

The Standardization of Villager Committee Election Procedures Survey Analysis of the 5th Round of Villager Committee Elections in 40 Villages from Five Counties in Jilin Province

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I. Survey Background, Purpose, and Methodology

Chinese villager committee elections have entered a phase of legalization and standardization, as indicated by the formal promulgation of the Organic Law on Villager Committees in 1998. Jilin Province is the birthplace of the *haixuan* method of villager committee elections. *Haixuan*, or “sea election,” means that candidates are not predetermined by higher-level government offices or leaders but nominated by villagers having the right to vote. Final candidates are then determined according to the number of nominations each individual receives. (Wang Zhoutian, 1995) As early as 1986, a portion of Lishu County, Jilin Province began using the *haixuan* method. By the 4th round of village committee elections in 1997, 86.8% of all villages in Jilin Province had moved to the *haixuan* method. (Jilin Province People’s Congress Internal Affairs and Justice Committee, et al., 2001) In November 2000, the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress in Jilin Province ratified the *Jilin Province Measures for the Election of Villager Committees*, standardizing many procedures in villager committee elections. Under the guidance of these Measures, the 5th round of villager committee elections in Jilin Province were held between November 2000 and March 2001.

To determine how well the election procedur

To administer the survey, we chose 20 male students in their third year (98th level) from the Department of Sociology, Huabei Normal University, using faculty recommendations, academic transcripts, interviews, etc. to make our selection. The students received survey training from the Department of Sociology, Northeast

The five sample counties, Huadian and Dongfeng in particular, adopted the practice of villager committee elections earlier than other coun

	Frequency	Percentage
Self-nomination	7	3.4
Nomination by Voters Freely Associated	9	4.4
Nomination by the Village Party Branch	2	1.0
Nomination by the VEC	0	0
Nomination by Villager Small Groups	1	0.5
Nomination by the VRA	8	3.9
Nomination by the Town/Township Government	3	1.5
Nomination by Individual Voters	184	90.2
Other	3	1.5

Table 4 indicates that “Nomination by Individual Voters” was the primary method used in nominating preliminary candidates. Moreover, in a general sense “Self Nomination” and “Nomination by Voters Freely Associated” also belong to the category of nomination by individuals. Nomination by organizations was rare, as indicated by the responses to “Nominated by the Town/Township Government,” “Nominatedr, in a gees. Moreovination bse “Self No46rga%rga saiat Vote noniz

(Multiple Choices Allowed) Unit: %

	Village Cadres Interviewed N = 204	Villagers Interviewed N = 586
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and villagers leading up to an election is very important, even playing a decisive role in the election's outcome.

**Table 9: Methods of Communication Between Candidates and Voters
(Multiple Choices Allowed) Unit: %**

	Surveys of Cadres N = 204	Surveys of Villagers N = 586
Home visit	4.4	8.9
Speeches delivered at VA on village management	48.5	37.4
Speeches delivered at VRA	73.0	49.3
Speeches delivered at election meetings	12.3	11.6

village, the number of ballots collected through mobile ballot boxes represented 42% of all collected ballots.

secret ballot obtained a high degree of support. However, it is worth noting that the secret ballot

Table 13: Methods of Counting Ballots**Unit: %**

Methods of Counting Ballots	Responses from Village Cadres (N=204)	Responses from Villagers (N=586)
Counted Before All Voters	58.6	55.1
Counted Before Villager Representatives	39.9	33.4
Total	98.5	88.5

When asked, “Was the election result published immediately?” 94.1% of village cadres answered, “The result was immediately published after the election.” 4.4% of village cadres answered, “The election result was not published immediately after the election but published on the same day.” Only 0.5% of them answered, “The result was published on the second day or later.” This indicates that the results of villager committee elections in Jilin Province were largely published immediately after the election.

B. Voting Rates

The voting rate is the percentage of total voters that actually cast votes. The *Measures* stipulate that an election is only valid if more than half of total voters actually cast votes. According to village election records, in 9 villages out of 40, the voting rate was 100%. The lowest voting rate was 73%. The average voting rate in the 40 sample villages was 94.2%.

Table 14: Voting Rate

Voting Rate	Number of Villages	Percent of Total Villages
71 – 80 %	4	10.0
81 – 90 %	5	12.5
91 – 99 %	22	55.0
100%	9	22.5
Total	40	100.0

The survey of villagers confirmed these results. Of the 586 villagers surveyed, 95.1% said they voted in the election, 4.6% said they did not vote, and 0.3% did not answer.

among villagers that their votes are effective has greatly reduced the number of ballots marked carelessly. Third, voters have become increasingly familiar with election procedures. Fourth, election workers provided detailed explanations.

D. Percentage of Ballots Won by the Villager Committee Chair and Vice Chair

According to the survey results of the 39 valid sample villages, the lowest percentage of total ballots won by the villager committee chair was 51%. In two sample villages the percentage of total ballots was 99%. The average percentage was 73.3%. See Table 15.

Table 15: Percentage of Ballots Won by the Villager Committee Chair

Percentage of Ballots	Number of Villages	Percentage of Villages
51 – 60 %	10	25.0
61 – 70 %	7	17.5
71 – 80 %	4	10.0
81 – 90 %	9	22.5
91 – 100 %	9	22.5
N / A	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

23 of the sample villages did not provide any data

	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
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Total	28	100.0
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C. Different Degrees of Competitiveness in Villages of Different Sizes

For this analysis the sample villages were divided into large and small villages, determined by whether the village population size exceeded 1,000. See Table 19.

Table 19: Competitiveness of Elections in Villages of Different Sizes

Level of Competition	Villages with Population Size Less than 1000	Villages with Population Size Greater than 1000
Low	7.1 (1)	42.9 (6)
Moderate	35.7 (5)	28.6 (4)
High	57.1 (8)	28.6 (4)
Total	100.0 (14)	100.0 (14)
Gamma = -.594, $p < 0.05$		

The value of Gamma in the table indicates a significant negative relationship between village size and competitiveness. The larger the village population, the lower the level of competition. As shown in the table above, 57.1% of villages with population less than 1000 had highly competitive elections. Only 28.6% of villages with population over 1000 had highly competitive elections.

We believe that the negative relationship between village size and competitiveness can be explained by two factors: the character of social relations in villages and elite mobilization. Social groups can generally be classified according to how closely residents interact with one another, either as a "society of strangers" or as a "society of acquaintances." Villagers are likely to interact as "acquaintances" when the village size is small and as "strangers" or "semi-acquaintances" when the village size is large. In smaller villages, voters have more information about candidates, reducing differences in prestige, ability, and social influence among candidates and thus increasing the level of competition. Moreover, candidates in smaller villages are more likely to become aware of the increased competition and campaign more vigorously, further increasing the level of competition. In large villages, by contrast, nominations are scattered and candidates are often very different from each other in terms of prestige, ability, and social

inability, and

Second, different procedures have achieved different levels of standardization. Voter registration, the direct nomination of candidates, and the public counting of ballots have been highly standardized. Campaign and voting procedures have not been standardized to the same extent, for a number of reasons: 1) neither the Organic Law on Villager Committees nor the Jilin *Measures* provide detailed guidelines regarding campaign procedures; 2) mobile ballot boxes remain an important voting method in some villages; 3) secret ballot booths were not set up in some villages; and 4) a voter identification card or written letter of trust was not required for a villager to receive a ballot in some villages.

Third, the voter participation rate is high and elections are competitive. In the 5

