economic changes caused by the ongoing economic growth and political reform in China. This is possible particularly when the Chinese central government loosens the restriction on the right of the rural population to move to the cities. Recently, a number of cities, such as Beijing and Guangzhou since 2012, have allowed migrant workers to participate in residents’ committee elections. Whether these policies may trigger more urban political participation or cause urban people to participate is not yet clear. The research agenda of rural-urban divide deserves further attention.
CHAPTER 4

THE BALLOT OR THE BULLET? PUBLIC AWARENESS OF GRASSROOTS ELECTIONS AND REGIME STABILITY IN CHINA

4.1 Introduction

Since China adopted democratic elections at the grassroots level after 1987’s villagers’ committee elections, one of the most important puzzles regarding these elections is whether elections will be a force driving regime transition or one maintaining social stability in China (Schubert 2003, 2002). This question is in line with current strands of theoretical developments on electoral authoritarianism (Lindberg 2009; Schedler 2006; Levitsky and Way 2002), which raise a similar debate over whether election will serve as a governance tool for autocratic leaders or a trigger of the democratization process for the general public.

While there has been a great deal of research attempting to resolve this debate, the answer remains inconclusive. Many researchers find that grassroots elections\(^{27}\) and electoral participation in China provide legitimacy to the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP) because elections improve local governance (Manion 1996; Heberer and Schubert 2006). Others argue that grassroots elections have been incrementally changing public opinion towards a more favorable attitude toward democracy (Zweig 2002; He 2006). Some scholars believe that grassroots elections in China may have simultaneously, and paradoxically, stabilized the regime and undermined it (Sun 2014). However, although a wealth of evidence shows that elections are associated with the formation of public opinion toward the regime, there is little evidence

\(^{27}\) I use grassroots elections to refer to villagers’ committee (VC) elections and residents’ committee (RC) elections throughout this chapter.
suggesting that elections will change citizens’ political behavior or prevent public resistance to the regime. That is, while elections promote the public’s good image on the regime, do they also defuse the tension between the state and society in a way that lowers citizens’ incentives to participate in contentious activities that will destabilize the regime? This remains an unanswered question.

In this chapter, I examine the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of holding elections in local China. Specifically, I look at the relationships between citizens’ awareness of elections, and their trust in government, involvement in collective activities against the authority, and their use of official channels to express their grievances. I argue that grassroots elections have neither a stabilizing nor a democratizing effect on the regime. Instead, elections exert a mixed effect: on the one hand elections decrease citizens’ motivations to join collective contentious activities while one the other they increase people’s use of government sponsored channels to express their concerns. This argument is based on the idea that elections are not grievance-reducing but a trust-enhancing mechanism. Since economic grievance has been a major cause of contentious activities in current China and elections do not provide substantial solutions to the issues facing citizens, a mechanism to express their grievances is still required. As such, I expect that citizens who are aware of elections will pursue official channels as an alternative to popular protest for expressing their opinions. I test this argument using Chinese General Social Survey 2010 and find empirical support for the proposition that public awareness of elections does bolster popular trust in government and decreases citizens’ involvement in dissident collective action against the authorities. At the same time elections encourage citizens to visit upper level officials to express their discontent about local issues (the mechanism is
called *shangfang*, an official institution for ordinary Chinese to report their grievances or misconduct by grassroots cadres). The implication from this chapter is that elections stabilize the regime conditionally. While elections serve the CCP’s purpose of social stability, they too increase the pressure from the public within the system. When official channels for grievance resolution work effectively, elections can legitimate the regime, but as official channels fail to deal with citizens’ concerns, elections may eventually facilitate the process of democratization, for ultimately citizens will demand a system that can resolve their grievances.

This chapter is organized as follows. In the second section, I briefly review the literature on elections and regime stability in authoritarian contexts and elaborate the importance of China’s case. In the third section, I turn to a discussion of current studies about the effects of grassroots elections on public opinion in China. Following the discussions, I develop a theoretical argument along with three testable hypotheses in the fourth section. In the fifth section, I describe the data and the operationalization of variables. Discussions of the empirical analysis will be presented in the sixth section, and implication and conclusions are provided in the final section.

4.2 4.2 Elections and Regime Sustainability

Elections are one of the essential elements of democracy. Nevertheless, elections are widely adopted in authoritarian countries as a nominal democratic institution for regime legitimacy. Evidence shows that the type of regime that is governed by authoritarianism but holds regular elections has been a common practices in the world (Svolik 2012; Seeberg 2013). For dictators, elections do not work as an instrument for transmitting public preferences to the
leadership and influencing policies, but more as "instruments of authoritarian rule" that help autocrats to legitimize their rule (Powell 2000; Schedler 2002; Linz 1978). Scholars consider the countries that adopt democratic institutions but remain authoritarian rule as neither democracy nor pure authoritarian regime, but as a form of hybrid regime termed competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2002; Diamond 2002; Schedler 2002; Carothers 2002).

Elections in authoritarian regimes function as more than just window dressing for dictatorships. From the view of elite politics, holding elections helps sustain authoritarian governance in a way that institutionalizes the existing power distribution. Evidence shows that competitive multiparty elections prolong authoritarian rule. Gandhi and Przeworski (2007), for instance, find that authoritarian incumbents that institutionalize elections and legislatures in the political systems remain in power five years longer on average than those who do not adopt these democratic institutions. Elections are also found to be a tool to strengthen authoritarian resilience because they can provide information to the incumbents on the regime’s popularity; this appears to be one function of Vietnam’s congress elections (Malesky and Schuler 2011). Elections can as well help construct a patronage network for rewarding loyal followers, as they have operated in Middle East countries (Lust-Okar 2009). For incumbents, multiparty elections signal the rulers' credible commitment in power sharing. When incumbents can win a landslide victory, it shows the invincibility of the incumbent party, as was observed in the Mexican case before 2000 (Magaloni 2006). Thus, elections may lead to democratic transition only if the incumbent is weak and the opposition is powerful enough to pressure the regime to change (Donno 2013). In other words, as long as authoritarian rulers can effectively manage electoral
competition and outcomes, elections will stabilize authoritarian regimes (Brownlee 2009; Svolik 2012).

However, from the view of public opinion, elections may eventually topple autocracy in the long run, since elections usually initiate democratic learning. For instance, Mattes and Bratton (2007) find that in African countries under democratic transitions, people learn the contents of democracy through their knowledge about and awareness of political affairs. With regular elections, the public gradually perceive the elements of democracy, such as voting and competition, and then feel that they ought to be able to influence their rulers and the government policies. The democratically educated citizens would pursue further political reforms facilitating democratization. This institutionalist argument can be traced to the observation of the linkages between elections and the democratization process, in which students in comparative politics posited that democratization can be triggered by citizens embedded in democratic institutions (Rustow 1970; Dahl 1971; Hermet 1978). The democratizing effect of elections is empirically supported by current scholarship as well. Lindberg (2006) reports that in Africa under third wave democratization, repeated elections played a crucial role prompting the democratization processes. Research on a global sample also finds that holding elections regularly increases the chance of democratization in electoral authoritarianism (Edgell et al. 2015).

Moreover, institutionalized elections may become an avenue for popular protest. For example, the “color revolutions” in post-communist authoritarian regimes were partially stimulated by public dissent over electoral fraud, which eventually brought down the incumbents (Beaulieu 2014; Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Tucker 2007). Elections, particularly
unfair elections, can backfire and decrease the public's political support for the regime. For instance, Rose and Mishler (2009) find that perceived unfairness in 2007 duma elections has led to a decline of the popular support for the incumbents in Russia.

While arguments for democratizing effects of authoritarian elections have received empirical examination, some fundamental questions remain under-explored. First, despite the sturdy theoretical foundation in the research on electoral authoritarianism, the empirical justification for the micro-foundation, particularly the linkage between the public's preference for democratization and the adoption of elections, is insufficient (Pietsch et al. 2015). Whether holding elections can be a driving force for political transition involves a causal chain in which elections implant democratic values in the public and encourage anti-regime activities among citizens that could ultimately destabilize authoritarian rule. In this causal progression, the change in the public's political values is rarely tested.

Second, the current research excludes one-party regimes where multiparty elections remained prohibited at national level. In fact, however, elections could be more detrimental to the rulers in one-party regimes because experiencing democratic institutions at the local level may generate public sentiment against the undemocratically selected higher leadership. This reaction to one-party regimes would be less likely in electoral authoritarianism where top leaders come to power through competitive, though manipulated, elections. Incorporating one-party regimes in the analysis of authoritarian elections expands the scope of electoral authoritarianism and contributes to the generalization of the current thesis for the effects of elections on authoritarian survival. This chapter attempts to fill this gap by evaluating how
grassroots elections adopted by one-party regime in China can influence public attitudes and behaviors toward the incumbent government.

4.3 Elections and Regime Sustainability in China

In China, elections are allowed by the Communist Party at the local level with limited competitions. In these local elections, opposition parties and organized campaigns are prohibited. The only way for ordinary citizens to run for office is to self-nominate to be candidates in elections. In elections for higher level government units, like county-level congresses, although citizens are allowed to cast their votes, they are not permitted to run for offices. Despite these limitations, unlike Soviet-style elections where voters had no choices between candidates but could only approve the persons preselected by the Party, China stipulates that electoral procedures must employ a secret ballot and that elections should include multiple candidates for each office. In this respect, elections are meaningful to ordinary Chinese as they provide citizens with rights to practice democracy via selecting local leaders through voting their own preferences. Below I briefly review existing works on the effects of these elections on Chinese citizens’ political attitudes.28

Research of China's grassroots election has revealed some impact of rural and urban committee elections on public attitude toward the Communist regime. Scholars report that participation in grassroots elections has produced essential effects on the public's political awareness of democracy. Li (2001) finds that villagers from villages where contested elections

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28 Of course, there are also other elections, and some of them are democratic, for instance, elections in work units, or trade union. About the analysis of trade union elections see Howell (2008)
were held are more likely to engage in petitions than those from villages holding noncompetitive elections. His further research (Li 2003) also confirms that rural elections significantly enhance villagers' external efficacy—villagers feel that they are more capable of influencing government policy making after their first free and fair elections. Zweig (2002) uses survey data in Zhejiang and finds that village elections have implanted democratic values in rural area. Sun (2014) also argues that rural elections have empowering effects on villagers—villagers who participate in elections exhibit higher levels of support for democracy. Kennedy (2009:395) finds that village committee elections received popular supports from villagers. He thus argues that voting in elections as democratic practices will further initiate the institutionalization of democracy.

The argument that electoral participation will drive China's democratization is not self-evident, however. Several works point to a strengthening effect of electoral participation on the CCP regime. Schubert (2009) Heberer (2009) conclude from their field observations in rural and urban committees that grassroots elections have played a role in channeling popular grievances to the local government and thereby improving policy implementation with popular support. They believe that local elections have reduced the citizens' propensity to challenge the local government. Manion (2006) analyzes a representative survey and argues that voting in competitive elections with free and fair procedures can increase ordinary villagers' trust in government officials. Similarly, Ma and Wang (2014) report that villagers experiencing quality electoral processes trust the township government at higher levels than those who do not have such experiences. Sun (2014) finds that electoral participation will promote democratic values among villagers while at the same time enhancing their trust in the authoritarian government.
Drawn from the empirical evidence, a temporary consensus seems to be that grassroots elections entail dual effects: elections enhance legitimacy of the CCP regime but implant democratic values among the public simultaneously (Sun 2014; Zweig 2002). However, the current studies have not investigated the relationship between elections and popular contentious behaviors directly. Using electoral participation and trust in government to evaluate the regime stability sometimes would confuse the relationship. As Shi (2000: 557) points out from his survey research, electoral participation could be a result rather than a cause of public preference over democracy or supports for the government. Indeed, previous research finds that it is democratic orientation or government trust that affects people's tendency to participate in grassroots elections but not the other way around (Tao et al. 2011; Shi 1999c; Zhong and Chen 2002).

In addition, citizens could attach different meanings to "the government", particularly in the Chinese context, where trust in government usually involves multiple levels of authorities (Li 2004; Zhong 2014; Lü 2014). Although popular trust in government is widely regarded as a source of authoritarian regime legitimacy, there has been no further evidence showing that this sort of trust can demobilize the public and prevent the sort of mass incidents that may threaten the authoritarian regime's stability, such as popular protests or organized dissident movements. Trust in government does not necessarily make citizens self-constrained in challenging authoritarian rule or abstaining from joining in dissident collective action. Theoretically, trust in the central government may even encourage citizens to air their grievance against local authority by mobilized protests or institutionalized petitions because they believe upper level governments will support their activities (Li 2008). To understand the relationship between
holding elections and the CCP regime stability, we may need to further reevaluate the relationship between elections and public resistance to the regime. The next section explores the effect of the public's awareness of elections on the participation in dissident collective action and in institutional channels for grievance resolution to clarify whether holding grassroots elections will substantially improve regime stability.

4.4 4.4. Awareness of Elections and Social Stability in China

To be able to shape the public attitude toward the regime, elections need to be known by citizens, and need to be meaningful. Ritualized political events such as the elections in Soviet Union offer no material or psychological value to citizens and thus have a quite limited effect on public opinion toward the regime. In this chapter, I look specifically at grassroots elections: rural villagers' committee (VC) elections and urban residents' committee (RC) elections in China. As I have mentioned, in China there are elections at multiple levels of governing units, among which only the VC and the RC elections allow Chinese citizens to select the leaders of local communities through competitive elections. In contrast, county and township people's congress elections are not for selecting local leaders but only for electing congress members, whose candidacies are usually predetermined by the party (Manion 2014: ch2; Yuan 2011; Dong 2006; Li 2002). In addition, elections in rural and urban communities are freer and fairer and more influential on local governance than other types of election in China. Grassroots elections not only engage Chinese people in democratic voting processes, but also substantially enhance local leaders’ accountability (Wang and Yao 2007; Luo et al. 2010; Manion 1996;
Brandt and Turner 2007). The chance that ordinary Chinese can learn and practice democracy is much higher in grassroots elections than in local congress elections.

The Chinese central government institutionalizes grassroots elections in national laws in order to establish an authority for bottom-level democratic system to alleviate social disturbance after economic marketization (Tan 2009; Shi 1999b; O'Brien and Li 2000; Kelliher 1997). However, the entire population are not well informed about these elections, largely because of the selective implementation of election laws by local governments29 and the fact that these elections are not synchronized (Tan 2009). The Chinese central authorities promulgated the electoral laws and delegated the power of implementing elections to local officials. Yet local officials have different incentives in offering authentic elections, and many of them choose not to adopt competitive elections at all (Shi 1999a; MacFarquhar 1998; Manion 2000). This makes citizens' learning experiences on elections unequal across subdivisions and subject to local officials' willingness to offer competitive elections. In local communities, whose party officials are willing to implement elections, citizens will be aware of and learn about elections, whereas in communities where local officials manipulate elections or block from the resident’s information about elections, citizens usually do not know about such elections.

Public awareness of elections can alter citizens' perception of the authoritarian regime, create a positive evaluation of the regime, and eventually decrease their intention to get involved in dissident collective action that destabilize the government. Holding elections influences the public attitude to the regime in many ways. One of the most important ways for the authoritarian rulers is to improve the image of the government or show the authoritarian

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29 For the discussions of selective implementation of policies of local officials in China, see O'Brien and Li (1999)
incumbents’ willingness to share power (Magaloni 2008). For the public, exposure to
democratic elections informs citizens that the regime is attempting to hear the public’s voice
and incorporate their voice into the policy-making process. When citizens are aware of
elections, they may be more likely to trust the political institutions set up by the government
and more willing to exercise their political rights granted by the authoritarian regime, such as
voting for state-appointed candidates (Heberer 2006). As such, holding elections and letting the
residents perceive their political rights would enhance the local residents' support for the
government. As I have discussed, electoral participation substantially increases individual trust
in the government and enhances the voters’ sense of political efficacy (Li 2003; Sun 2014).

Based on the improved trust, higher levels of public awareness of election can thus
lower the chance that the public will get involved in collective contentious activities against the
regime's interests. In addition, elections also provide an institutional alternative for political
participation or for opinion expression. In authoritarian countries, the lack of institutions for
political participation is a cause of mass protests that destabilizes the regime since the only way
for citizens to express concerns is through collective activities. Grassroots elections can play a
positive role in decreasing this destabilizing tendency of mass incidents. When citizens are
aware of elections, they know they have a right to vote against unpopular local officials or at
least express their discontent with them to higher level authorities (Shi 1999c). Under this
condition, awareness of elections may discourage the public from going to the street.
Compared to citizens who are aware of elections, those who are not aware of elections will be
less subject to being persuaded to employ more conventional alternatives for political
participation.
Accordingly, individuals who are aware of grassroots elections will develop a higher level of trust in the government and will be less likely to get involved in collective dissident activities, such as participating in, donating to, or emotionally supporting collective protest, strikes, or demonstrations, all of which are considered by the government as anti-regime activities. In contrast, those who have no awareness of grassroots elections will be not develop institutional trust in government and will be more likely to engage in these activities.

Hypothesis 1: All else being equal, awareness of grassroots elections will enhance individuals' levels of trust in authoritarian government in China

Hypothesis 2: All else being equal, awareness of grassroots elections will lower individuals' incentives to get involved in collective dissent activities

However, while elections can be a buffer against democratizing pressure by enhancing citizens' trust in the government, they do not provide substantial solutions to popular grievances that result from economic reform, which is a major reason why citizens engage in collective dissent activities in present-day authoritarian regimes. After the 1989 Tiananmen movement, China's mass incidents mostly do not involve calls for democratic reforms at the national level. Instead they are grievance-based protests (Chan et al. 2014). Laborers strive for pensions, job security, and salary increases (Lee 2007). Peasants resist unreasonable fees, levies, and land seizure by local governments (O'Brien et al. 2006; Guo 2001; Chen 2012). Citizens and farmers march against environmental pollution caused by industrial expansion (Deng and Yang 2013). These grievances are fast growing as a byproduct of economic development. They have consistently aroused various levels of mass incidents that have forced the Chinese government to adjust its policies to address these grievances (Cai 2010). Although holding elections can promote local governance by improving local party officials' competence
and accountability, indirectly mitigating the social pressure for political reform, it is still difficult for elections to fundamentally eliminate social grievances.

Accordingly, elections will decrease the public’s motivation to challenge the state, but should not be expected to decrease popular complaints about the grievances people have suffered. As a result, we should see elections encourage citizens to choose official dispute resolution mechanisms rather than dissident collective activities the regime considers illegal to convey their concerns to the governments. In other words, awareness of elections enhances the chance that citizens will adopt government sponsored institutions to deal with their grievances. A similar observation can be traced to the social movement literature, which argues opening the political system, such as liberalizing elections, will reformulate the political opportunity structure (POS) and increase the public's willingness to express their discontent to the regime through conventional, institutional mechanisms (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994; Kitschelt 1986). However, opening the political systems usually does not necessarily mean that a regime is more vulnerable to popular protests. Quite the contrary, openness can incorporate protests into the system. As Hipsher (1998: 157) writes, "one of the ironies of democratization cycles is that the social movements that lead the push for democracy tend to become institutionalized once democracy becomes a reality.” The cases like the democratization of Chile and Brazil in 1980s led social movement elites to choose elections and congresses instead of strikes or protests as a tool to influence policies (Hipsher 1998).

Following the similar logic of Hipsher’s argument, I expect that elections can channel social discontent into institutions that are manageable for the authoritarian regime. Because elections lead the public to expect greater responsiveness by the government, they will be
more willing to adopt the mechanisms provided by the government to voice their opinions. In China, almost all organized collective dissident activities on the street are considered illegal by the regime. For disgruntled citizens, an institutional way to express complaints and grievances can deliver their discontent to the upper level government officials by directly visiting those officials\(^{30}\) (\textit{shangfang}) or through sending complaints to them by mail.\(^{31}\) These institutional channels are established by the CCP to "gather information on popular responses to government policies and to monitor the behavior of lower-echelon bureaucrats" (Shi 1997:234). Not surprisingly, scholars find that the citizens' use of these official channels is associated with their support for the regime: The more citizens support the regime, the more likely they will be to choose official channels to air their complaints (Chen 2004: ch6). If awareness of elections enhances popular trust in government, it could just as well encourage citizens to adopt this official avenue to resolve their grievances.

Moreover, elections provide information for the citizens that the local party elites are subject to popular votes, which may embolden citizens to use institutional approaches of dispute resolution. In China, citizens are concerned about retaliation from local government when they decide to go to upper level governments to complain about local authorities (Chen 2004: 162). When local authorities cannot arbitrarily dominate local politics, and abuse their power to repress residents, the residents will be more willing to use official channels to air their grievances. Elections show that local people have rights to check local governments' power. If citizens are aware of elections, the failure to implement elections usually becomes a complaint.

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\(^{30}\) The visit can be carried out individually or collectively. According to the law, the maximum number of people in the group visiting the upper level government (usually the letter and visits office) is five.

\(^{31}\) The Chinese government called these approaches \textit{xinfang}, which literally means letters (\textit{xin}) and visits (\textit{fang}).
of citizens to “preserve” their own rights. For instance, in Chen’s research on villagers’
*shangfang* behavior, villagers frequently go to higher authorities to complain about local
governments’ manipulation and unfairness in elections (Chen 2012). This suggests that
awareness of elections creates incentives for the public to express discontent within the
system.

**Hypothesis 3:** All else being equal, awareness of grassroots elections will increase the use
of *shangfang* mechanisms to express individual discontent

To sum up the theoretical argument, I argue that neither a democratizing nor stabilizing
effect would precisely describe the relationship between elections and regime stability. Instead,
from the view of political behavior, elections exert an institutionalizing effect: Public awareness
of elections can improve the public's trust in the government and thereby decrease the public's
willingness to get involved in activities that destabilize the regime. However, it does not
essentially resolve social groups' grievances. Hence, as an alternative, those who are aware of
elections and trust the government will choose to use official channels to express their
discontent. In other words, elections can help prevent mass incidents from happening not
because the grievances are resolved, but because they help to institutionalize the public’s
dissent into the system.

### 4.5 Data and Variables

To test the hypotheses, I employ the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS 2010) dataset,
a national survey data collected in 2010 by the National Survey Research Center at Renmin
University of China (NSRC). The interviews were conducted through stratified probability
sampling to select respondents, all of whom are 18 years old or older. The response rate is
74.32% and the final number of valid observations (respondents) is 11783. The nation-wide large sample allows us to show the complete picture of public opinion in China with regard to their awareness of elections and intentions of getting involved in contentious behaviors or complaining through official channels. In this section, I discuss the operationalization of variables and specify the empirical strategy for testing the hypotheses.

4.5.1 Dependent Variables

The hypotheses involve several dependent variables. Hypothesis 1 proposes that awareness of elections will improve people's trust in government. I evaluate the trust in government using the question "what do you think the following organizations in terms of the level of trust?" The scale is (1) completely untrustworthy, (2) relatively untrustworthy, (3) between untrustworthy and trustworthy, (4) relatively trustworthy. (5) completely trustworthy. Since the variable of interest is trust in government, I evaluate two types of governments—the central and local governments. Previous research has pointed out Chinese citizens trust the central government more than local ones (Bernstein and Lü 2000; Li and O'Brien 1996; Shi 2001). Looking at the two types of government separately helps identify to which level of government citizens give credit when they are aware of elections. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of popular trust in government in China. Chinese generally have high trust in government no matter the central or local government, and, not surprisingly, Chinese do trust in the central government more than local government (89% for trust in the central government and 65% for trust in local governments).
Table 4.1 Citizens' Trust in Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust in Central Government (%)</th>
<th>Trust in Local Government (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Untrustworthy</td>
<td>91 (.78)</td>
<td>525 (4.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively Untrustworthy</td>
<td>298 (2.54)</td>
<td>1,365 (11.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Untrustworthy and Trustworthy</td>
<td>882 (7.52)</td>
<td>2,213 (18.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively Trustworthy</td>
<td>4,277 (36.47)</td>
<td>4,781 (40.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Trustworthy</td>
<td>6,181 (52.7)</td>
<td>2,828 (24.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,729 (100)</td>
<td>11,712 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second hypothesis proposes that awareness of elections can lower individuals' incentives to get involved in contentious activities such as protest, demonstrations, or strikes.

To operationalize this variable, I use the question that asks respondents "what is your role if you ever engaged in the collective activities such as collective petitions, demonstrations, strikes, or against government's policies, unreasonable fees, land taking or demolitions in the past three years." The options include: (1) organizers, (2) participants, (3) not participated but offered material supports, (4) not participated but offered moral supports, (5) other roles, (6) never participated. Since I am interested in whether a respondent has been involved in these activities, I recode them into a binary variable, in which if a respondent ever played a role in collective activities, coded 1; if a respondent answered “never participated” or have chosen “these collective activities never happened in my community” before answering this question, I coded it as 0. Table 4.2 shows the distribution of citizens’ involvement of collective contentious activities. Generally speaking, the number of individuals who answered they have been involved in these activities is low, only 3.59% of respondents have had these experiences. It
may be because involvement in collective contentious activities is risky in an authoritarian regime with powerful repressive capacity.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Involvement in Collective Contentious Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement in the past three years</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in the past three years</td>
<td>385 (3.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No involvement in the past three years</td>
<td>10,338 (96.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,723 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third hypothesis posits a positive relationship between public awareness of elections and individuals' use of official channels to air their grievances. As I have mentioned earlier, *shangfang* is an official conduit for public complaints, by which citizens directly go to the upper level governments to report malpractices by local authorities. The variable that measures individual's use of official channels to express their discontent is directly drawn from the question, "have you ever participated in collective *shangfang* in the past year?" If a respondent answered yes, I coded the dependent variable as 1; otherwise, 0. Table 4.3 shows that the percentage of respondents having participated of *shangfang* (1.36%) is even lower than that of those who have been involved in collective contentious activities against the regime. It means *shangfang* is not a popular choice for citizens either. As previously discussed, *shangfang* could incur local officials’ retaliation. Therefore, as I argued, the low occurrence of engagement in *shangfang* may be due to relatively limited trust in local government.

Table 4.3 Distribution of Participation of Shangfang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in the past year</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the past year</td>
<td>160 (1.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No participation in the past year</td>
<td>11,566 (98.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,726 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The likelihoods of respondents’ protest and shangfang participation are almost certainly under-reported in this survey. Perhaps because of the sensitivity of the questions and the fear of repercussion, only a small portion of respondents have reported their involvement in anti-authority activities. In fact, however, under-reporting of anti-government behavior is not unique to China, but common in all surveys. Reporting bias, if any, should work against statistical significance and hence makes any finding of significant relationship more convincing. That is, the limited observation cases should make statistical results less likely reach significance level. The under-reporting bias thus will provide strong supporting evidence to my argument if I can find significant relationships between the awareness of elections and respondents’ participation in contentious activities and shangfang. The smaller percentages reported in respondents’ participation in contentious collective activity and shangfang participation will not be detrimental, but in a sense even strengthening, to my attempts of using this survey data to draw empirical implications.

4.5.2 Independent Variable

The independent variable of interest is public awareness of grassroots elections. I construct this variable from two questions. First, I use the question asking respondents whether they voted in the last villagers’ committee or residents’ committee election to identify their knowledge about elections. Second, I use the question that asks nonvoters why they did not vote in the last election. The options include (1) don’t know such elections; (2) know there was an election but don’t know how to vote; (3) don’t know candidates; (4) not qualified to vote; (5) no time; (6) not interested; (7) other reasons. To operationalize the awareness of grassroots
elections, I recode these two questions into a binary variable. In the variable, nonvoters who
answered “don’t know such elections” are coded as 0; voters and those who know elections but
did not vote are coded as 1. In Table 4.4, we can see that most respondents have experienced
or been aware of elections, while a quarter of respondents (25.5%) do not know the existence
of grassroots elections.

Table 4.4 Distribution of Awareness of Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aware of villagers’ or residents’ committee elections</td>
<td>8,778 (74.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know such elections</td>
<td>3,005 (25.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,783 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.3 Control Variables

Given that Chinese public opinion would vary across different social groups, I control
several demographic and contextual variables to eliminate the possibility of spurious
relationships. For demographic variables, I control respondents’ gender, age, ethnicity,
education level, and income. Previous research finds that male Chinese are more politically
active than female Chinese (Shi 1997). I add a gender variable, a binary variable called Male, in
which male respondents will be coded as 1 and female coded as 0. Older Chinese, who
experienced Communist rule before the market reforms of the 1980s might have more trust in
government than younger citizens. An age variable will be added to the models. Age will be the
number of years since the respondent’s birth. Non-Han Chinese may be more likely to engage in
conflicts with the government than Han Chinese since minority groups may be involved in
pursuing ethnic or cultural rights from Han Chinese-dominated government. I code non-Han
respondent as 1 and Han Chinese as 0. More educated people would have more knowledge
about government policies, which may encourage them to use elections or official dispute resolution channels. I control individuals' Education levels by categorizing the respondents into five groups: (1) no education, (2) elementary school or lower, (3) High school education; (4) College education; (5) Graduate school or above. In addition to education, income is also widely considered to be a determinant of political behavior. I measure Income by taking the logarithm of a respondent's family income in order to avoid the skewness of income distribution.

Four contextual variables are controlled. First, the arguments propose that awareness of grassroots elections will influence individual behavior in contentious activities. However, village committee elections in rural area might be different from residents' committee election in urban area. Many scholars point out that rural elections are more competitive than urban elections in China (Xiong 2008; Ma et al. 2000; Gui et al. 2009). I thus control the location of elections. If a respondent's household is village, I code it as 1, and if he or she is an urban resident, coded as 0. In addition, three variables are added into the model to control for individuals' memberships in the Party and in a union, and their employment status in the government. For membership in the Party, I code it as 1 if a respondent is a current Communist Party member and 0 otherwise. For union membership, members in the union are coded as 1 and nonmembers are coded as 0. Similarly, if a respondent is employed by the government, military, or the Party, I code it as 1 otherwise 0. Considering membership or employment in these official organizations may promote individuals' loyalty to the regime, the Party Membership, Union Membership, and Government Employment are added to the model to control the potential group variation in regime loyalty.
Table 4.5 Description of Control Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>11783</td>
<td>0.387083</td>
<td>0.487104</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11783</td>
<td>0.481796</td>
<td>0.49969</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>11780</td>
<td>47.30272</td>
<td>15.6793</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han</td>
<td>11761</td>
<td>0.093444</td>
<td>0.291067</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>11768</td>
<td>2.670717</td>
<td>0.906106</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>10153</td>
<td>8.205572</td>
<td>3.142363</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.81551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>11681</td>
<td>0.120966</td>
<td>0.326101</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Member</td>
<td>11767</td>
<td>0.124161</td>
<td>0.329779</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Employee</td>
<td>11629</td>
<td>0.075501</td>
<td>0.264209</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6   Empirical Analysis

This section specifies the empirical strategies in testing the hypotheses. Several models will be used to examine the relationships between awareness of elections and citizens’ trust in government, involvement in collective contentious activities, and participation in official channel of expression complaints. The results will be discussed in this section.

4.6.1   Statistical Models

I employ three major models to test my arguments. I use an ordered logit regression model to test the first hypothesis that awareness of elections will increase the public’s trust in
the government, given the dependent variable in this hypothesis is ordinal. As for the second hypothesis that awareness of elections will decrease the public’s intention to get involved in contentious collective action, and the third hypothesis that awareness of elections will increase public’s willingness to use official complaint channels, I examine the relationships using logit regression models since the dependent variables in these models are binary\textsuperscript{32}.

One caveat is potential endogeneity of the relationships between the major variables. Some may argue that it is trust in government that improves the chances that a person will be aware of grassroots elections, or because of their involvement in different types of activities, citizens have different intentions to know whether there is an alternative political institution to express their opinions, such as elections. For instance, a citizen who went to the street may choose to ignore the existence of elections, and a citizen who visited higher level government officials more often could be better informed of the implementation of local elections by the government. To check the potential endogeneity issues, I adopt instrumental variable models to investigate whether the relationship suffers endogeneity.

\textbf{I use percentage of awareness of elections of the community (not including the}

\textsuperscript{32} One potential concern about the data is, aside from the reporting bias I have dealt with, the skewed distribution of many zeros in the variables that measure individual's participation in contentious collective actions and shangfang, with a small percentage of respondents who answered they have participated in protests, strikes, demonstrations, or shangfang activities. Statistically, the number of cases should be large enough (more than three hundred and one hundred and fifty, respectively) to avoid potential biases resulting from the rarity of events. As Paul Allison’s (2012) famous quote in his discussion of rare event modeling: “The problem is not specifically the rarity of events, but rather the possibility of a small number of cases on the rarer of the two outcomes. If you have a sample size of 1000 but only 20 events, you have a problem. If you have a sample size of 10,000 with 200 events, you may be OK. If your sample has 100,000 cases with 2000 events, you’re golden.” Nevertheless, I also conducted rare event models with clustered standard errors as robustness checks on the results. I follow the method suggested by King and Zeng (2001), who estimate a rare event logit model to correct the coefficients and standard errors for unevenly distributed dependent variables containing many zeros, for instance, the variable that measures war occurrence. The results from different models (see Appendix C) remain robust and consistently support my arguments.
respondent in the calculation) as the instrumental variable. The higher the percentage, the more likely the respondent will have knowledge about elections. But since the respondent is excluded in the calculation of the average, there should be little expectation that this variable will be directly related to his or her intention to be involved in other political activities such as strikes, protests, demonstrations, or *shangfang*. Nor should it be associated with individuals’ trust in government. The instrumental variable models will be shown in the end of empirical analysis to provide additional check of our findings.

4.6.2 Awareness of Elections and Trust in Government

Table 4.6 shows the results of the relationship between Chinese citizens’ awareness of grassroots elections and their trust in government. The coefficients lend support to the first hypothesis that awareness of elections will increase citizens’ trust in government. The left-sided model shows that awareness of elections is significantly and positively associated with individuals’ trust in the central government. The marginal effects suggest that the chance that an individual who is aware of elections finds the central government completely untrustworthy will be 1.5 per cent lower than an individual who is not aware of elections. On the contrary, the likelihood that citizens who is aware of elections thinks the central government is completely trustworthy will be 4.8 per cent higher than for citizens who do not know there exist elections (see Figure 4.1).
Table 4.6 Ordered Logit Estimate for Trust in Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust in Central Government</th>
<th>Trust in Local Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Elections</td>
<td>0.190 (0.047) ***</td>
<td>0.313 (0.044) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.0951 (0.042) *</td>
<td>-0.131 (0.0387) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.0150 (0.002) ***</td>
<td>0.0112 (0.001) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han</td>
<td>0.189 (0.075) *</td>
<td>0.569 (0.069) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.355 (0.031) ***</td>
<td>-0.148 (0.029) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>0.00241 (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.00331 (0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>0.445 (0.047) ***</td>
<td>0.019 (0.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>0.0284 (0.063)</td>
<td>0.0463 (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Member</td>
<td>0.191 (0.063) **</td>
<td>0.131 (0.056) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Employee</td>
<td>0.219 (0.074) **</td>
<td>0.324 (0.065) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut1</td>
<td>-4.750 (0.183) ***</td>
<td>-2.683 (0.142) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut2</td>
<td>-3.317 (0.154) ***</td>
<td>-1.259 (0.137) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut3</td>
<td>-2.055 (0.145) ***</td>
<td>-0.252 (0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut4</td>
<td>0.0219 (0.143)</td>
<td>1.536 (0.136) ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N                        | 9869                       | 9857                      |
Wald chi2(10)            | 691.41                     | 351.81                    |
Log likelihood           | -9632.6214                 | -13816.14                 |

Standard errors in parentheses; Dependent variables ranged from 1=completely untrustworthy to 5=completely trustworthy; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Similar patterns are found regarding trust in local government. Figure 4.2 shows the predicted probability: Compared to those who do not know about grassroots elections, people who are aware of residents/village elections are about 1.5 per cent less likely to think the local
government is completely untrustworthy while awareness of elections increases the likelihood that people believe local governments are completely trustworthy by 5.5 per cent. The analysis demonstrates the relationship between awareness of grassroots elections and trust in government in China. According to this model, citizens who are from villages, male, older, non-Han Chinese, lower-educated, and have party membership will be more likely to trust in central government than others. The pattern of trust in local governments is generally similar to the trust in central government but the gender effect is reversed. Male Chinese are less likely to trust local government than female Chinese. This could be due to men participating in local politics more than women in China (Howell 2006; Pang and Rozelle 2010), which makes men more unsatisfied than women with dealing with local governments.

Figure 4.1 Awareness of Elections and Trust in the Central Government
The second hypothesis proposes that public awareness of elections will assist the regime to decrease the public’s involvement (organize, participate, donate or emotionally support) in contentious collective action such as strikes, demonstrations, or protests. Table 4.7 reveals the negative relationship between awareness of grassroots elections and Chinese citizens’ involvement in contentious collective activities. The coefficient suggests that individuals who are aware of grassroots elections will be less likely to participate in collective action against the authority. Figure 4.3 shows the predicted probability calculated from the coefficients.

Figure 4.2 Awareness of Elections and Trust in Local Governments

4.6.3 Awareness of Grassroots Elections and Involvement in Contentious Collective Activities

Awareness of Villagers’/Residents’ Committee Elections
### Table 4.7 Logit Estimate of Involvement of Collective Contentious Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate (S.E.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Elections</td>
<td>-0.335 (0.125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.316 (0.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.017 (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han</td>
<td>-0.450 (0.234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.012 (0.088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>0.012 (0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>-0.346 (0.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>0.106 (0.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Member</td>
<td>-0.073 (0.188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Employee</td>
<td>-0.124 (0.214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.316 (0.393)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 9870, Wald chi2(10) = 27.54, Log likelihood = -724.99541

Standard errors in parentheses; Dependent Variable: 1=Involvement in Collective contentious activities in the past 3 years; 0= no involvement; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

---

**Figure 4.3** Awareness of Elections and Involvement of Collective Contentious Activities
Citizens who are aware of grassroots elections are 1.2 per cent less likely to participate in contentious collective action than citizens who have no awareness of grassroots elections. At first glance, the marginal effect seems to be small, but it should not be considered as trivial. First, considering involvement in collective action against the authorities is highly risky in China, whose government has demonstrated a willingness to crack down on dissidents. It is quite a difficult decision for citizens to go to street to fight for their rights. Second, in comparison to other variables, awareness of elections in fact plays the most important role in lowering the chance of mass incidents. For instance, being a party member, a union member, or a government employee has no substantial influence on decreasing people’s intention to participate in activities against the authorities. In the model, awareness of elections exerts the strongest influence on citizens’ involvement in contentious collective activities. As far as regime stability is concerned, the influence of election awareness should not be deemed as inconsequential. The control variables provide some additional information: those who are male, younger, and from urban cities tend to be more active in contentious collective action. It is not surprising that urbanization can be a trigger for collective contentious activities because of the crowded population. The activeness of men and the youth could be interpreted as their higher willingness to participate in politics than women and the older people.

4.6.4 Awareness of Grassroots Elections and Involvement of Collective Contentious Activities

The theoretical argument proposes that awareness of elections will increase citizens’ use of institutional or official channels to express their grievances (hypothesis 3). This proposition receives empirical supports as well. In Table 4.8, individuals’ awareness of
grassroots elections is significantly and positively correlated with the participation in collective *shangfang*, a China’s official channel to air ordinary people’s complaints to upper level government officials. The marginal effect suggests that citizens who are aware of grassroots elections are about 1 per cent more likely to participate in *shangfang* activities than citizens who are not aware such elections. Since the frequency of *shangfang* occurrence is relatively small, it is thus not surprising that the predicted probability is small as well. However, because participation in *shangfang* is also a risky task, considering it could incur harsh retaliation from local officials, the significant, positive relationship between awareness of elections and the adoption of *shangfang* approach should also be taken seriously. Other characteristics are also found to be significantly associated with the use of *shangfang*. Citizens who are male, minority, lower educated and from urban cities are more likely to use *shangfang* to express their concerns to the government.

Table 4.8 Logit Estimates for Participation in Collective Shangfang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Coefficient (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Elections</td>
<td>0.540 (0.227) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.386 (0.184) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han</td>
<td>0.736 (0.238) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.362 (0.136) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>0.048 (0.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>-0.632 (0.215) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>-0.135 (0.264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Member</td>
<td>0.369 (0.240)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Employee</td>
<td>-0.0495 (0.337)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-4.054 (0.644) ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N*=8988, Wald chi2(10) = 57.67, Loglikelihood = -1387.4713

Standard errors in parentheses; 1= Participation in collective *shangfang* in the past year, 0= no participation; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
4.6.5 Endogeneity Test for the Relationships

Table 4.9 and Table 4.10 report the endogeneity test using the instrumental variable. In Table 4.9, the coefficients show that awareness of elections may have no substantial effect on citizens’ trust in the central government when considering endogeneity while it is significantly associated with citizens’ trust in local governments. Hence, we might conclude with more confidence that awareness of elections will increase individuals’ levels of trust in local government than about the relationships between awareness of elections and citizens’ trust in the central government.
Table 4.9 Instrumental Variable Models for Trust in Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust in Central Government</th>
<th>Trust in Local Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Elections</td>
<td>0.016 (0.050)</td>
<td>0.322 (0.074) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>0.182 (0.020) ***</td>
<td>-0.029 (0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.034 (0.016) *</td>
<td>-0.094 (0.024) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.006 (0.001) ***</td>
<td>0.006 (0.001) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han</td>
<td>0.085 (0.025) ***</td>
<td>0.309 (0.037) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.124 (0.011) ***</td>
<td>-0.062 (0.017) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>0.003 (0.003)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>0.005 (0.026)</td>
<td>0.025 (0.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Member</td>
<td>0.087 (0.025) ***</td>
<td>0.091 (0.034) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Employee</td>
<td>0.096 (0.032) **</td>
<td>0.190 (0.040) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.304 (0.061) ***</td>
<td>3.330 (0.088) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9869</td>
<td>9857</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wald chi2(10) = 717.68  Wald chi2(10) = 291.40

Estimates are from 2SLS regression model; Standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 4.10 Instrumental Variable Models for Protest and Shangfang Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Involvement of Collective Contentious Activities</th>
<th>Participation in Collective Shangfang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Elections</td>
<td>-0.231 (0.161)</td>
<td>0.411 (0.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>-0.143 (0.066) *</td>
<td>-0.271 (0.086) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.143 (0.053) **</td>
<td>0.133 (0.071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.007 (0.002) ***</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Han</td>
<td>-0.205 (0.100) *</td>
<td>0.266 (0.099) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.006 (0.038)</td>
<td>-0.132 (0.048) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged Income</td>
<td>0.006 (0.009)</td>
<td>0.017 (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>0.040 (0.080)</td>
<td>-0.073 (0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Member</td>
<td>-0.030 (0.083)</td>
<td>0.147 (0.102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Employee</td>
<td>-0.061 (0.098)</td>
<td>-0.022 (0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.311 (0.195) ***</td>
<td>-2.224 (0.253) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>athrho</td>
<td>0.036 (0.067)</td>
<td>-0.095 (0.094)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insigma</td>
<td>-0.947 (0.007) ***</td>
<td>-0.938 (0.007) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>8988</td>
<td>9870</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimates are from Ivprobit model; Instrumental variable: the average level of awareness of elections in respondents’ community; Standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 4.10 shows the instrumental variable model for citizens’ involvement in collective contentious activities and participation in collective shangfang. While the coefficients of
awareness of elections in both models are insignificant, the Wald test suggests that there is no
evidence of endogeneity in the original models (the athrhos in both models are insignificant,
p>.05). Accordingly, the original logit models still provide strong evidence that awareness of
elections is significantly associated with citizens’ intention to participate in contentious
collective action and to participate in collective *shangfang*. The argument of institutionalizing
effect of awareness of elections still holds.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter evaluates the relationships between holding grassroots elections and
ordinary Chinese’ attitudes toward the government as well as their behavior against the
regime. I propose that citizens’ awareness of elections bolsters regime legitimacy by enhancing
popular trust in governments, and as such, elections can preempt potential social unrest by
decreasing citizens’ involvement in collective activities against authority. However, awareness
of elections also prompts the public’s willingness to adopt official channels to express
grievances as an alternative of street protests. Combining these effects together, elections do
not alleviate pressure from the society but at best make state-society conflict manageable to
the Communist regime. The findings provide empirical support for the theoretical arguments.
Awareness of elections increases popular trust in the government among Chinese while the
additional support from endogeneity test only goes to popular trust in local government.
Awareness of elections also substantially influences Chinese citizens’ contentious behavior
against authority. Being aware of elections decreases citizens’ involvement in collective
activities that destabilize the regime, but at the same time it increases people’s willingness to use institutional mechanisms to solve their concerns.

The findings have implications for the survivability of the Chinese Communist Party. Since 1978 economic reforms, China has pursued economic development as an approach to maintain its ruling legitimacy. Accompanying the development are social grievances. From rural to urban areas, may Chinese experience economic and social transition at extraordinary speed but also suffer unwanted consequences of economic development, such as demolition of houses, land expropriation, pollution, or malpractice by local officials. The Chinese central authorities have attempted to adopt local democracy to ameliorate the disturbances resulting from social grievances. However, elections are not a solution for economic grievance per se. Complementary institutions are needed to lower the chance that the public challenge the government. Lack of such institutions could facilitate regime breakdown, as we saw in the Arab Spring events of 2011. China seems to do well in providing an official channel for the public to voice their grievances, under which elections have enhanced the regime’s prospects for surviving economic and social transitions. Future attention should also be paid to investigating whether the (mal)function of shangfang will in return influence the public’s pursuit of political reform such as direct elections at higher levels.

The findings also speak to the current debate between the democratizing and stabilizing effect of elections on authoritarian regimes, or at least, on one-party dictatorships. From the view of public opinion, elections may simultaneously exert both influences on the regime, as previous studies have suggested (Sun 2014). The finding in this chapter implies that holding elections contains popular resistance outside the system, but increases the pressure within the
system. Public awareness of elections decreases collective activities against the regime but encourages the use of government sponsored mechanisms to express opinions. Although more research is needed, one implication from the findings is that elections may eventually democratize China without revolution, as Taiwan, another Chinese society, has gone through in 1990s. As more and more citizens are aware of grassroots elections, the social pressure within the system imposed on the regime will grow. This may finally lead to the opening of political arena for interest articulations in China.
5.1 Summary of the Major Findings

This dissertation has shown a significant set of linkages between elections and authoritarian rule using China as a critical case. As the most populous country in the world, China’s local electoral reform, started in the 1980s, can be seen as an electoral practice that has influenced the largest number of people, and perhaps the largest number of local governments, in a single country. The electoral reform offers valuable empirics to investigate the dynamics of electoral politics, as well as the causes and consequences of the adoption of election rules, under an authoritarian regime. The findings in this dissertation suggest that state-owned resources and governing costs are associated with local officials’ decision to liberalize elections. A further examination shows that elections can strengthen the Chinese Communist Party’s political survival in that the public’s awareness of elections is significantly associated with higher trust in governments. But the trust-enhancing effects require local governments to empower citizens to adopt official channels to air their grievances. As a consequence, whether the elections can survive authoritarian regimes remain a problem of state resources and governing costs.

The authoritarian leaders’ choice between competitive elections and manipulated ones is expected to be related to the amount of state-owned resources at the disposal of the local government and governing costs facing that government. In the theory building, I also take into consideration external constraints on local officials—the pressure from upper levels of government as well as from local social groups in the implementation of competitive elections.
The empirical results from the statistical test suggests that Chinese local officials’ choices of electoral rules are significantly associated with the size of electorate, which provides evidence that governing costs have a substantial effect on authoritarian rulers’ decision to liberalize elections. The case of the Wukan incident which occurred in 2011 provides qualitative evidence regarding the effects of social demands, state-owned resources, higher level governments, and strong social cohesiveness on the adoption of competitive elections. Quantitative evidence does not lend support to the relationships between state-owned resources and local officials’ choice of competitive elections. It may suggest that in a one-party autocracy like China where maintaining social stability is so important to the survival of the CCP, the potential failure of buying off local support consistently incentivizes local officials to adopt competitive elections in places with large electorates. The finding in the second chapter echoes the logic of political survival that a larger electorate will encourage rulers to allocate public goods among the electorate, given that providing private goods in return for political support is too costly where the electorate is large (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). Elections are a mechanism that local officials use to distribute goods, and the liberalization of these elections can help them to neutralize the cost of governing local communities.

As electoral reform proceeds, how do citizens perceive electoral competition and electoral manipulation, and how does that perception influence their decision to vote? This question is important because elections, as authoritarian rulers expect, should help the government to glean legitimacy from the public. Low voter turnout would signal a weakness of elections as a tool in garnering popular supports. A comparison of Chinese rural and urban grassroots elections demonstrates that state-owned resources matter. As discussed in third
chapter, rural governments have maintained, and in a sense even strengthened, their patronage capacity by developing village-owned enterprises since 1978’s economic reform. In contrast, urban residents’ committees have lost the capacity that they were endowed with in the Maoist era. Therefore, rural elections see more loyalist voters, such as party members, than urban elections. The findings also show that citizens who are more democratically oriented turn out to vote in urban election but not in rural elections. The sharp contrast provides further evidence that the differences of state-owned resources can exert significant effects on authoritarian rulers’ use of elections. Ironically, the finding indicates that the enthusiastic electoral participation in rural areas may not be a sign of active democratization, but more a result of rural governments’ controlling of patronage resources, particularly jobs and village-owned enterprises. Without the advantage of state-owned resources, urban governments experience a low level of electoral participation, but the elections should be more attractive to those who are democratically oriented. This would jeopardize, if not shatter, the hope that rural elections will drive China’s democratization at local level.

In fact, even if people with a greater democratic orientation are more likely to vote in urban areas, the influence of the state can still be discerned. The empirical analysis also shows that in urban areas, people who are union members, farmers, or hired in the residents’ committees are more likely to go to the ballot booth. This suggests that while the urban residents’ committees have no state-owned resources to mobilize loyalist voters such as party members, they can force their employees to participate in elections. The unions, which are CCP-controlled social groups, have distributive resources with which to take care of workers, immigrant workers or retirees, making them a strong political machine in cities. This may also
explain why those who identify themselves as farmers in cities would have higher voter turnout—they are immigrant workers from rural areas and have demands placed on them by social groups, particularly the unions. The dynamics here provide us some clues about what would happen when authoritarian governments fail to provide patronage goods in elections: those social groups endowed with resources will replace the role of authoritarian governments.

The unevenness of election practices has a profound influence on state-society relations. As discussed in the fourth chapter, awareness of elections can significantly improve citizens’ trust in government, decrease their inclination to participate in protests, strike, or other types of contentious activities that would destabilize the regime. However, it is also found that awareness of elections will encourage citizens to use official channels to resolve their issues with governments. Considering that protesting, striking or even using official channels, such as shangfang, are all costly avenues for Chinese citizens to air their grievance, the findings provide clear evidence that elections matter in stabilizing the CCP regime, but conditionally. Although holding elections can assist authoritarian rulers in decreasing potential challenges from societies, it also increases the burdens from the society via institutionalized conflict resolution mechanisms. This finding may help explain why the CCP can effectively use elections to survive in politics while other regimes, such as the countries in Arab Spring that lacked a well-functioning official channel for the public to air their grievances, fail to survive by using elections.

Grassroots elections in China, as the findings in this dissertation evince, exert uneven effects on rural and urban areas as well. First, grassroots elections have strengthened authoritarian governance at local level of rural areas in China. Rural elections since 1978 can be
deemed as a milestone or, at least, a sign of China’s democratization and as a force promoting democracy among the Chinese population at local level. The empirical evidence, unfortunately, however, cannot confirm this trend. Instead, statistical analysis in chapter 2 indicates that authoritarian elections, with an economically dominant local government, may have postponed the likely democratic transition but bolstered subnational authoritarianism in rural China. The optimism is doomed as a strong local authority can have resources to mobilize party loyalists, maintain their rule, and ultimately survive election pressure. Rural China, in this sense, is not as democratized as the claims from scholarly works, media or China’s official propaganda has pictured.

Urban China, on the other hand, is not as pessimistically under authoritarian control as the lower turnout rates indicate. In comparison to villagers’ committees, urban residents’ committees’ limited control over local resources, and the privatization of SOEs and the demise of danwei system have contributed to a benign environment for electoral liberalization. In urban grassroots elections, democratic voters have found incentives to participate in competitive elections for freely selecting their community leaders, thanks to this weakening economic function of residents’ committee governments. As such, although general turnout rate in urban areas is much lower than that in rural areas, the hidden rural-urban differences behind the scene show the opposite— on the quality of democracy or democratization, urban China outperforms rural China.

The empirical evidence in chapter 4 also provides additional support for the rural-urban divergence in the levels of democratization. Rural residents are significantly less likely to participate in collective contentious events and shangfang activities than their urban
counterparts. In the last decade, Chinese scholars and governments began to put considerable emphasis on the so-called *shan nong* issues (literally, three rural issues)—agriculture (*nong ye*), rural areas (*nong cun*), and peasants (*nong min*), with an attempt to reduce the mounting pressure from the economic transition of rural areas. The chapter 3 and 4 may provide indirect but strong evidence that this attempt has somewhat succeeded—rural areas, a place that cultivates more loyalty and manufactures fewer challenges to the authoritarian government, could have become indispensable to the survival of China’ current regime. Rural grassroots governments that can effectively maintain loyalty from party members and rural residents have developed more trust in governments, particularly in the central government, and are less likely to challenge the authority by any forms of action. These findings imply that rural democracy still has a long way to go.

On the other hand, just as modern democracies were originated from cities, urban China has been an incubator for democracy. The grassroots elections in urban China, in comparison to rural grassroots elections, have attracted more democratic citizens, more political movement participants, and even more people using *shangfang* to fight for their lawful rights, as chapter 3 and 4 have demonstrated. Hence, China is not unique compared to the rest of the world: the empirical evidence shows the opposite to what many scholars have contended that enthusiastic electoral participation has made rural areas outperform urban areas regarding democratization. The analyses in chapter 3 and 4 provide clear evidence that democratization in urban areas is more promising than that in rural areas. There is not any sign that this trend will be bucked in the near future. The finding of urban-rural difference in democratization thus contributes to our knowledge by revisiting the current common-held
belief that villages are democratizing while cities are still under strict CCP control, a myth that may mislead us to expect an occurrence of China’s unique democratization procedure, which would not yet happen or might never happen.

Figure 5.1 The Framework of Elections and Authoritarian Rule

In sum, this dissertation has pictured the dynamics of authoritarian elections in China. The findings provide useful information for understanding how elections can be used by authoritarian leaders at the subnational level, and under which conditions elections will help to strengthen authoritarian governance. The Chinese case suggests that the adoption of elections is dependent upon authoritarian rulers’ consideration of state-owned resources and governing costs, and in turn, the effectiveness of adopting elections to buy off social support is a function of state-owned resources as well. Finally, China’s case shows that the ballot can ward off the bullet: public awareness of elections has been significantly strengthening the government’s legitimacy and enhancing the survival of the regime. The effects of elections on Chinese authoritarian rule can be summarized using the framework in the first chapter.
5.2 Policy Suggestions from the Findings

As the Chinese central authority in 1980s attempted to use rural grassroots elections to solve the unrest resulting from the economic reforms of the post-Mao era, elections have been stipulated in national laws and widely adopted by local governments in China. Elections have helped the central authority solve the governance crisis in rural China (O’Brien and Han 2009; Shi 1999b), and to some degree in urban China as well (Heberer 2009). This dissertation further demonstrated that elections can improve legitimacy and stabilize the government by enhancing public trust in government and lowering the likelihood of state-society conflicts. However, the varieties of the election rules that have been implemented across local governments in China suggest that local authorities still have incentives to manipulate elections and election rules and even to choose not to offer elections. The evidence also shows that there is a huge variation across rural and urban areas regarding electoral participation. Thus, the findings in this dissertation can provide several policy suggestions to the Chinese central government and democratic advocates in international organizations.

For the central government, the findings in this dissertation suggest that the central government can increase local officials’ incentives to liberalize villagers’ committee elections by enlarging the size of village electorate. One way to do this, as mentioned in the second chapter, is to combine villages. The larger population will increase the pressure from society to force local officials to abandon electoral control and adopt competitive elections. A second way is to restrict the power of local officials to manage the village-owned enterprises. The effects of higher values of VOEs on disincentives for holding competitive elections, though receiving limited support from the quantitative analysis, have been shown in many cases. The central
authorities in China can enact strict rules for restricting local officials’ discretionary power in managing VOEs to facilitate the electoral reform in rural areas.

In addition, public awareness of elections can be one of the sources of legitimacy of the CCP regime, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. The central authority can benefit from adopting grassroots elections. Although in the empirical test, the trust-enhancing effect of the awareness of elections is less conclusive on the central government, according to the endogeneity test, the central government can still lower the probability of the occurrence of local disturbances by enforcing the electoral rules. Yet, the government should be prepared to face pressure from official institutions that allow citizens to voice their grievances. The Chinese central government can avoid the large-scale state-society conflicts by simultaneously strengthening the electoral institutions as well as the official conflict resolution mechanisms.

For international organizations or individual countries who attempt to advocate democracy in China, the findings in this dissertation provide a general understanding of how elections work at the grassroots level. In the 1980s and the 1990s, rural villager’s committee elections received considerable resources and supports from international organizations, including the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Carter Center, the Asia Foundation, the International Republican Institute and the UN. These organizations also funded a great deal of research ion improving rural democracy. However, the findings here suggest that urban democracy requires more attention from international organizations. The low participation rate in urban elections can be improved by devoting more resources to informing urban citizens of the elections. Experiments conducted by Chinese universities have demonstrated that noncoercive mobilization, such as receiving notification from other citizens, can significantly
boost voter turnout (Guan and Green 2006). In addition, the sense of community also increases citizens’ willingness to vote. International organizations whose goal is to improve China’s electoral democracy can assist the establishment of urban communities and bring more citizens to the ballot booth. Since urban voters are significantly associated with their democratic orientations, international organizations can also help the governments to prevent potential electoral fraud in urban areas to attract more democratic voters, which may eventually expedite democratization in local China.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

While the scope of the theoretical framework and empirical evidence in this dissertation apply to subnational elections in China, the arguments can be further developed by comparing China with countries in other regions. Scholars have found evidence that authoritarianism could be persistent at the subnational level (Gibson 2005). One of the reasons for subnational authoritarianism is the high local financial autonomy. For instance, in his research on Argentina’s local elections, Gervasoni (2010) finds that fiscal rents demotivate subnational governments to pursue democratic representation and at the same time strengthen the power of local governments to repress or buy off social actors, which became a source of subnational authoritarianism. Keller (2002) reached a similar conclusion in his evaluation of subnational democracy after fiscal decentralization in Ethiopia and Nigeria. He finds that local democracy does not significantly improve when regional governments can share higher levels of revenue than in the past. Instead, the problems of official corruption within regional bureaucracies has worsened with a higher level of fiscal decentralization. A similar case also can be found in post-
communist regimes. Markowitz (2012) reports that subnational governments in Uzbekistan developed clientelist ties through local elites’ control of local economic resources. China’s case suggests that subnational authoritarianism is not just a phenomenon of new democracies, but can also exist in one party China. Future research can compare the global sample with the China’s subnational sample to identify whether fiscal decentralization does make a difference in local officials’ implementation and manipulation of elections across different regime types.

Another comparison can be adopted within the one-party regime. For instance, the findings in this dissertation about causes and consequences of China’s local elections should provide heuristic information for studying Vietnam’s elections, given that the two countries both are dominated by Leninist parties and have government structures and other institutional characteristics in common. Moreover, future research can employ most different and most similar system designs33 by comparing elections in China, Vietnam and North Korea. While China and Vietnam have many features in common, North Korea represents a country that is ruled by a single party regime that does not embrace economic reforms and regional decentralization. The comparison between the three countries will shed light on how elections affect one-party rule in different contexts.

Future research can continue to investigate the dynamics of Chinese grassroots elections. As mentioned in the introduction, China’s local elections exhibited a huge variation that requires explanations. Because of limitation in the scope of available data, this dissertation

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33 The strategy here is that China and Vietnam can be compared by most similar system designs while China and North Korea or Vietnam and North Korea can be considered as most different system designs. For the discussions of the two systems in comparative studies, see Lijphart (1975); Teune and Przeworski (1970); Frendreis (1983) and Meckstroth (1975)
cannot exhaust all possible research questions about elections in China. Some research questions are important and worthy of study in the future. First, although Chapter 2 has provided an analysis of the liberalization of elections in rural areas, there are variations in the adoption of elections among city governments in urban areas. Why did some city governments in Shanghai and Shandong pioneer in holding residents’ committee elections? Why do some city governments allow elections but others do not? Can the factors affecting rural officials’ adoption of elections explain urban officials as well? Since the data for urban elections are quite scarce, future research with enough research resources can help to generalize the arguments in this dissertation by answering these questions regarding urban elections.

Moreover, research on China’s electoral politics can be extended to elections at higher levels of government. For instance, elections for county-level and township-level congresses can provide a case to observe to which level the Chinese central authority is willing to share power. In fact, in 1998, a local government in Sichuan province experimented with the direct election for government leaders in a populous but poor township, Buyun. This was the first time, and also the last time until now, that the citizens could directly elect local leaders at the township level. However, the central government ruled against this adoption of elections in Buyun after the election. This suggests that the central government has its own preference over electoral reform—they perceive the threat to their power from election when the electoral reform extends to higher levels of governments. Research can continue to observe whether the central government will keep blocking the chance that electoral practices can extend beyond grassroots level. This may provide important information for China’s democratization in the future.
APPENDIX A

SOLUTION OF THE EXTENSIVE FORM GAME
Players  $p_1$: Party Elites; $p_2$: Nonpartisan Elites

Terminal histories The set of all sequences $(A_1, A_2, A_3)$, where $A_1$ is the choice of $p_1$ to either provide party dominant nomination or primary nomination, $A_2$ is the choice of $p_2$ to accept or reject, $A_3$ is the action of $p_1$ to either repress $p_2$ or accommodate them when the first proposal of $A_1$ is rejected by $p_2$.

\[(PDN, Accept) (PDN, Reject, Repress) (PDN, Reject, Accommodate)\]
\[\{ (PN, Accept) (PN, Reject, Repress) (PN, Reject, Accommodate) \}\]

PDN = party dominant nomination; PN = primary nomination

Player function $P(\emptyset) =$ Party Elites, $P(A_1) =$ Nonpartisan Elites for all $A_1, P(A_1, A_2) = $ Party Elites if $A_2 = \text{Reject}$

Preference Each actor’s preferences depend on the others’ choice. If there is one conflict in both choices, both players need to pay the costs once. If there are two conflicts in both choices, both players need to pay the costs twice. The cost for $p_1$ is $s$, for $p_2$ is $c$.

$p_1$’s preferences are represented by the payoff function $u_1$ for which

$u_1(PDN, Accept) = \alpha, u_1(PDN, Reject, Repress) = \alpha - 2s,$

$u_1(PDN, Reject, Accommodate) = \alpha - k - s, u_1(PN, Reject, Repress) = \alpha - s,$

$u_1(PN, Reject, Repress) = \alpha - k - 2s, u_1(PN, Accept) = \alpha - k$

$p_2$’s preferences are represented by the payoff function $u_2$ for which

$u_2(PDN, Accept) = 0, u_2(PDN, Reject, Repress) = -2c,$

$u_2(PDN, Reject, Accommodate) = k - c, u_2(PN, Reject, Accommodate) = -c,$

$u_2(PN, Reject, Repress) = k - 2c, u_2(PN, Accept) = k$
Solutions:

First, suppose $k > s$ and $k > c$. In the length 1 which follows $p_2$ choose $\text{Reject}$ in the left side, we see that there are two choices for $p_1$: $\text{Repress}$ and $\text{Accommodate}$. The payoff for $p_1$ to choose $\text{Repress}$ is $\alpha - 2s$, and to choose $\text{Accommodate}$ is $\alpha - k - s$. Since $k > s$, $p_1$ will choose $\text{Repress}$. Next, consider the right side in the length 1, $\alpha - s$ is always bigger than $\alpha - k - 2s$, so $p_1$ will choose $\text{Repress}$ and the final outcome is Party Dominant Nomination.

In the length 2 of left side, $p_2$ knows that $p_1$ will $\text{Repress}$, and her payoff will be $-2c$, therefore she will prefer $\text{Accept}$ in which the payoff for her is 0. In length 2 of right side, her best choice is $\text{Accept}$, because $k$ is larger than $-c$. In the length 3, $p_1$ makes the first move. Since $p_1$ knows that $p_2$ will $\text{Accept}$ if she chooses $\text{PDN}$, $\text{PDN}$ is the best choice for $p_1$ because she can keep all resource. Thus, if $k > s$ and $k > c$, the pure-strategy subgame perfect equilibrium is $\left(\text{PDN Repress Repress}, \text{Accept Accept}\right)$. And what can account for institutional choice is the terminal history $\left(\text{PDN, Accept}\right)$. The subgame perfect equilibrium will be the same when considering $k > s$, but $k < c$.

Second, suppose $k < s$ and $k > c$. In the length 1 of left side, $p_1$ is better off by choosing $\text{Accommodate}$ since $\alpha - k - s > a - 2s$. In the length 1 of right side, $p_1$ chooses $\text{Accommodate}$. Consider the length 2 of left side. Since $p_2$ knows that $p_1$ will choose $\text{Accommodate}$, she is better off by choosing $\text{Reject}$ for $k - c > 0$. In the right side, her choice on $\text{Accept}$ will be always better. Under this condition, in the length 3, $p_1$ will choose $\text{PN}$ because of the better payoff $\alpha - k > \alpha - k - s$. Therefore, if $k < s$ and $k > c$, we find that the subgame perfect equilibrium is $\left(\text{PN Accommodate Accommodate, Reject Accept}\right)$, in
which prediction is the terminal history \((PN, Accept)\), and the final outcome is Primary Nomination.

Finally, suppose \(k < s\) and \(< c\). In the length 1 of left side, \(p_1\) will choose \textit{Accommodate} since the payoff \(\alpha - k - s > \alpha - 2s\) while on the right side she is always choosing \textit{Accommodate}. In the length 2 of left side, \(p_2\) will choose \textit{Accept} since \(k - c < 0\) while on the right side, \(p_2\) always chooses \textit{Accept} as well. Thus, in the length 3, \(p_1\) will choose \textit{PDN} to get a better payoff \(\alpha\) instead of \(\alpha - k\). Under this situation, the subgame perfect equilibrium will be \((PDN \textit{Accommodate} \textit{Accommodate}, \textit{Accept} \textit{Accept})\). And the predicted terminal history here is \((PDN, Accept)\), so the electoral institution will be Party Dominant Nomination.
APPENDIX B

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VOTER TURNOUT AND CROSS-TAB OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC ANALYSIS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
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<td>0.919</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.503</td>
<td>0.500</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>48.597</td>
<td>16.388</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
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<td>Age Square</td>
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<td>2630.252</td>
<td>1655.074</td>
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<td>Non-Han Chinese</td>
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<td>Type of Employment</td>
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Cross-Tab of Party Membership and Democratic Consciousness

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Party Members (%)</td>
<td>34 (2.93)</td>
<td>164 (14.15)</td>
<td>351 (30.28)</td>
<td>610 (52.63)</td>
<td>1,159 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth League Members (%)</td>
<td>1 (8.33)</td>
<td>3 (25)</td>
<td>2 (16.67)</td>
<td>6 (50)</td>
<td>12 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party Members (%)</td>
<td>39 (7.37)</td>
<td>119 (22.5)</td>
<td>185 (34.97)</td>
<td>186 (35.16)</td>
<td>529 (100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Party Affiliation (%)</td>
<td>667 (6.91)</td>
<td>1,300 (13.46)</td>
<td>2,594 (26.86)</td>
<td>5,097 (52.77)</td>
<td>9,658 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>741 (6.52)</td>
<td>1,586 (13.96)</td>
<td>3,132 (27.58)</td>
<td>5,899 (51.94)</td>
<td>11,358 (100)</td>
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APPENDIX C

ROBUSTNESS CHECK MODELS FOR CLUSTERED STANDARD ERRORS AND RARE EVENT LOGIT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Trust in Local Gov.</th>
<th>(2) Trust in Central Gov.</th>
<th>(3) Trust in Local Gov.</th>
<th>(4) Trust in Central Gov.</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Aware of Elections</td>
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<td>0.190***</td>
<td>0.317***</td>
<td>0.277***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.0564)</td>
<td>(0.0577)</td>
<td>(0.0544)</td>
<td>(0.0178)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>0.0187</td>
<td>0.445***</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0792)</td>
<td>(0.0851)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>0.0951*</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
<td>0.136***</td>
</tr>
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<td>(0.0457)</td>
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<td>0.0150***</td>
<td>0.0111***</td>
<td>0.0130***</td>
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<td>(0.00163)</td>
<td>(0.00172)</td>
<td>(0.000692)</td>
<td>(0.000593)</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.571***</td>
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<td>(0.145)</td>
<td>(0.162)</td>
<td>(0.442)</td>
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<td>Edu</td>
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<td>Linc</td>
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<td>(0.00675)</td>
<td>(0.00781)</td>
<td>(0.000293)</td>
<td>(0.0122)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union</td>
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<td>0.0284</td>
<td>0.0435***</td>
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<td>(0.0618)</td>
<td>(0.0678)</td>
<td>(0.0128)</td>
<td>(0.117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party member</td>
<td>0.131*</td>
<td>0.191**</td>
<td>0.131***</td>
<td>0.171**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.0542)</td>
<td>(0.0637)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gov_employ</td>
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<td>0.219**</td>
<td>0.323***</td>
<td>0.194</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.0659)</td>
<td>(0.0761)</td>
<td>(0.0340)</td>
<td>(0.127)</td>
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<td>cut1</td>
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<td>-2.703***</td>
<td>-5.198***</td>
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<td>(0.206)</td>
<td>(0.148)</td>
<td>(0.102)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.517***</td>
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<td></td>
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Robust standard errors clustered by community (model 1 and 2) and rural/urban (model 3 and 4) in parentheses
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) protest</th>
<th>(2) shangfang</th>
<th>(3) protest</th>
<th>(4) shangfang</th>
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<td>Aware of Elections</td>
<td>-0.335*</td>
<td>0.540*</td>
<td>-0.403**</td>
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<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.265)</td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
<td>(0.249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>-0.346</td>
<td>-0.632</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.209)</td>
<td>(0.324)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.316**</td>
<td>0.386*</td>
<td>0.290*</td>
<td>0.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.176)</td>
<td>(0.118)</td>
<td>(0.172)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-0.0154***</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</table>

Robust standard errors clustered by community (model 1 and 2) and rural/urban (model 3 and 4) in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) protest</th>
<th>(2) shangfang</th>
<th>(3) protest</th>
<th>(4) shangfang</th>
<th>(5) protest</th>
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<td>-0.337*</td>
<td>0.523*</td>
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<td>(0.0853)</td>
<td>(0.0640)</td>
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<td>Village</td>
<td>-0.346*</td>
<td>-0.632**</td>
<td>-0.346</td>
<td>-0.632</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
<td>(0.215)</td>
<td>(0.209)</td>
<td>(0.323)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.315**</td>
<td>0.384*</td>
<td>0.315**</td>
<td>0.384*</td>
<td>0.289***</td>
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<td>-0.427</td>
<td>0.752</td>
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<td>-0.115</td>
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<td>-0.112</td>
<td>-0.0149</td>
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Rare event logit estimates in entries. Standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by community in model 3 and 4, and clustered by rural/urban in model 5 and 6.
*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001
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