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State Capacity and Support for Village Institutions in Rural Shaanxi

JOHN JAMES KENNEDY

Abstract For successful political reforms, such as village elections or elimination of arbitrary fees, the central party-government must have the political capacity to implement new laws down to the village level. Thus for researchers as well as government officials, it is important to have accurate measures of reform success or failure. There are two equally important measures that are closely tied to state capacity. One measure is the top-down level of commitment that county and township officials have towards implementing reforms. That is, whether these new institutions exist and function at the village level. The second measure is the bottom-up villager evaluation of local institutional procedures and cadre behavior. Using data collected in one northwest province in 2000 and 2004, findings show that implementation of some reforms, such as village elections, is uneven, while other reforms, such as the 2002 tax-fee reforms, were more successful. There are two implications from this study. One is that the central party-government lacks the commitment rather than the capacity to fully implement village elections. The urgency of relieving villagers' tax-fee burdens that were perceived as the source of rural unrest and instability was more important than the development of village elections. Second, in villages where the reforms are fully implemented, villagers make a clear conceptual distinction between popular support for the elected leaders and the election process. That is, they display disgust for the elected leaders and support for the election process and the village fee system. However, in villages where reforms are not fully carried out, villagers exhibit a more uniform lack of support for leaders and local institutions.

Keywords village elections, tax-fee reform, popular support, cadres, elected leaders

Author's affiliation John James Kennedy is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA.

In June 2004, during fieldwork in a remote northwest village, I met an elderly village woman who posed a question, as soon as she set her eyes on me.

She asked me my nationality and I said American. Then, she came within two inches of my nose and said, "What the hell are you doing in Iraq?". Although she did not know details about the American involvement in Iraq, she was generally informed and held a strong opinion. I then proceeded to tell her that not all Americans agree with the war and that over 40 percent of Americans did not vote for the president. She said, "You hold competitive elections for your leaders?" I nodded in the affirmative. She then said, "Ah ... just like our village."¹ After a few minutes, we began to joke about our personal disgust for our respective elected leaders. She continued to inform me about the village election process and how she and other villagers monitor their elected leaders. The most striking aspect of our conversation was her level of support for village regulations including the election process, while at the same time she displayed complete abhorrence for the elected leadership. Other residents within the village and township demonstrated similar attitudes towards the leaders and local regulations.

However, in the neighboring county villagers told a different story about elected leaders and village institutions. Although most villagers did not have a detailed knowledge of the village election law, they knew that village cadres and township officials had manipulated the election process. That is, villagers know the difference between real and cosmetic elections. In these villages voting is considered a worthless act because the outcome is predetermined and the election law does not apply. The "elected" village leaders are more accountable to the township officials above than the village electorate below. The leaders' decisions regarding the distribution of village resources and transparency in collection and management of local finances are considered unfair due to the personal influence of the township officials and a few villagers with political connections. Consequently, the vast majority of villagers displayed just as much disgust for the election process as they did for the elected leaders.

What explains the uneven implementation of political reforms in rural China, particularly the variation between villages and counties? Does the central government lack the political capacity to fully implement grass-roots political reform? Moreover, how can citizens within an authoritarian regime such as the People's Republic of China, develop support for local democratic institutions? While national leaders in China are not popularly elected, Chinese villagers can directly elect local leaders and village committee members. However, support is not established with the introduction of local elections. Beyond elections and voting, villagers must observe changes in cadre

behavior. That is, how institutions shape the performance of elected leaders. Villagers may not be satisfied with the leader's decisions or outcomes such as the local economy, but they can support the fairness of the election and the elected leader's decision-making process. The key measure is the distinction villagers make between the elected cadres and the local institutions. Of course, new laws and political reforms need to be fully enforced *before* villagers can observe a change in cadre behavior. State capacity reflects the ability of the central leadership to completely carry out political reforms down to the village level, and this requires compliance from township and county party-government officials. Uneven implementation demonstrates a weak state capacity. However, if the central party-government demonstrates the political capacity to fully carry out some laws over others, then the issue is a matter of political commitment rather than capacity.² Therefore, an analysis of the success or failure of village-level reforms includes a top-down approach examining county and township party-government commitment to national laws (reforms) and a bottom-up approach investigating villagers' attitudes towards the elected cadres and local institutions.

While continued uneven implementation of political reforms persists, a number of studies on rural political development suggest that villagers display much greater support for the central leadership than for local leaders.³ Indeed, large nationwide surveys reveal high levels of support among rural and urban residents for the national leadership, central party-government institutions, and national economy.⁴ At the same time, villagers show little support for village leaders and township officials. Yet, support for institutions requires clear legal and conceptual distinctions between the specific leaders and the political institutions.⁵ Villagers need to have faith that fully implemented laws and regulations will shape the behavior of government officials. This separation between individuals and institutions calls for leaders to be directly accountable to citizens through elections. Research on political support suggests that the best indicator of support for institutions within democratic societies is when citizens display disgust for their elected leaders and the national economy while maintaining a high level of support for democratic institutions.⁶ This implies a reciprocal relationship between support for individual leaders—including policy outcomes such as the economy—and the institutional processes such as elections.

Evidence from two surveys of 36 villages (in 2000 and 2004) suggests that rural residents can develop support for local institutions, such as tax laws and local elections, while harboring complete distrust for the perfor-

mance of the elected leadership and the local economy. That is, Chinese villagers' attitudes towards local elected leaders and institutions are similar to attitudes found in democratic societies. Still, within the sample there is an uneven level of support across villages, and the data suggest that this backing varies between counties and townships. In addition, there are also a disproportionate number of villagers who are unfamiliar with specific laws and new political reforms. Nevertheless, popular support can occur when the majority of villagers observe whether or not the new reforms change cadre behavior.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section presents the general model of political support. The model is based on top-down implementation of political reforms by mid-level (county) officials and bottom-up attitudes of citizens who observe cadre behavior. The second section will analyze citizen support for the local election process, and it will specifically examine the Organic Law of Villagers' Committee—both the trial law in 1988 and the revision in 1998. The third section examines villagers' support for the local tax system, and it will apply the model to the central government's attempts at reducing villagers' tax and fee burdens. Specifically, the failure of the Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees and Labor (1991) and the success of the tax-for-fee reform (税费改革; 2002) to reduce villagers' burdens will be examined. Indeed, the full implementation of the tax-for-fee reform reflects the central leadership's political capacity and commitment to this particularly rural reform. The final section will discuss the implication of the model and the lack of political commitment to carry out the village election law.

Examining success or failure of political reforms: top-down and bottom-up approaches

Democracies tend to have a low opinion of elected national leaders. Data from the World Values Survey 2000 suggest that the more democratic the nation, the more disgusted citizens are with the elected leaders, while national leaders in single-party regimes enjoy a higher level of support.⁷ In fact, theorists propose that citizens in democracies tend to have high levels of stable support for the government institutions, such as the election process and judicial system, while displaying relatively unstable and lower levels of support for individual leaders as well as their national economic and social policies.⁸

However, rather than applying this theory of public support to the central leadership and institutions in China, I argue that this approach is more suit-

able for analyzing state capacity regarding the success (or failure) of political reforms in establishing democratic institutions at the local level *within* an authoritarian regime. The introduction of political reforms, such as village elections, starts with laws emanating from the center and implemented down to the village level. On the ground, villagers need to make a clear distinction between the individual leaders and the local institutions.

At the national level (top down), the introduction of national laws, such as local elections and reduction of local fees, provides citizens with the legal means to monitor local cadres, but successful monitoring of local leaders can only be achieved with credible threat of sanctions. However, sanctions are only credible if the noncompliant leaders are certain that the punishments will be carried out. For village cadres, this level of certainty is increased if the mid-level county authorities are committed to the reform and fully implement the law. Yet, if these county officials regard the new reforms as unimportant or low priorities, then sanctions become a hollow threat and local township and village cadres have little to fear. As a result, the new institutions may not influence the behavior of village cadres. Therefore, any analysis of political reforms at village level requires a close examination of town and county party-governments.

At the individual level (bottom-up), institutional support is defined as villagers' perceived fairness of local institutions such as the village election process and the tax and fee system. A body of research emphasizes the importance of procedural fairness and public evaluation of local political institutions.⁹ According to Margaret Levi, "individuals need to have evidence that government is relatively fair.... The belief in government fairness requires the perception that all relevant interests have been considered, that the game is not rigged."¹⁰ Perceived fairness in institutions is a result of repeated interactions between elected leaders and villagers. It is based on villagers' direct experience and observation of cadre behavior and how these cadres follow the rules. In fact, an indicator of local institutional support is when villagers support the decision-making process but not necessarily the decision maker.

The data presented in this study display two distinct patterns. First, no matter how the village leadership is selected, the vast majority of villagers in the sample are disgusted with their elected leaders. Second, there is a wide variation in the commitment of mid-level leading cadres to implement political reforms. Both of these trends are documented in previous studies on rural China.¹¹ However, I suggest that support for local institutions is occurring in

rural areas where (1) the mid-level officials are committed to the new laws and (2) villagers observe changes in the behavior of elected leaders. When one of these elements is missing, there is little or no support for local institutions.

County-leading cadres and commitment to the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees

The Organic Law of Villagers' Committees was enacted by the National People's Congress in 1988 (trial basis) and 1998. This regulation allows villagers to select three to seven committee members and the chair of the village committee in a competitive election. Besides allowing villagers to elect local leaders as well as recall elected leaders, the Organic Law states that cadres must publicize the collection and use of local revenues, and it stresses transparency in reallocation of village resources such as land and public investments.

While the Organic Law is an attempt to establish a democratic selection process for villager leaders, the central leadership has no intention of democratizing rural China.¹² This is a form of political development where elections allow villagers to monitor local cadres rather than a general democratization plan from the top down. For the central government, the continuous monitoring of local cadres is a daunting and costly task, especially at the village level. The aim of the Organic Law is to shift the costs of long-term monitoring of village leaders and committee members from the higher authorities to the villagers. However, at least in the short term, the higher authorities must apply top-down pressure to ensure the full implementation of the Organic Law.

The 1988 Organic Law of Villagers' Committees was an important first step in allowing villagers to monitor village committee members, but the regulation did not specify how the candidates were to be chosen. This left a legal loophole for county and township officials to implement the election law as they saw fit.¹³ As a result, the quality of elections regarding the level of competitiveness and selection of candidates varied widely among villages.¹⁴ Some of the elections were more competitive than others. According to interviews in 2000, many village activists referred to the 1988 Organic Law as "old wine in a new bottle" (新瓶装旧酒) meaning that the newly "elected" cadres were no different than the previously appointed ones.

The nomination process best explains the variation among village elections.¹⁵ In general, the more open the nomination process the greater the quality of the elections. The most open process is the villager nomination where villagers select the candidates in an open assembly. Lower-quality elec-

tions involve a closed nomination process in which the village Party secretary or township officials select the candidates. In these elections, even if there are more candidates than positions available (i.e., a competitive contest), the village Party secretary or township government still has their choice in office.

However, township officials have a strong interest in manipulating the election process. These officials need local cadres to carry out policies in the villages. Thus, in order to ensure that village committee members can be trusted to implement policies for the township government, especially unpopular policies such as family planning and tax collection (before 2002), township officials must either appoint the leaders or at least be involved in the nomination process. This is not because township-leading cadres are inherently antidemocratic, but rather their promotion depends on the fulfillment of mandated policies set forth by the county party-government.¹⁶ Township-leading cadres are directly accountable to county authorities through the one-level-down management system and their evaluations for promotion (preferably to the county party-government) are based on fulfilling policy obligations.¹⁷ Therefore, an open village election is a wildcard for the township officials. Will villagers nominate and elect individuals who will work with the township government or not? Given the motivations of township officials to manipulate the elections, open nominations will only occur when county-leading cadres include full implementation of the Organic Law in their evaluation of township officials. That is, when the Organic Law becomes a mandated or priority policy within the county.

In 1998, the trial law was revised to include the villager nomination process and it became law. As a result, it is easier to determine whether or not the election law is implemented through the nomination process. The three-county sample examines two election cycles in Shaanxi Province that were conducted in 1999 and 2002 (see Table 1). Overall, the quality of elections varies by county, and this variation becomes even more apparent after the 2002 elections. This reflects the level of commitment of the county Party secretary to fully implement the 1998 Organic Law. The elections that most closely follow the 1998 law are those held in county 2 followed by county 1. In county 3, the township officials have a clear hold on the election process. Interviews with township officials in county 2 revealed that they are not satisfied with most election results regarding the villagers' selection of committee members and village leaders, but they state that they have no choice.¹⁸ One town Party secretary pointed out that the new mandate to implement the 1998 Organic Law complicated the fulfillment of other county mandates,

Table 1 Village candidate nomination type by township in 2000 and 2004 (villages)*

	County 1		County 2		County 3	
	T11 2000 (04)	T12 2000 (04)	T21 2000 (04)	T22 2000 (04)	T31 2000 (04)	T32 2000
(04)						
Villager assembly	1 (3)	2 (2)	3 (3)	2 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Party branch	2 (0)	0 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (1)	0 (1)
Township government	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (2)	1 (1)
Appointment	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Total villages	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	2 (3)	3 (3)	2 (2)

*The village election types are based on the 1999 and the 2002 elections; in the 2000 survey 16 villages were sampled and in the 2004 survey 17 villages were sampled (the same 16 plus one). In 2000, we surveyed six counties and labeled them 1 through 6, and in 2004 we surveyed the same villages in counties 3, 5, and 6 (see Kennedy, "The Implementation of Village Elections and Tax-for-Fee Reform in Rural Northwest China"). In this table, counties 3, 5, and 6 are renamed 1, 2, and 3. For definition of nomination types, see Appendix 3.

Sources: Author's surveys in Shaanxi in 2000 (sample comprising 16 out of 36 villages) and 2004

such as family planning and local development projects, because they require the full cooperation of village cadres.¹⁹ However, township officials interviewed in county 3 had more flexibility to influence election outcomes and were more satisfied with election results than their counterparts in county 2.

While township officials have an incentive to manipulate the village elections, it is unclear why county party-government leaders choose to fully implement the 1998 Organic Law. One reason county Party secretaries may decide to prioritize village elections is that their own promotion depends on maintaining social stability within their county. There are several ways to preserve rural stability within a county, including greater use of police and security forces to monitor villagers and suppress social disturbances before they get out of hand. However, providing villagers with the opportunity to freely elect and remove local leaders can also contribute to social stability. During interviews in 2000 and 2004, several county Party secretaries revealed their belief that competitive village elections and open nominations can increase social stability by allowing villagers to directly monitor and sanction the village committee members and the village leader. Moreover, villagers may be more willing to comply with unpopular policies, such as family planning, and to listen to someone they elected rather than a leader that was appointed or selected by the township government.²⁰ Thus, it can be in the interest of the county leadership to fully implement village elections.

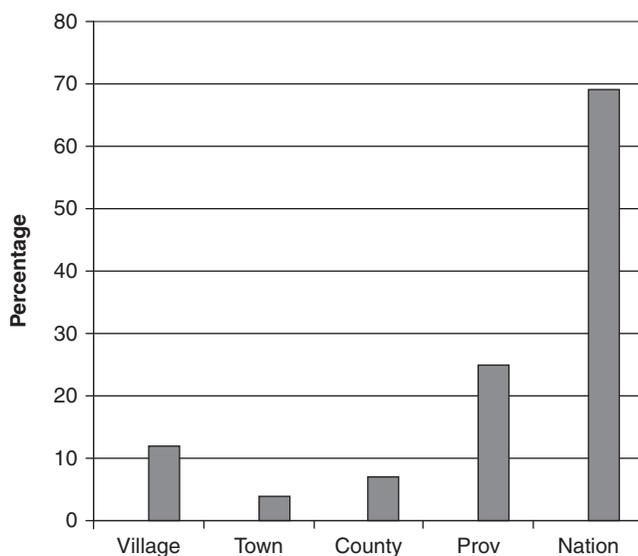


Figure 1 The level of villager support for village cadres and party-government officials at town, county, provincial, and national levels

Source: Author's 2004 survey in Shaanxi, village sample (n = 153).

Although county Party secretaries may endorse the Organic Law, many township officials tend to view the elections as problematic. Nevertheless, the fact that town officials fully implement the election law despite their own misgivings about the ability of villagers to choose effective leaders suggests that county Party secretaries can prioritize the Organic Law and incorporate it into the promotion and evaluation process.

Popular support for the election process

Even with the backing of county-leading cadres, the 1998 Organic Law was not widely publicized nor was the information disseminated in the traditional mass campaign style. In 2004, less than 20 percent of the villagers in the sample could identify the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees. Nevertheless, the belief that local elections are important is not solely dependent on knowledge of the Organic Law.²¹ Over 70 percent of the respondents reported that the village elections were "very important" or "important." Even in county 3 where the 1998 Law has not been enforced, over 70 percent of the respondents believe the elections are important. At the same time, there is a uniform disgust for the village leadership (see Figure 1). This suggests that

although the vast majority of villagers do not believe elected leaders best serve their interests, they still feel that freely electing a candidate or removing an incumbent is an important process.

Villagers' support for the election process varies by their perception of election quality of the elections rather than knowledge of the Organic Law. While 80 percent of the respondents do not know the law, over 90 percent provide a clear judgment as to whether or not the elections are fair. In counties 1 and 2, respondents in each village hold a strong opinion about the election process as either fair or unfair, and in each county less than 7 percent report "do not know." However, over 18 percent of respondents in county 3 reported, "do not know." The levels of support are highest in the villages that experienced a change in the election process from lower- to higher-quality elections. For example, two villages in county 1 experienced an improvement in the quality of elections from village Party secretary nomination in the 1999 elections to the more open villager nomination in 2002 (Table 1). The level of support for the election process also improved from just over 50 percent of respondents believing the process was fair in 2000 to over 70 percent in the 2004 survey.²² Interviews as well as the survey data suggest that villagers' support for electoral institutions is based on observed change in the election process and elected cadres' behavior over time. In fact, the quality of elections in county 1 evolved over a period of three election cycles from township-nominated candidates in 1996, to village Party secretary nominations in 1999 and villager nominations in the 2002 elections.²³ Yet, in county 3, the level of support had actually decreased over time in several villages. In Table 1, one township in county 3 experienced a reduction in the quality of elections from 2000 to 2004.²⁴ In 2000, the village Party secretary controlled the nomination process, and 45 percent of the respondents reported that the elections were fair (27 percent said, "do not know"). It is not unusual for some villagers to be supportive of the village Party secretary's decision, but that level of support for the process decreases when the candidate selection is made outside the village. In 2004, the nomination process changed and the township officials selected the candidates. At the same time support for the election system decreased dramatically. Over 70 percent of the respondents reported an unfair process.

Estimates from the ordered logit model show that the most significant influence on villagers' level of support for village elections is direct observation of the process (Table 2, Models 1 & 2).²⁵ Yet, estimates for "knowledge of the election law" are insignificant. This suggests that while villagers do not

Table 2 Determinants for the fairness of the last election for 2000 (Model 1) and 2004 (Model 2) and attitudes toward the elected village leader in 2004 (Model 3)

3 ^b Variables	Model 1 ^a	Model 2 ^a	Model
	(2000)	(2004)	(2004)
	coefficient (z-score)		
Knowledge of election law		-0.38 (0.78)	
Observed changes in election process	1.18** (2.88)	1.48*** (3.49)	
Perception of the election process (fairness)			-0.17 (0.26)
Estimate of household income	0.00 (0.23)	0.00 (0.24)	0.01 (0.43)
Evaluation of village economy (good or bad)	-0.31 (1.29)	-0.41 (1.82)	-0.77** (2.50)
Education (years)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.11 (1.22)
Distance to county seat (km)	0.02 (0.55)	0.04 (1.10)	
N	153	153	153

^a Ordered logit model with the ordinal measure for the dependent variable that ranges from 1–5 where 1 is unfair and 5 is fair (see Appendix 2, question 110).

^b Logit model with a dichotomous variable for attitude toward the elected leaders (see Appendix 2, question 108).

** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

Sources: Author's surveys in Shaanxi in 2000 (sample comprising 16 out of 36 villages) and 2004

have to have intimate knowledge of the Organic Law, residents can easily observe the difference between fair and unfair elections. That is, it is not difficult to spot township interference in the election process. In Shaanxi, a number of social disturbances that resulted in arrests and injuries occurred after villagers observed township interference in the elections.²⁶ This also explains why some county-leading cadres may prioritize the Organic Law.

Economic factors, such as reported household income and villagers' evaluation of the village economy, have no independent influence on support for the election process. Indeed, the majority of villagers evaluate the performance of the village economy in 2000 and 2004 as "bad" with less than 10 percent assessing the economy as "good" in 2004 and 13 percent in 2000. However, the evaluation of the national economy in 2000 is consistently "good" (Figure 2). The evaluation is similar in the 2004 survey.²⁷ One explanation is that most villagers, even in the poorer, more remote areas, have a

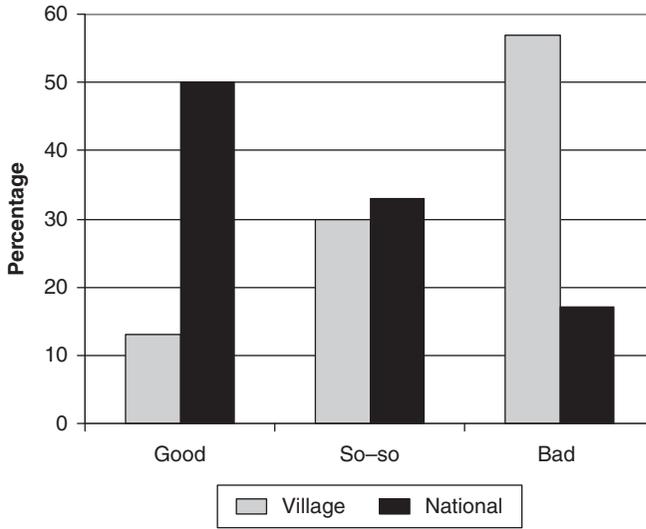


Figure 2 Villagers' evaluation of the village and national economy in 2000

Source: Author's Shaanxi 36-village survey in 2000 (n = 327).

television set and a radio. The state-run media outlets provide a continuous stream of positive national economic news reports. For many rural residents there is a huge contrast between the glowing pictures and reports about the national economy and the village economic conditions. This may explain the difference in villagers' attitudes towards the national and local economy.

However, economic evaluation of the village has a significant negative influence on villagers' support for elected leaders (Table 2, Model 3). Villagers tend to blame elected leaders for the perceived poor conditions of the village economy. Even if villagers observe a fair election process, they continue to display dissatisfaction with the elected leadership and the local economy. In fact, villagers' evaluation of the election process as fair or unfair has no significant effect on their opinion of the elected leader. Nevertheless, elections only represent one rural institution. For rural residents one of the most important institutional developments has been the central party-government's attempts to control the local tax and fee system, also known as villagers' burdens.

Reducing villagers' burdens and tax reforms

Throughout the 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) claimed that one of the main goals of the central government was to reduce the excessive

fees and apportionments in the rural areas otherwise known as villagers' burdens. An increased number of reported tax strikes and demonstrations against unfair fees show that villagers were willing to take matters into their own hands if provincial or national leaders failed to control the behavior of township officials and village cadres. The central government made two attempts to control villagers' burdens, one in 1991 and another in 2002. These regulations were meant to shape the behavior of local cadres and provide villagers with the legal mechanisms to monitor leaders. The first reform failed to reduce villagers' burdens. That is, the 1991 regulation did not change the behavior of village leaders. This was due to a lack of central and mid-level government commitment. However, the second reform succeeded in changing the behavior of village cadres because the central and mid-level governments firmly endorsed the 2002 tax reform.

The central government's early attempts to relieve villagers' burdens were unsuccessful due to a lack of commitment and weak enforcement mechanisms. The Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees and Labor (1991) limited villagers' fees and apportionment to no more than 5 percent of their annual income, but the regulation did not clarify who would estimate villagers' mean annual income for the village or how the average annual income was calculated. The lack of central and provincial government commitment meant that county leaders were able to decide whether or not to fully enforce the new reforms. Moreover, the regulation was not well publicized. Although township officials were informed of the new regulation regarding the reduction of fees, it was up to the township party-government to decide how and when to inform the villagers. As a result, the 1991 Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees and Labor did little to change the behavior of village cadres regarding the collection of fees. Moreover, villagers displayed very limited support for the revenue collection system.

Not long after the adoption of the Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees and Labor (1991), researchers as well as villagers noted the fatal flaw in the regulation that allows village cadres to easily get around the 5-percent rule by overestimating villagers' annual income.²⁸ Estimates of villagers' annual income varied widely between cadres and community residents. In one village, villager respondents' mean estimate of their household income was RMB 2428, and the annual fees were RMB 564.²⁹ This meant that village fees on average constituted 23 percent of villagers' annual income. However, an accountant estimate of villagers' annual income was RMB 3600 and the fees made up 16 percent of villagers' income. In addition, the estimates vary

between cadres within the same village. In the same village, the leader's estimate of villagers' annual household income was RMB 4500, while the Party secretary's estimate was RMB 9000. The implication for the 5-percent rule is that cadres' compliance depends on whose estimate is used to determine whether or not the regulation is being enforced.

In the three-county sample of 2000, the same pattern exists for all village cadres. The accountant's estimate is the closest to the villagers' reported income followed by the village leader and the Party secretary (see Table 3). Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang as well as Thomas Bernstein and Lü Xiaobo suggest that village elections can provide villagers with a mechanism to monitor elected cadres and possibly reduce abuses such as overestimation of villagers' income.³⁰ The village leader and the accountant are popularly elected cadres while the Party secretary is not. While elected leaders are considered more accountable to villagers, the data show that the elected leaders' estimate of villagers' income was still 20 percent higher than the villagers' own reported income and over 40 percent higher than the accountant's estimate. One notable observation is that the accountant's estimate in 2000 is always lower than the villagers' estimate even in villages with no elections at all (i.e., appointed leaders).³¹ The village accountant is close to the numbers and has a good idea of the community revenues and finances, but this does mean that his/her estimate is the only one used to determine villagers' fees. A rift may exist between the Party secretary and the elected village cadres. Even if fully implemented village elections are functioning in such a way that villagers can monitor the village committee, the Party secretary can still report an overestimation of villagers' annual income to higher authorities giving the impression that the 5-percent rule is enforced. This not only reflects the problem associated with the uneven implementation of the Organic Law, but also the limitation of village elections with popularly elected leaders and appointed party secretaries.

In the 2000 sample, a few villagers actually knew about the 1991 fee regulations, and several used the regulations to make their case against local cadres and officials. While tax strikes and illegal disturbances do occur as a result of overtaxation, village activists first make their case through verbal or written comments within the village. As O'Brien and Li point out, rightful resisters "take strong measures only after courteous ones fail" (先礼后兵).³² Two examples of "courteous measures" are written comments on official tax-fee forms and publicly distributed pamphlets. In 2000, villagers receive biannual tax forms that list the fees and taxes to be paid. The cover of the form clearly dis-

Table 3 Estimates of villagers' annual household income in 2000 and 2004

	2000	2004
	RMB (frequency)	
Villagers' estimate of HH ^a income (136)	5494 (133)	6579
Village leader estimate of villagers' mean HH income	6909 (13)	4934 (16)
Party secretary estimate of villagers' mean HH income	8068 (13)	4085 (12)
Accountant estimate of villagers' HH income	4086 (14)	4448 (15)
Township Party secretary's estimate of villagers' HH income ^b		4666 (6)

^a HH stands for head of household.

^b Although we conducted informal interviews with township-leading cadres in 2000, we only started using questionnaires for township cadres in 2004.

Sources: Author's surveys in Shaanxi in 2000 (sample comprising 16 out of 36 villages) and 2004

plays estimated mean annual per capita income for the village. Fees and taxes are paid with the attached form and then, a week or so later, the form is returned to the villager with a stamp (chop) as proof of payment. A number of resisters write directly on the tax form to make their complaints known to the village cadres and possibly township officials who stamp the receipts. One villager wrote, "This is dog farts! Who calculated the average income? No one asked me what my income is and this average does not reflect my income." He said that neither the village cadres nor the township officials responded to his comments.³³ Another type of courteous resistance is the pamphlet (传单). In the sample, a village activist used this method to publicly announce that local cadres are not implementing reforms to reduce villagers' burdens. Unlike the notes on the tax forms many of the pamphlets were unsigned and anonymous, but they reached a larger audience. In the villages sampled, some of the pamphlets were signed "village Party member and farmer" or simply "village resident." Still, without commitment from county-level officials, the regulation to reduce the collection of fees continued to be manipulated or ignored by township officials and village cadres.³⁴ Indeed, a number of important studies have detailed the failure of the 1991 Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees to reduce villagers' burdens.³⁵ Surveys suggest that by 2000, villagers seem to display general support for the regime, while exhibiting uniform disgust for the local leadership.³⁶

By the end of the 1990s, incidents of rural unrest continued to rise. One of the main reasons for local protests was the unfair tax-fee burdens.³⁷ Although rural unrest was widespread, the incidents were not coordinated actions against the central government. In fact, these were more atomized protests that were directed towards the local authorities such as the village cadres and town officials. Nevertheless, the increasing numbers of protests could be perceived as grown instability in the countryside. The lack of central leadership commitment to fully implement the 1991 Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees as well as the Organic Law contributed to this perception of instability and reduced political capacity.

After 2000, there was a sense of urgency regarding the rural unrest and villagers' burdens. As a result the central government proposed a new reform to reduce villagers' burdens in 2002 called the tax-for-fee reform. The new reform completely eliminated local fees in favor of a single agricultural tax. Unlike the Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees, the tax-for-fee reform had the support and political commitment of the central government all the way down to the township.³⁸ In addition, the central and provincial propaganda departments went into high gear to publicize the new reform. In fact, the reform was implemented in the traditional mass campaign style complete with rural study groups.

To determine the success of the 2002 tax-for-fee reform and the political capacity of the central leadership to implement priority policies, the changes in cadre behavior were examined, that is, their estimate of villagers' household income. Table 3 compares the 2000 and 2004 samples of village cadres and their estimates of villagers' income. The accountants' estimate of the villagers' mean annual income is about the same for 2000 and 2004, and it is consistently lower than the villager respondent estimates of their own income. The most striking difference is that in the 2004 sample, all the village cadres and the township-leading cadres provided a similar estimate of villagers' annual household income that was lower than the estimate reported by the villager respondents. In 2000, the respective Party secretary's mean estimate of villagers' annual household income was almost twice as much as the accountant's estimate, while in 2004 it is much lower. In addition, the reduction in villagers' burdens is essentially the same across all six townships and all three counties. The lack of variation between townships and counties reflects a uniform commitment of county leaders to implement the tax-for-fee reform.

The second attempt to reduce villagers' burdens was also highly publicized and villager knowledge about the new tax reform was more widespread than

Table 4 Determinants for the fairness of the tax/fee system for 2000 and 2004^a

(2004) Variables	Model 1 (2000)	Model 2
	coefficient (z-score)	
Knowledge of tax/fee reform		0.46 (0.88)
Observed changes in taxes/fees		1.52** (2.64)
Estimate of household income	0.00 (0.64)	0.00 (0.20)
Evaluation of village economy	-0.18 (0.81)	-0.43 (1.56)
Education (years)	-0.01 (0.10)	0.11 (1.68)
Distance to county seat (km)	0.07 (1.72)	-0.01 (0.01)
N	153	153

^a Ordered logit model with the ordinal measure for the dependent variable that ranges from 1–5 where 1 is unfair and 5 is fair (see Appendix 2, question 76).

** = $p < 0.01$

Note: The village election types are based on the 1999 and 2002 elections.

Source: Author's surveys in Shaanxi in 2000 (sample comprising 16 out of 36 villages) and 2004

the 1991 Regulation Concerning Peasants' Fees. In the 2004 sample, 64 percent of the villager respondents reported that they knew of the tax-for-fee reform and that it was implemented in their village. Moreover, 62 percent reported that they observed a decrease in villagers' burdens, that is, the elimination of fees. This had a direct influence on villagers' attitude toward the local tax-fee system. In 2000, villagers were asked if the local tax system was "fair" or not (see Appendix 2). Over 60 percent reported that the tax system was unfair. However, in 2004, only 38 percent of the respondents in the same village reported that the tax system was unfair. This reflects a shift in villager support for the tax-fee system and the process in which the taxes and fees are collected and assessed.

The estimates from the ordered logit model show that the most significant influence on villager attitudes towards the tax-fee system is the observed change in the actual fees (Table 4, Model 2). Moreover, in 2000 and 2004, villagers' perception of the local economy and their own income has no significant influence on their evaluation of the tax and fee system. This demonstrates that villagers can make a clear conceptual distinction between the fee and taxation process and economic outcomes (i.e., influence on their

own income). Similar to village elections and knowledge of the Organic Law, the coefficient for “knowledge of the tax-for-fee reform” is not significant. This suggests that it is villagers’ observation of cadre behavior rather than knowledge of the law that has the greatest influence on villagers’ evaluation of the tax-fee system.

Conclusion

The evidence suggests that popular support for institutions can develop at the village level in China. The key is the conceptual distinction villagers make between elected leaders and the election process. In villages that fully implemented the Organic Law, villagers tend to share the same attitudes towards the elected leaders, the village economy, and the local institutions as those found in democratic societies. Moreover, examining the success or failure of political reform at the village level requires a top-down *and* bottom-up approach. While change in cadre behavior is due to the pressure from higher authorities at the county level and above, the best judges of cadre behavior and institutional change are the villagers. Thus, villagers’ perceptions and attitudes are important components in evaluating the effectiveness of grass-roots political reform.

The evidence also suggests that institutional support is distinct from specific support for individual leaders. Even though villager support for local electoral institutions varies among and within the three counties, over 85 percent of the villagers believe that village cadres are not looking out for the villagers’ interest. Over half the villages in our sample did not experience a turnover in leadership between 2000 and 2004, that is, over half the village leaders and Party secretaries were the same people. While villagers’ disgust for these individual leaders remained unaltered, their support for new laws and regulations that shape cadre behavior underwent considerable change.

Regarding state capacity and the two types of reforms, county officials display a greater commitment to implement the 2002 tax-for-fee reform than the 1998 Organic Law due to pressure from provincial and central authorities. The decrease in villagers’ burdens and change in cadre behavior regarding estimates of villagers’ income were consistent across all three counties. In addition, the majority of villagers observed the changes in their tax rate and how local cadres carried out the new tax-for-fee reform. As a result, the level of support for the tax system is higher in 2004 compared to attitudes

before the 2002 reform. In contrast, the 1998 Organic Law is unevenly implemented and the quality of the elections varies by county. Although the vast majority of respondents had no knowledge of the Organic Law, they still were able to evaluate the fairness of the elections and support or not support electoral institutions.

Still, why was there such a large difference in central leadership commitment in implementing the 2002 tax-for-fee reforms as opposed to the Organic Law (1988 and 1998)? There are two possible reasons. First, as the reports and data suggest, the urgency in reducing the perceived cause of rural unrest due to increasing villager burdens was more important than the development of village elections. While allowing villagers to monitor local cadres through elections may contribute to long-term social stability, the elimination of excessive fees was meant to have an immediate effect on reducing villager frustration and unrest in the countryside. For higher authorities, such as county, provincial, and national Party secretaries, social stability is a policy priority above all else. Second, as the survey data suggest, introducing village elections has unintended consequences such as increasing villager demands for greater participation in local decision making and popular control over cadres.³⁹ Indeed, even though villagers hold disdain for their elected leaders, they still believe that it is better to have elected rather than appointed village committee members. The lack of commitment to the Organic Law may reflect an understanding of these unintended consequences. In fact, at the moment, the central leadership seems more committed to slowing the demand for more democratic institutions than to developing those institutions. Several recent experiments with township elections have been suppressed and the evidence suggests that the central leadership is still holding back any significant expansion of local elections.⁴⁰ Limited experiments with increasing representation in town and county People's Congresses continue, but overall democratic political reforms still take a backseat to economic development and social stability.

The irony, of course, is that democratic reforms can contribute to greater social stability such as trust in local institutions and procedural fairness. The evidence suggests that the central leadership has the political capacity to carry out specific priority policies and laws, but only time will tell whether or not the central party-government will commit to serious democratic reforms. Nevertheless, if and when the central leadership decides it is time to deepen political reforms and expand the election process to the townships and

even the counties, then it will be necessary to incorporate the top-down and bottom-up approaches to evaluate the success or failure of future reforms.

Appendix I

The 2000 data used in this analysis comes from a survey of 36 villages conducted in Shaanxi Province between October and December 2000. The survey employed random multistage sampling and covered six counties⁴¹ which were chosen based on their level of development using G. W. Skinner's core-periphery map of Northwest China.⁴² Within each county, two townships were randomly selected. At the township level, three villages were randomly chosen. Within each village nine households were selected from the household registration list (户籍) supplied by the village accountant. The household registration list provided the official name of the head of the household, but in many cases the official household head was not present at the interview. The main reason for the absence of the head of the household in our sample is that the head (typically male) was out of the village working (打工) for weeks or months at a time. Therefore, if the official household head was not present at the time of the interview, we asked to interview the person in charge of the household at that moment. Usually this was the wife. As a result, the response rate was almost 100 percent for the survey and 25 percent of the respondents were women (the same for the 2000 and 2004 surveys). In addition to the nine villager respondents, the village leader, Party secretary, and accountant were also interviewed. Twelve graduate students from Northwest University, Xi'an, were trained to conduct the survey. Thus, each graduate interviewer was assigned one respondent per village. In addition to the survey, the author conducted eight village case studies in three different townships. The author spent two to five days in each village between March and April 2001. In-depth interviews were conducted with villagers, village leaders, and township and county officials.

The June 2004 survey is a sample of villages in three of the six counties sampled in 2000. Although the same villages were sampled, we do not use the same households or individuals. This type of panel data is called repeated cross-sectional data because we are collecting new information from statistically similar individuals in the same villages. The questionnaires are also the same, but we added 10 new questions. The average time for each survey interview was 55 minutes. In addition, the 2004 survey had formal interviews with one of the township-leading cadres in each township. The same method was also used to survey villagers and cadres in 2004; 12 graduate

students from Northwest University, Xi'an, were trained to conduct the survey and in-depth interviews.

Appendix 2

No. 65. Has the new Tax Reform Law been implemented in the village?

(1) yes ___ (2) no ___ (8) does not know ___

No. 66. If the Tax Reform Law has been implemented, have you seen a decrease in your annual tax rate?

(1) decrease ___ (2) no decrease ___ (8) does not know ___

No. 76. In some villages, farmers believe that the village tax system is unfair, while in other villages farmers believe that the tax system is fair. In your opinion, do you think village tax system is fair or unfair? How would

1	2	3	4	5	8 (DNK)
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you rank the fairness of the tax system where 1 is very unfair and 5 is very fair?

Unfair

Fair

No. 93. In some villages, farmers believe that electing the village leader is very important as opposed to having an appointed leader, while in other villages farmers believe the village elections do not matter. In your opin-

1	2	3	4	5	8 (DNK)
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ion, do you think the elections are important or not? How would you rank the importance of elections where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important?

Not important at all

Very important

No. 108. Thinking about local and national leaders, who do you believe is looking out for your best interest?

(1) village small group leader _____

(5) county leaders _____

(2) village leader _____

(6) provincial leaders _____

(3) village party secretary _____

(7) national leaders _____

(4) township leaders _____

Note: Each of the seven categories is treated as dichotomous variables (0,1). Thus, if the respondent selected “national leaders” then all other variables are treated as 0. A few villagers selected two leaders, but because these are not ranked each is still coded as 1.

1	2	3	4	5	8 (DNK)
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No. 110. Thinking of the last village election, where do you place it on this scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means that the last election was very unfair and 5 means that the last election very fair?

Unfair

Fair

Appendix 3

The village nomination categories were determined through quantitative and qualitative means. In the questionnaire, we asked villagers about the election and nomination processes. Specifically, we asked villagers how the candidates in the most recent election were nominated: by the villagers, the village representative assembly, the Party branch, or the township. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, when we asked this question of the nine households in a village, we observed inconsistent answers within the same village. In order to reconcile the cases in which the opinions of villagers in a single village were inconsistent, we developed a single village measure. To do so, we aggregated the nomination data across households to the village level using a “majority rule” procedure. According to the procedure, we chose the nomination procedure that was selected by the majority of the villagers.⁴³ In addition, the responses of the majority of villagers must also be consistent with at least two of the village cadre responses. All three cadres were asked the same set of questions as were the farmers regarding the village election process. Enumerators also conducted lengthy sit-down interviews with the leader, Party secretary, and the village accountant in each village. One of the most important findings in both the 2000 and 2004 samples was that the village accountant and the village leader’s answers were more consistent with the majority of the villagers than the Party secretary. Finally, in the 2004 sample we had additional interviews with the principal of the elementary school and the cadre in charge of family planning. The school principals in particular were well informed, educated, and typically quite candid about village elections and relations between cadres and villagers.

Notes

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¹ It was 10 years earlier that higher authorities (township officials) appointed all the village leaders, but in 1992 local elections for the leader were introduced in the village.

² While failure to fully implement *any* central policy down to the village level reflects weak state capacity, the ability to fully carry out *some* policies does not suggest strong state capacity. I suggest that if the central leadership can get even a few priority policies fully implemented, then this reflects political commitment and at least a minimum level of state capacity. Thus, local level cadres will continue to selectively implement policies and only ensure that priority policies are completely carried out.

³ Thomas P. Bernstein and Lü Xiaobo, "Taxation without Representation: Peasants, the Central and the Local States in Reform China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 163 (2000): 742–63; Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust in Rural China," *Modern China* 30, no. 2 (2004): 228–58; and Tony Saich, "Citizens' Perceptions of Governance in Rural and Urban China," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 1–28.

⁴ World Values Survey 2000–2001, "Online Data Analysis," <<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>>, accessed 20 November 2008; for data access, also see Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), "European and World Values Surveys Integrated Data File, 1999–2002," Release I (Study No. 3975), <<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/ICPSR/>>, accessed 20 November 2008.

⁵ Russell J. Dalton, "Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies," in *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, ed. Pippa Norris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27; David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁶ Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*; Marc J. Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust," *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (1998): 791–808; Edward N. Muller and Thomas O. Jukam, "On the Meaning of Political Support," *American Political Science Review* 71, no. 4 (1977): 1561–95.

⁷ Using the measure for "level of democracy" from the Polity IV, "Individual Country Regime Trends," <<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>>, accessed 24 April 2008 and Freedom House 2002 data, *Freedom in the World 2001–2004: The Democracy Gap*, general ed. Linda Stern (New York: Freedom House Press, 2005), <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/survey2005.htm>>, accessed 20 May 2008. Japan is ranked most democratic among East Asian countries, followed by South Korea, Taiwan. China and the least democratic Vietnam. In response to the World Values Survey (2000) question on satisfaction with national leadership, 98 percent in Vietnam report satisfied, followed by 72 percent in China, 38 percent in Taiwan, 32 percent in South Korea, and 8 percent in Japan.

⁸ Dalton, "Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies"; Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*; Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust."

⁹ John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes toward American Political Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Margaret Levi, "A State of Trust," in *Trust and Government*, ed. Valerie Braithwaite and Margaret Levi (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), 77–101; and Tom R. Tyler, "Governing amid Diversity: The Effect of Fair Decisionmaking Procedures on the Legitimacy of Government," *Law and Society Review* 28, no. 4 (1994): 809–32.

¹⁰ Levi, "A State of Trust," 90.

¹¹ Bai Gang, "Zhongguo cunmin zizhi fazhi jianshe pingyi" (Examining the construction of China's villager self-government rule of law), *Zhongguo shehui kexue* (Social sciences in China), no. 3 (1998): 88–106; He Xuefeng, "Dangqian cunmin zizhi yanjiu zhong xuyao chengqing de ruogan wenti" (A certain number of problems that need clarification in the current studies on villager self-government), *Zhongguo nongcun guancha* (China rural survey), no. 2 (2000): 64–71; Li, "Political Trust in Rural China"; and Kevin O'Brien and Li Lianjiang, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹² Li and O'Brien and Li also suggest that the intention of the central leadership is not to democratize rural China, see Li, "Political Trust in Rural China," and O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance*. Of course, the uneven implementation of the Organic Law is also an indicator of the lack of commitment to democratize the countryside.

¹³ Bai, "Zhongguo cunmin zizhi fazhi jianshe pingyi."

¹⁴ Bai Gang, *Xuanju yu zhili: Zhongguo cunmin zizhi yanjiu* (Elections and administration: research on villager self-governance in China) (Beijing: China Social Science Publishing, 2001), 155; Gao Zhengwen, "Guanyu Shaanxi sheng cunweihui huanwei xuanju guancha baogao" (An observational report about village committee election turnovers in Shaanxi Province), in *Xiangcun zhengzhi* (The politics of the countryside), ed. Wang Zhongtian (Nanchang: Jiangxi People's Publishing House, 1999), 171; He, "Dangqian cunmin zizhi yanjiu zhong xuyao chengqing de ruogan wenti"; Jamie P. Horsley, "Village Elections: Training Ground for Democratization," *The China Business Review*, March–April 2001, 44–52; and Melanie Manion, "The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside," *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 736–49.

¹⁵ Bai, *Xuanju yu zhili*; 156; He, "Dangqian cunmin zizhi yanjiu zhong xuyao chengqing de ruogan wenti"; and John J. Kennedy, "The Face of 'Grassroots Democracy' in Rural China: Real Versus Cosmetic Elections," *Asian Survey* 42, no. 3 (2002): 456.

¹⁶ The township-leading cadres refer to the government head and Party secretary. The leading cadres at the town and county level are transferred every three to four years. Village cadres and regular town and county officials are not subject to the cadre transfer system (*ganbu jiaoliu tizhi*). For a very good analysis of the cadre management system at the local level, see Maria Edin, "State Capacity and Local Agents Control in China: CCP Cadre Management from a Township Perspective," *The China Quarterly*, no. 173 (2003): 35–52.

¹⁷ Township-leading cadres have a "responsibility contract" that specifically lays out policy obligations such as economic development projects, family planning targets, and tax/fee quotas. The contracts also prioritize the policies and laws to be carried out. The township-leading cadres sign a contract every year. In addition, the township government also has village leaders and Party secretaries sign responsibility contracts.

¹⁸ Interview, June 2004.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ This is not an unusual viewpoint. Jean Oi pointed out that higher authorities tend to take this view of village elections in order to promote the implementation at lower levels. See Jean Oi, "Economic Development, Stability and Democratic Village Self-Governance," in *China Review 1996*, ed. Maurice Brosseau et al. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1996).

²¹ See Appendix 2 for the question on the importance of village elections.

²² The village elections in Shaanxi Province took place in 1999 and 2002. The surveys were conducted in 2000 and 2004.

²³ According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in Shaanxi Province the election cycle began in 1990. Thus, 1996 represents the third round, 1999 the fourth, and 2002 the fifth round of elections.

²⁴ In Table 1, it is township 31 (T31).

²⁵ The measure for "direct observation" is what villagers report as the nomination process. In almost every village in the 2000 and 2004 samples, villagers gave different answers as to what kind of nomination process occurred in the last election. This is different from the institutional definition in Table 1 (see Appendix 3).

²⁶ Residents in one Shaanxi village in a county near Xi'an became violent when the township (*zhen*) officials came into the village in the middle of the election and began making changes in the well-established election process. A number of villagers beat one official and overturned a police vehicle. See Zheng Yu, "Hu xian Dayan cun huan jie xuanju cheng naoju" (Hu county Dayan village elections changes become farcical), *Huashang bao* (Chinese business journal), 10 August 2000, 1.

²⁷ The World Values Survey 2000 shows that a vast majority of respondents display strong support for the central leadership and satisfaction with the national economy.

²⁸ Bernstein and Lü, "Taxation without Representation"; Justin Yifu Lin, Ran Tao, Liu Mingxing, and Zhang Qi, *Urban and Rural Household Taxation in China: Measurement and Stylized Facts*, Working Paper (Beijing: China Center for Economic Research, Peking University, 2002); Tao Ran and Mingxing Liu, "Government Regulations and Rural Taxation in China," *Perspectives* 5, no. 2 (2004): 1–5.

²⁹ The village is from the 2000 sample and the code is village number 2 from township 1 in county 3.

³⁰ Kevin O'Brien and Li Liangjiang, "Accommodating 'Democracy' in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 162 (2000): 465–89; Bernstein and Lü, "Taxation without Representation."

³¹ Of course, this also has to do with sample size. The survey randomly samples nine villagers as well as the village leader, Party secretary, and accountant. Thus, the "villager estimate" is that of the nine villagers and the "accountant estimate" concerns the whole village.

³² O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*, 92.

³³ The villager gave me his stamped tax form with the written comments, Interview, April 2001.

³⁴ Although the reports of arbitrary fees continued into the 1990s, the township officials and village cadres were not necessarily collecting excess fees for their own benefit. After the 1994 fiscal reforms, township governments and village committees were left on their own to provide funding for local services.

³⁵ Lin et al., *Urban and Rural Household Taxation in China*; Tao and Liu, "Government Regulations and Rural Taxation in China."

³⁶ Li, "Political Trust in Rural China"; Saich, "Citizens' Perceptions of Governance in Rural and Urban China"; and World Values Survey 2000.

³⁷ Bernstein and Lü, "Taxation without Representation"; R. S. Eckaus, "Some Consequences of Fiscal Reliance on Extrabudgetary Revenues in China," *China Economic Review* 14, no. 1 (2003): 72–88; Ray Yep, *Maintaining Stability in Rural China: Challenges and Responses*, Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: Center for Northeastern Asian Policy Studies, Brookings Institution, 2002).

³⁸ Ray Yep, "Can 'Tax-for-Fee' Reform Reduce Rural Tension in China? The Process, Progress and Limitations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 177 (2004): 42–70.

³⁹ For a very good recent analysis on village elections and the unintended consequences, see He Baogang, *Rural Democracy in China: The Role of Village Elections* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

⁴⁰ Tony Saich and Xuedong Yang, "Township Elections in China: Extending Democracy or Institutional Innovation," *China Report* 39, no. 4 (2003): 477–97; Mary E. Gallagher, "China in 2004: Stability above All," *Asian Survey* 45, no. 1 (2005): 21–32; and Li Lianjiang, "The Politics of Introducing Direct Township Elections in China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 171 (2002): 704–23.

⁴¹ The survey may be considered a representative sample of Shaanxi Province, but *not* rural China. See Melanie Manion, "Survey Research in the Study of Contemporary China: Learning from Local Samples," *The China Quarterly*, no. 139 (1994): 741.

⁴² For a clear explanation of Skinner's model see Daniel Little, *Understanding Peasant China: Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 69–104.

⁴³ See Shi Tianjian, "Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy," *World Politics* 51, no. 3 (1999): 385–412.

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