

Conflict Management through Controlled Elections:

“Harmonising Interventions” by Party Work Teams in Chinese Village Elections

MING MA is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Nanjing School of Administration, 190 Lingshan North Road, Jiangsu, China. He received his PhD in government and international studies from Hong Kong Baptist University (maming@life.hkbu.edu.hk).

YI KANG is Associate Professor of government and international studies at Hong Kong Baptist University, Academic and Administration Building, Baptist University Road Campus, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong SAR. She received her PhD in political science from Yale University. She is author of *Disaster Management in China in a Changing Era* (2015). She has published articles in *Journal of Contemporary China*, *China Information*, *China Review*, *Food Control*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, etc. (yikang@hkbu.edu.hk).

ABSTRACT: This study explores a distinct type of electoral intervention, which we call “harmonising intervention,” by the Chinese local state to achieve the goal of securing the joint post of the village Party secretary and Village Committee director. It involves mediating conflicts through electoral interventions and using elections to create harmony. The research finds that through such interventions, the local state simultaneously accomplishes the legitimisation, information collection, elite co-optation, and clout demonstration functions of authoritarian elections. “Harmonising interventions” have obvious power concentration effects and strengthen local state control rather than village self-governance.

KEYWORDS: Chinese village election, electoral intervention, conflict management, local Party-state, rural governance.

After the “Organic Law of the Village Committee of the People’s Republic of China” was promulgated in 1987, elections to posts within the Village Committee (VC) were widely held in rural areas in China in the 1990s with the aim of consolidating the regime by solving the severe information asymmetry and principal-agent problems caused by multiple government layers and a large number of villages. Researchers find that elections can empower villagers to vote out corrupt village leaders and thus curb cadres’ predation and enhance local state accountability (O’Brien and Li 2000; Zhang et al. 2004; Wang and Yao 2007; Manion 2009).

Nonetheless, grassroots elections have impaired the ruling party’s ability to signal its strength in rural society and have often made existing conflicts in villages more evident or have triggered new conflicts (Hu 2005; Su et al. 2011; Wong, Tang, and Liu 2020). In some regions, informal groups and thugs manipulate elections (Tsai 2007; O’Brien and Han 2009; Mattingly 2016). Power struggles

among different forces in villages are further exacerbated by the rise in value of collective property assets, which generates greater incentives for electoral fraud and manipulation by both informal groups and local officials (Shi 1999; Zhong and Chen 2002; O’Brien and Han 2009).

Conflicts among village elites, especially those in leadership positions, are no less intense than cadre-mass conflicts. Party elites have expressed concerns that an elected VC may impair the authority of the Village Party Committee (VPC) (O’Brien and Li 2000; Guo and Bernstein 2004). As a result, the “locus of power” in villages has been destabilised by increasing tensions and power struggles between the VPC and the VC, especially when the Village Party secretary (VPS), who is appointed by the upper-level authority, and the Village Committee director (VCD), who is elected by the rural residents, are from opposing factions or clans in the village (Oi and Rozelle 2000; Sun et al. 2013). The recent introduction of new governance

Table 1. Effects of different mechanisms for achieving the goal of the joint post of the VPS and the VCD

Mechanism	Upward accountability	Conflict mediation	Electoral legitimacy	Information gathering	Signalling strength
Two-ballot system	×	√	√	√	×
Appointing elected VCD as VPS	×	√	√	√	×
Appointing unelected VPS as VCD	√	×	×	×	√
Harmonising intervention to make VPS win the VC election	√	√	√	√	√

Source: authors.

mechanisms such as “one issue, one discussion” (*yishi yiyi* 一事一議) to tie the hands of predatory local officials signifies collective decision-making, particularly regarding public project construction in villages. Village elites representing different interests all have veto power in this process. Therefore, elite divisions directly cause difficulties in policy implementation and village development as there are often discussions without consensus and deadlocks in decision-making.

To consolidate elite solidarity, improve village administration, and strengthen the Party-state’s control and legitimacy at the grassroots level, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long promoted the goal of securing the joint post of the VPS and the VCD – “one shoulder pole” (*yijiantiao* 一肩挑) (Wang and Mou 2021). To achieve this goal, the top leadership and local state have experimented with various measures over the years, oscillating between strengthening the democratic selection of village leaders and bypassing elections to reinforce top-down control. These measures include installing two-ballot systems to make the candidates of the VPS subject to popular vote (Li 1999),¹ holding the VCD election first and appointing the winner as the VPS (Schubert 2002), higher-ups directly appointing the VPS as the VCD (Pastor and Tan 2009), etc. However, the effects of these measures have been unsatisfactory. They have either reinforced the top-down control problem, as elected village Party secretaries are more likely to stand with voters; or have exacerbated tensions and conflicts in village administration, as higher-ups’ direct appointment deprives the village leadership of electoral legitimacy that allows them to mediate cadre-mass confrontations and conflicts between different interests.

In recent years, the top leadership has increasingly emphasised the importance of Party leadership in rural society (Zhou 2017). The leadership has reiterated the goal of the joint post of the VPS and the VCD. The “Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalisation” approved by the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee in 2018 explicitly stated that the joint posts of the VPS and the VCD should reach 35% by 2020 and 50% by 2022.² This goal was also stressed in the “Regulations on Rural Work” promulgated in September 2019. In response, local state organs have taken the initiative to introduce new mechanisms to coordinate VPS and VCD elections to get the VPS, who is nominated by the upper-level Party branch and voted for by the village Party members, elected as the VCD through competitive VC elections.³ What approach can better integrate the separate or even conflictual processes of VPS appointments and VCD elections, while the former stress top-down control and the latter feature bottom-up opinion expression?

This study explores a distinct type of electoral intervention by the Chinese local state to achieve the goal of joint postings for the VPS/VCD, which we call “harmonising intervention.” It involves mediating conflicts through electoral interventions and using elections to create harmony. Through such interventions, the local state seeks to “kill several birds with one stone”: simultaneously accomplishing the legitimisation, information collection, elite co-optation, and clout demonstration functions of authoritarian elections. In this process, the local state enhances both its despotic and infrastructural power in grassroots society.

Literature Review

Elections and conflict management

Many believe that elections either do not exist or are noncompetitive in authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002). Nonetheless, researchers have noted an increasing prevalence of national- and subnational-level elections in authoritarian regimes, which in many ways serve to assuage social and political conflicts and thus perpetuate authoritarianism (Lipset 1960; Schapiro 1964; Cornelius, Eisenstadt, and Hindley 1999; Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Schedler 2006; Morse 2012). Elections facilitate the co-optation of social groups (Gandhi 2008) and powerful elites through clientelist exchanges (Lust-Okar 2009). National and subnational elections also help autocrats gather information on cadre performance (Zaslavsky and Brym 1978; Blaydes 2011) and the distribution of societal support (Magaloni 2006; Little 2017). Finally, elections enable autocrats to signal strength to deter rival collective actions and military defection (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Simpser 2013).

Although elections can be effective in conflict management, they may also ignite deep-rooted conflicts. Authoritarian regimes face particularly daunting challenges in holding elections as

1. The two-ballot system model is still adopted by some local governments in China.
2. “中共中央國務院印發‘鄉村振興戰略規劃（2018-2022年）’” (*Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan yinfa “xiangcun zhenxing zhanlue guihua (2018-2022 nian)”*), The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council issued the “Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalisation (2018-2022)”, *Xinhuanet* (新華網), 26 September 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-09/26/c_1123487123.htm (accessed on 7 January 2020).
3. “中共中央印發‘中國共產黨農村工作條例’” (*Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa “Zhongguo gongchandang nongcun gongzuo tiaoli”*), The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued the “Chinese Communist Party Regulations on Rural Work”, *Xinhuanet* (新華網), 1 September 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-09/01/c_1124947671.htm (accessed on 6 January 2020).

various functions of elections are incompatible with the regimes themselves due to their nature. Wise resource allocation, power sharing, and policy concessions to appease social demands and co-opt social groups and elites require quality information that can be gathered only through free and fair elections. However, competitive elections provide opposition forces with opportunities to organise and challenge autocrats (Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Morse 2012). To show strength, the actors in power resort to electoral fraud and manipulation to ensure grand victories (Dunning 2011). This weakens the information-gathering function of elections, intensifies conflicts, and results in great sociopolitical instability (Snyder 2000). Controlled or manipulated elections cannot make promises of future benefits and credible power-sharing regimes (Powell 2009). As the losers of the current election do not anticipate any opportunity to win elections in the future, they may find it optimal to fight or at least thwart the winner's exercise of power in the postelection administrative context.

Whether an election becomes a blessing or a curse in authoritarian settings depends on how the ruling party manoeuvres the electoral process to ensure a stable outcome and minimise its disruptive effects. This study examines relevant dynamics in the context of subnational elections in contemporary China.

Vertical management in China

How the central leadership influences local governance has long been an overarching theme of Chinese politics. Scholars pay close attention to the polity's changing arrangements in vertical control over time. Despite experimentation with various forms of decentralisation (Landry 2008; Zhan 2009), observers notice the tendency of strengthening vertical control in recent years. There was "soft centralisation," where power was shifted from local government (*kuai* 块) to functional bureaucracies (*tiao* 条) that were centrally controlled to counter local protectionism (Mertha 2005). There was integration of the CCP's Commission for Discipline Inspection and the People's Procuratorate (Li and Wang 2019). There was "institutionalised mobilisation" in which cross-system, cross-level, and pairing-up mechanisms were used to adjust both the *tiao-kuai* relationships and state-society relations (Tsai and Liao 2020). In addition to these institutional changes, the practice of sending ad-hoc task forces such as work teams, central inspection groups, or first-secretaries-in-residence to directly intervene in grassroots governance by higher levels of the Party-state has become routine in Xi's signature anticorruption and antipoverty campaigns (Yeo 2016; Liao, Tsai, and Lin 2020; Perry 2021).

Building on the literature on both authoritarian election and Chinese vertical management, this study illustrates how the Chinese Party-state uses subnational elections as a tool for conflict management and vertical control. To serve this purpose, electoral intervention does not take the conventional form of fraud but rather entails a combination of informal, ad hoc, and formal institutional approaches as well as a flexible deployment of the means of consultation, competition, persuasion, and coercion. Electoral intervention is the epitome of how ad hoc forces are deployed to strengthen the Party-state's vertical management. Compared with the intervention mechanisms documented by other authors, our study elaborates a more complex process where work teams dispatched top-down need to manage subnational elections, which are supposed

to be bottom-up and have multiple intrinsically incompatible functions in gathering information, co-opting elites, appeasing societal demands, enhancing legitimacy, and showing clout. We describe the work team's endeavours to integrate those self-contradictory functions to exploit the maximised benefits of elections.

Method

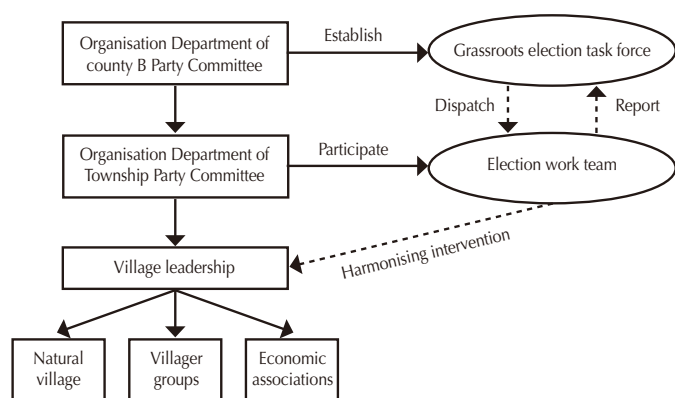
The authors conducted ethnographic research in county B in Guangdong Province and adopted a process-tracing approach to examine how harmonising intervention is carried out by the local authorities to improve the rate of joint VPS/VCD posts. Process tracing enables us to be sensitive to the sequence of developments and subtle dynamic changes and thus to disentangle complex causality in a single-case study (Brady and Collier 2010).

County B was deliberately selected for its successful experience in practising harmonising intervention. It is located in the central part of the Pearl River Delta plain and is economically developed. Its jurisdiction covers ten townships that govern 162 villages. The villages are all administrative villages, each containing several natural villages or villager groups.⁴ Thanks to rapid economic development, the value of the collectively-owned assets in the villages, especially land, has increased exponentially over the past decade. As a result, conflicts surrounding the management of collective assets and land expropriation have become frequent and acute. Since 2018, the government of county B has sought to implement the central government's rural revitalisation policy and resolve village conflicts through the promotion of the joint post of the VPS/VCD. A Grassroots Election Task Force (hereafter referred to as Task Force) was established specifically to accomplish the joint office target, which was considered a top priority. The Task Force was led by the county Party secretary. Members included the township Party secretaries and Organisation Department directors. The Task Force dispatched ten work teams, each comprising one standing committee member of the county-level Party Committee, one top official from the township government, and six to nine civil servants from county- and township-level bureaus, to conduct harmonising interventions in the elections in all 162 villages in county B (Figure 1). Selection criteria for work team members were (1) knowledge of the Party's personnel management and (2) the need for young, promising cadres to accumulate grassroots work experience for future promotion. The performance of the work teams was evaluated by the county-level Organisation Department with respect to procedures (e.g., the approach and quality of preelection consultation and investigation) and outcomes (e.g., the competency of the VPS supported by the work teams, the achievement of the joint-post goal, and the election order). The work teams were responsible to the Task Force and under the direct supervision of the County Discipline Inspection Committee (DDIC), which reduced the chances of village cadres bribing work team members. The authority of county B made it explicit that work team members who performed outstandingly could be promoted regardless of their length of service and that those who had poor performance would be denied promotion for one year. Through harmonising interventions by the work teams, more than 40

4. Villager groups are legacies of the production teams (*shengchan dui* 生產隊) that emerged during the command economy era. A villager group comprises several neighbouring households. The villager group leader is elected by the group members.

village Party secretaries were replaced by more suitable Party cadres between 2018 and 2020. The cross-office rate of the VPS and VCD increased from 68% in 2018 to 100% in 2020. Thus, this case allows us to identify the key measures pursued by the local Party-state in steering grassroots elections.

Figure 1. Grassroots election management structure in county B. The bold lines illustrate regular administration flows within county B. The dashed lines indicate the relationship between regular bureaucratic structure and the ad hoc election task force.



Source: authors.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 2019 and May 2020. We interviewed 12 Party cadres and 25 government officials from the administrative levels above the village level who had experience conducting harmonising interventions. They came from county- and township-level Organisation Departments, Party Discipline Committees, and Police and Finance Bureaus. Our interviews sought to understand their rationales and detailed operations in electoral interventions. We also interviewed ten village leaders, including the incumbent and former VPSs and VCDs, 15 village elites such as clan leaders and private enterprise owners, and 26 ordinary farmers to obtain a panoramic picture of the interactions among different parties involved in village elections.

Harmonising intervention in village elections in county B

Drawing on the data collected from interviews and Party and government documents, we found that harmonising intervention is carried out in three steps in county B.

First, consultation and investigations take place to gather information on the village. The county authority dispatches work teams to the villages to collect information on the incumbent village leadership and the existing contentions and grievances and to identify potential nominees for the joint post of the VPS/VCD. In the process, the work teams broadly consult rank-and-file Party members, village elites, and ordinary residents. They also coordinate among multiple government departments to conduct background investigations on potential candidates. The dispatch of work teams by higher-level governments to grassroots society for temporary and urgent tasks is one of the CCP's frequently used governance techniques (Perry 2019). In county B, we observe that the work teams involved in

village elections are normally composed of five to eight members who are county-level and township-level Party cadres.

Second, the nomination of the right candidate takes place through a carrot-and-stick approach: if the incumbent VPS is not the most satisfactory candidate, the work team uses persuasion, compensation, and coercion to make him/her drop out of the race for reelection and introduces a new candidate who is believed to be more loyal, competent, and/or popular than the incumbent. The work team then mobilises Party members to support this candidate in the VPS elections.

Finally, an electoral campaign to settle existing contentions and prevent postelection conflicts is executed. After the VPS is appointed, the work team starts its "campaign" for the VPS in the VC election. It conducts another round of consultations, visiting almost every household in the village to ensure the accurate calculation of votes. It also helps the VPS build rapport with the villagers and gain popularity by spending resources to solve grievances and provide public goods while propagandising the advantage of the joint post of the VPS and the VCD, and co-opting or suppressing strong competitors of the VPS to ensure that the VPS wins the VC election.

In villages where serious internal conflicts cannot be resolved through ballot boxes or where suitable VPS candidates are not found, the township authority dispatches cadres to temporarily serve as the first secretary⁵ to quell power struggles among the elite groups, improve cadre-mass relations, and search for suitable candidates for the VPS outside those villages.

Gathering information through consultation and investigation

A popular, competent, and loyal VPS is vital for the joint post of the VPS/VCD. Information on the performance of the incumbent village leadership and other indigenous talents who can be potential VPS candidates is jointly held by multiple government agencies and ordinary residents in the village. Whether the incumbent VPS is capable and popular can be learned through extensive social consultation. Villagers who have interacted with the incumbents and alternative candidates can also evaluate their political loyalty and suitability to serve as VPS by making note of whether they have ever criticised the Party, the central leadership, or state policies and whether they participate in regular religious activities. The government tax department can report on the economic status of potential candidates. The police can check the security information of the candidates, such as their criminal records, records of participating in radical collective actions, or membership in thug groups.

In 2019, The Organisation Department of county B (BOD) formulated a policy of prequalification review and record filing for VPS nominees (*cun (shequ) dangzuzhi shuji renzhi zige shenhe he bei'an guanli zhidu* 村(社區)黨組織書記任職資格審核和備案管理制度). To implement this policy, the BOD dispatched more than 100 cadres to form work teams and visit 205 urban and rural communities to gather information on the members of their Party branches and/or Village Committees. The measurement indexes are listed in Table 2.

5. The CCP established a rural first secretary-in-residence (*zhucun diyi shuji* 駐村第一書記) system in 2001. Young cadres working in the provincial government are appointed to serve as first secretaries in charge of both the VPC and VC of certain villages to complete specific tasks. "This is a temporary posting and the appointees remain attached to their parent units. Those who perform well are rapidly promoted after the end of the posting" (Liao, Tsai, and Lin 2020: 170).

Table 2. Prequalification review of the VPS nominee

Aspect	Key Index
Loyalty (20 points)	Has the person practised “four types of consciousnesses” (<i>sige yishi</i> 四個意識), “four matters of confidence” (<i>sige zixin</i> 四個自信), and “two upholds” (<i>liangge weihu</i> 兩個維護)? ⁶ (10 points)
	Has the person falsified, misled, or deceived the Party-state agencies and acted in a Janus-faced manner? (10 points)
Competency (20 points)	Can the person unite subordinates and strengthen village leadership cohesion? (10 points)
	Does the person have business management or entrepreneurship experience? (5 points)
	Is the person trusted and respected by the villagers so that s/he can effectively mediate conflicts? (5 points)
Diligence (20 points)	Has the person followed the principles of democratic election, management, decision-making, and supervision in routine work? (10 points)
	Does the person participate actively in meetings and other organisational activities of the VPC and VC? (5 points)
	Is the person active in responding to villagers’ demands and helping them solve problems? (5 points)
Achievement (15 points)	Has the person contributed towards promoting village income growth and public welfare, building and maintaining public infrastructure, and providing social services to the residents when in office? (5 points)
	Has the person managed to maintain social order and preserve the culture of the village? (5 points)
	Has the person implemented state policies around family planning, disaster relief, farm subsidy, minimum living standard guarantee, etc.? (5 points)
Integrity (25 points)	Has the person and his/her relatives held extravagant weddings or funerals? (5 points)
	Has the person been disciplined for crime, prostitution, gambling, or drugs? (10 points)
	Has the person ever accepted bribes or embezzled government funds or collectively-owned assets? (5 points)
	Has the person followed social ethics and village regulations? (5 points)

Source: compiled by the authors from government documents and data collected from fieldwork in October 2019.

The work teams conducted two rounds of consultations and investigations. The first round involved the “democratic appraisal” of the performance of the incumbent VPCs and VCs and the strength and weaknesses of each of their members. The work teams held meetings for this appraisal, inviting members of the VPCs and VCs, the leaders of villager groups, the representatives of village collective economic organisations, private enterprise owners, and social organisation managers to express their views at the meetings. The second round of consultations was conducted in the form of a questionnaire survey and interviews with village elites, rank-and-file Party members, and ordinary residents. The work team members directly went to households for one-to-one interviews to collect information on the incumbent village leadership’s operational status, work rationales, degree of solidarity, and its members’ individual characteristics. The work teams assured the interviewees that their responses would be kept confidential and that all solicited opinions and requests would be recorded and reported carefully. They particularly encouraged the interviewees to comment on cadre-mass relationships that were crucial for local state legitimacy and stability. In some villages, residents frankly told the work teams that their village cadres were “all rotters” (*cunganbu meiyige haodongxi* 村幹部沒一個好東西). At the same time, multiple Party-state organs, such as the DDIC, the Political and Legal Affairs Commission, the Finance Bureau, and the Police Bureau, were all requested to report on the background of the people under investigation.

These consultation and investigation processes were not always smooth, especially in villages where land disputes and other contentions among the cadres and villagers were intense. Disputed and disgruntled parties may want to take the opportunity to ask work teams to solve their problems first. Under such circumstances, work teams usually delegated some members to deal with disputes and discontent, whereas the other members continued to implement their original schedules to ensure efficient progress at work. All work teams we studied managed to win villagers’ trust by listening and responding to their grievances and demands, serving to “boost the CCP’s legitimacy in the villages” (Liao, Tsai, and Lin 2020: 177). As commented by Tsai and Liao (2020: 57), “This kind of responsive authoritarianism has mobilized both cadres and the masses.”

After gathering abundant information, the work teams took appropriate measures to optimise village leadership by selecting VPS nominees who were believed to be capable of strengthening internal cohesion in the villages and of winning the VC elections. Political loyalty and a clean record, such as never having engaged in corruption or radical collective action, not being a thug, etc., were

6. “Four types of consciousnesses” refers to being conscious of the need to uphold political integrity, to keep the big picture in mind, to follow the CCP as the core of Chinese leadership, and to act consistently with the CCP Central Committee policy. “Four matters of confidence” refers to confidence in the chosen path, guiding theories, the political system, and the culture of the CCP. The content and requirements of “two upholds” involve upholding Xi Jinping’s core role and the Central Party leadership. In practice, the work teams ask interviewees whether the incumbent leaders have ever expressed opinions against the top Party leadership or criticised central policies.

prerequisites for the selection of VPS nominees. The work teams and the BOD that oversaw problems in those domains received harsh penalties for non-performance. Therefore, individuals who defected in terms of loyalty or integrity were among the first to be removed from the candidate pool, irrespective of how competent or popular they were. Cadres who were found to be severely problematic by work teams lost their jobs immediately.

Ousting undesirable VPS candidates with a carrot-and-stick approach

When the work team finds the incumbent VPS satisfactory and there are no other better options, the incumbent VPS becomes a formal candidate for the joint post. The work team informs him or her of the feedback from the villagers, not only to remind the candidate to improve but also to help the candidate form strategies to enhance popularity in the campaign for the VC election.

In villages where work teams identify better alternatives to the incumbent VPSs, they use persuasion, compensation, and/or menacing tactics to make the incumbent VPSs drop out of the race for reelection. According to experienced work team members who were interviewed, approximately one-third of the unqualified incumbent VPSs immediately gave up their positions because they knew that they had lost the trust and support of the residents and the work teams and were unlikely to regain it. Two-thirds of the unqualified VPSs, however, were reluctant to quit. Under such circumstances, the work teams had to deploy carrot-and-stick approaches.

Advising

The incumbent VPS of village 12, Lai, enjoyed over 70% percent of the villagers' support. The work team found no political or integrity problems with him in their consultations and investigations. He was considered the best candidate for the VPS/VCD joint post. The work team told Lai that several residents had complained about the lack of transparency in village finance management, which had the potential to enable corruption and embezzlement. In response, Lai invited an independent professional auditing agency to review the village's financial management thoroughly and put up posters in public places to publicise the results. He also increased the frequency of publishing financial statements from quarterly to monthly and sent e-copies of the statements to the villagers on their WeChat groups to ensure that all of them were able to access the documents conveniently. According to the work team members in their follow-up interviews with the villagers, many residents welcomed these practices and stated that the new measures were helpful in clearing up misunderstandings. After Lai gained sufficient supportive votes within the VPC, the township-level Organisation Department approved his nomination as the VPS of village 12. The VPS automatically became the candidate for the VC election. After this nomination was announced, the work team received no complaints from the villagers.

Persuasion

Persuasion is the most frequently adopted method by work teams as it costs less. Work teams often invite authoritative cadres at the township level to chat with unqualified incumbent VPSs. The invited cadres first applaud the VPS's past contributions to village development and emphasise the importance of selecting a competent

and popular VPS who can win the VC elections. This is an objective set by the central leadership and is expected to be enforced seriously by all Party members. The cadres also remind the VPS to continuously support village development even after leaving the position. This arrangement is intended to show the VPSs that they are still highly valued by the local authorities while at the same time exerting pressure on them. As a work team member explained in an interview, "When the township leaders come to persuade you personally, you should know where you stand and make wise decisions. Otherwise, you have no sense of propriety." In some cases, the strategy of "relational repression" (Deng and O'Brien 2013) was employed: the work team invited the children or relatives of the unqualified incumbent VPS who worked in government or state-owned enterprises to persuade him or her.

For example, through its consultations in village 10, the work team found that the incumbent VPS, Ho, had failed to meet expectations in terms of competence and achievement. Many villagers commented that Ho was honest but incompetent and had tried to avoid trouble and conflict through inaction. Over the past five years, the nearby villages had developed rapidly in their economy, but village 10 lagged far behind. When the work team tried to persuade Ho to quit, he objected and said, "Although I have few achievements, I have also made few mistakes, and have devoted great effort to my work." The work team invited the township Party secretary, Ms. Li, to have dinner at Ho's house to continue to persuade him. Li successfully convinced Ho to leave his office on a voluntary basis.

Compensation

In some cases, the work teams used compensation, promising unqualified incumbent VPSs other public offices in exchange for giving up their posts. For instance, when an incumbent VPS has a good relationship with the work team's preferred candidate and expresses willingness to support the new candidate, the incumbent is encouraged to serve as deputy Party secretary, and his or her salary remains unchanged. The township government also recruits some unqualified VPSs as their staff without formal positions and gives them salaries equivalent to those of section assistants (*fukeji* 副科級).

The incumbent VPS of village 5, Cai, was considered undesirable by the work team because of her old age and chronic illnesses. However, Cai insisted that she could continue to work as the VPS. She emphasised that it was immoral to expel her after she had served the village for so long and made tremendous contributions. After several rounds of negotiations, Cai was offered a new job as an administrative staff member at the township public service office.

Menace

Menace is used when a work team finds clues of misconduct on the part of the undesirable incumbent VPS and the incumbent refuses to leave office. Work teams are not authorised to investigate crimes, and they have great time pressure to complete their current work. Therefore, they cannot gather enough evidence to prove malfeasance on the part of an incumbent VPS. Nonetheless, when clues of misconduct are available, a work team will not compensate an incumbent VPS with a new public post. Instead, it will convince the VPS to quit by issuing a threat of a thorough investigation into his or her financial or integrity problems.

The work team received many reports from the residents of village 4 that the incumbent VPS, Zhu, had embezzled collective assets in contracting fishpond projects. As this had happened five years earlier and the reporting residents could not provide solid evidence, the work team persuaded Zhu to quit, but he refused and insisted that he was innocent. The work team then showed him a receipt that recorded his purchase of many expensive cigarettes and wines. Although this receipt could not directly prove embezzlement, it certainly indicated extravagant waste on his part. The work team told Zhu that this was only part of the evidence it had obtained and that they would like to help him “save face” and let him quit by himself rather than submit all the evidence to the County Economic Crime Investigation Team. Zhu left both his position and village 4 to escape further investigation.

Campaigning for the VPS as conflict prevention and resolution

The process of selecting a VPS nominee significantly enhances the chances of the VPS winning the VC election. To ensure the victory of the VPS in the elections, the work team pursues preelection polls to accurately calculate votes and actively co-opt or repress the strongest competitors to the VPS. The work team also advertises the advantage of the VPS/VCD joint post to the general public and offers financial resources to help the VPS provide quick solutions to existing grievances and demands or public goods to boost the VPS's popularity within a short period of time.

Preelection polls and propaganda

Preelection polls are conducted in a manner similar to that of the consultations for the selection of the VPS nominees. As the pool of VCD candidates is broader than that of the VPS (the former requires no Party membership), the work teams had to conduct preelection polls on a wider scale. The work teams worked with grid-style social managers⁷ in villages to visit almost every household to collect information on voters' preferences. By calculating the support rate of the VPS and other competitors, the work teams take appropriate measures to reduce competitiveness in the VC elections. For instance, they talk to powerful competitors and encourage them to run for deputy VCD in the VC elections, promising them that they will receive a salary equivalent to that of the VCD level once they succeed. In this way, competitors are co-opted into future village leadership, and their potential challenge to the leadership in the postelection governance context is preempted.

The work teams also highlight the advantage of the VPS/VCD joint post in reducing power struggles within the village leadership and avoiding the politics of blaming and shirking responsibilities. They advertise this advantage to voters through various channels, including brochures, board notices, and messages on WeChat groups. To address the villagers' concerns that the joint post can cause arbitrary decision-making and rampant corruption, work teams emphasise the rules of “four discussions and two publicising” (*siyi liang gongkai* 四議兩公開)⁸ in village governance to ensure adequate public deliberations on important village affairs and highlight the role of the DDIC in periodic patrol and daily supervision.

Boosting voter support

The BOD also provides resources to help VPSs resolve conflicts in villages and improve their service provision capacity to boost their

voter support. In 2018, the BOD set up a special fund for grassroots Party-building and allocated 20 million *yuan* from it to community development each year. The community development fund was distributed through two channels: one-third was allocated through competition, and two-thirds were equally and directly distributed to each VPS to satisfy the needs of their village. Before 2018, when this fund was not available, when villagers asked merely for streetlamps to be repaired, the village leadership had to apply for funding from its higher-level authorities and had to wait for months to obtain approval. The new funding enabled the VPS to respond to villagers' demands rapidly and effectively, which significantly improved cadre-mass relations.

Finally, the work teams mobilised VPC members, village group leaders, enterprise runners, economic corporation managers, and rank-and-file Party members to persuade their relatives, neighbours, and friends to vote for the VPS. Task groups comprising village elites were formed and visited one household after another to introduce the VPS to voters who were unfamiliar with him/her or undecided *vis-à-vis* their voting preferences. From our interviews with the villagers, we found that while this door-to-door campaign could not guarantee that every voter would support the VPS in the VCD election, it created an impression among the villagers that the VPS enjoyed high popularity and that the village elites all rallied around him/her.

On VC election day, every step strictly adhered to the prescribed procedures and was transparent. The entire process was video-recorded for upper-level checks. The DDIC also dispatched staff to the villages to monitor whether there was any vote-buying or clan intervention in the elections. It also set up physical and digital mailboxes to receive reports and collect information on electoral manipulation. The rule-based election largely lacked competitiveness as the work team's thorough and systematic preelection work had already made the VPS the only possible winner. However, there were exceptional cases. In villages where conflicts between different factions and clans or between cadres and masses were intense, the work teams' endeavours did not pay off easily.

Intervening continuously until the joint post was accomplished

For villages with severe conflicts among the elites or intense cadre-mass relationships, or where suitable joint-post candidates were lacking, the local authorities needed to dispatch county-level Party cadres to temporarily serve as the village first secretary who worked with the work teams to quell elite conflicts, improve cadre-mass relationships, and look for VPS candidates.

For example, the cadre-mass relationship in village 6 was intense and full of mutual distrust. The villagers suspected that the incumbent village leaders had embezzled collectively-owned money but lacked concrete evidence of the crime. The villagers petitioned to the township authority on several occasions and received no response

7. Yongshun Cai, “Grid Management and Social Control in China,” *Asia Dialogue*, 27 April 2018, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2018/04/27/grid-management-and-social-control-in-china> (accessed on 3 May 2021).

8. “Four discussions” means the VPC makes proposals, the VPC and VC deliberate on the proposals, all Party members review the proposals through meetings, and villagers/villager representatives approve the proposals through meetings. “Two publicising” indicates publicising both decisions and their implementation outcomes in village governance.

except for a few threats from some thugs. When the work team held a consultation to select the VPS nominee, most residents believed that the work team would be partial to the incumbent village leadership and pretended that they supported the incumbent VPS. In the VC election, however, they voted for another candidate. As the joint post objective was not accomplished, the BOD appointed the deputy director of the county Police Bureau as the first secretary of village 6, who was responsible for investigating the villagers' reports and improving cadre-mass relations. A month later, the incumbent VPS and one township-level official were arrested. The first secretary publicised the results of the investigation and apologised sincerely to the villagers. The villagers then became more willing to tell the work team their real preferences in terms of VPS candidates in the subsequent rounds of harmonising interventions. Village 6 achieved the joint post goal in December 2019.

Between 2018 and 2020, the BOD established a special team to cope with 11 difficult cases in villages where Party organisation work was weak and fragmented. The special team dispatched 11 cadres above the deputy section level to the villages as first secretaries to rectify problems and resolve conflicts. The BOD also dispatched 109 young and middle-aged cadres and 54 security police from provincial-level government agencies to 54 key problematic villages to temporarily take over the positions of deputy Party secretaries or assistants to Party secretaries to help the villages accomplish specific tasks, such as strengthening grassroots Party-building, starting large projects like industrial park renovation (within or across villages), suppressing clan and other conflicts in villages for the maintenance of social stability, and optimising cadre-mass relationships. These personnel helped look for potential candidates who could possibly fill the VPS/VCD joint post.

With unremitting endeavours on the part of the work teams and the support of local authorities, county B achieved 100% joint posts in 2020. This cost the county authority not only a large amount of manpower but also total fiscal spending exceeding 10 million *yuan* in the preceding three years. This spending covered the costs of training work teams in communication and data-collection skills, and conducting background investigations and social consultations, as well as the resources invested in ousting undesirable VPS candidates and campaigning for the VPS (e.g., the aforementioned community development fund). Apparently, fiscal capacity significantly affected the effectiveness of harmonising interventions and the reproducibility of county B's experience in other regions.

However, we see government moves that allow us to expect the general application of harmonising intervention in the foreseeable future. In September 2020, the "Measures for Village Committee Elections in Guangdong Province" were revised; the revisions have strengthened Party leadership in the electoral processes and specified the roles of work teams.⁹ Similar initiatives were also implemented in other provinces. As the central leadership has made it clear that grassroots Party-building and the achievement of the VPS/VCD joint post were priority tasks in rural governance, the local state has allocated considerable manpower and resources to harmonising interventions irrespective of its financial status. The Central Organisation Department designated county B as a "grassroots Party-building monitoring point," and the Guangdong provincial government selected county B as an outstanding example

of grassroots Party-building innovation. Numerous local authorities from other regions visited county B to learn their strategies and gain from their experience in promoting the joint post. The practice of harmonising intervention has spread quickly.

Discussion

The Party work teams' harmonising intervention in village elections has several distinct features. First, the goal is to mediate conflicts both within the elite groups and between the elites and masses in the villages. The upper echelons of the local state need to draw on the machinery of the village leadership for governance and thus have an interest in ensuring a peaceful and stable environment where such machinery can operate smoothly. The work teams use preelection consultations and deliberations to understand the distribution of conflicts in villages and identify potential leaders who can be accepted by different contending parties, and are worldly enough to balance diverse expectations. The work teams help the handpicked candidates to campaign by investing resources to assuage the entire village. On the one hand, they help the candidates respond to existing grievances and demands from villagers, and on the other, they co-opt or repress powerful elite competitors to the candidates. Finally, *de jure* open and competitive elections are held to inject legitimacy into the elected village leadership and signal its strength granted by the local Party-state so that potential challenges to its power can be preempted in its postelection administration.

Second, the work teams seek to solve intrinsic conflicts around information gathering and clout demonstration in authoritarian elections by adopting a two-pronged strategy of harmonising interventions. Wong, Tang, and Liu (2020: 27) detailed the local state's two-pronged approach to intervention in elections: the local state exercises tight control over the Party elections and "distances itself from elections for non-Party positions." Our understanding of the "two-pronged strategy" differs from these authors' observations. Here, the strategy combines the opposing democratic and centralising practices, that is, the work teams apply "democratic-centralism," a decision-making and disciplinary principle rooted in the tradition of the Leninist Party, at every stage in their electoral interventions. To select the VPS, the work team encourages free discussions among Party members, village elites, and villagers' representatives on the potential candidates and their pros and cons. Once the right candidate is identified by the work team, the Party members are expected to endorse the candidate through their votes to demonstrate unity and discipline. Then, to help the VPS win the VC election, the work team pursues a second round of "democratic" consultations, which expands to cover almost every household in the village. The aim is to collect the information they need for the VPS's strategic electoral campaign. The campaign aims at "centralism" in the ballot box; that is, votes are not cast in unrestrained and unpredictable ways. When voting fails to end contentions, the work team stays on to manage postelection conflicts and carries out a new round of consultations and deliberations to seek measures to tie the hands of all contending parties and centralise power in the VPS

9. "“廣東省村民委員會選舉辦法”修訂情況解讀" (*Guangdong sheng cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju banfa*) *xiuding qingkuang jiedu*, Interpretation of the Revision of the "Measures for Village Committee Elections in Guangdong Province", *Xinhuanet* (新華網), 1 September 2019, http://smzt.gd.gov.cn/zwgk/zcfg/zcjd/spyp/content/post_3099047.html (accessed on 6 January 2020).

nominee that the work team chooses.

Third, the work teams' harmonising interventions embody a unique format of infrastructure power in contemporary China, which Chen (2020) called "local state adhocism." In electoral interventions, the work teams operate as an organisational hub and a command centre that connects different government agencies, and they pool their resources and coordinate their actions in information collection and conflict settlement. They also immerse themselves in grassroots society and interact with villagers in a direct and casual manner, which helps them map social forces and conveniently mobilise the masses. The work teams deploy highly flexible means of enforcement, combining informal consultations and deliberations, and formal electoral institutions, with the former yielding *de facto* impacts on village leadership selection and the latter remaining *de jure*. They exercise "discretionary powers, both persuasive and coercive, to 'get things done'" (Chen 2020: 182) in appeasing village contentions and helping their selected candidates get elected, which has inevitably weakened the role of legal institutions in conflict resolution and village elections.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, harmonising interventions are conducted by the work teams from outside the villages. This indicates the strengthening of Party organisations' despotic power in the rural local state in breach of essential principles of village self-governance. Work teams are the gatekeepers of village elections, architects of village leadership, and mediators and arbitrators who play a central role in resolving existing conflicts in the village and preventing future conflicts. Party dominance underscores all the processes, and Party authority and popularity among the villagers is thus significantly enhanced.

As shown in the previous section, harmonising interventions can resolve conflicts and relieve social pressures in grassroots governance in rural China. Nonetheless, interventions generally have short time horizons and aim to directly defuse or suppress conflicts rather than to foster legitimate and binding institutions for the maintenance of peace in the long run as competitive elections do. Contending parties and disgruntled villagers are often co-opted and/or coerced to give consent to the selected/elected village leadership. It is difficult to predict how sustainable the stability built on this type of consent is.

What is more certain is the power concentration effects of the elections that strengthen not village self-governance but local state control. Village leadership is centralised as the VPS and VCD are merged into a single unit. This leadership is not only *de facto* handpicked by the work teams who act on behalf of the local Party authorities but also must rely on the support of the work teams to gain legitimacy by winning elections and creating a congenial environment for its postelection governance. This results in obedient village leadership that is far more willing to act as a loyal agent of the local state than to serve as an intermediary between the state and the villagers. Centralised power implies centralised responsibility. Future misgovernance and malfunction will inevitably be entirely blamed on the centralised village leadership and the local Party-state that backs it.

Conclusion

Since taking office, Xi Jinping has launched several ambitious policy campaigns such as combatting corruption, reducing poverty, protecting the environment, and managing the pandemic. The success of each campaign hinges on how the local state actually

approaches problem-solving. In rural China, where conflicts among village elites and between cadres and masses are intense, governance is difficult and central policy cannot be fully implemented. A direct consequence of the work teams' harmonising interventions in village elections has been the redistribution of power and resources to alleviate or eliminate grievances and confrontations within villages, especially among the village elites, and thus to rebuild village management and its operational environment. We show that local Party organisations have served an increasingly predominant role in designing and orchestrating this institutional and power reconstruction.

As this study demonstrates, grassroots election not only provides a unique tool for conflict management that is distinct from the existing mechanisms, but also profoundly restructures the relationship between Party-state and village. The joint post of VPS and VCD does not necessarily lead to more accountable grassroots governance, but through the intervention processes, the Party-state strengthens its vertical control of villages, expanding and consolidating both its infrastructure and its despotic power at the expense of village self-governance. Our findings substantiate the observation by Liao, Tsai, and Lin (2020: 176) that "the system of grassroots elections has been further restricted under Xi's rule." The current institutional arrangement motivates village cadres to act as loyal stewards of upper-level authorities, which facilitates top-down policy campaigns. Despite the policy uncertainty in China, we expect such vertical management approaches to remain prevalent in the foreseeable future as the Party-state seeks to tighten its grip on rising grassroots dissent and fluctuating policy implementation.

There are a number of caveats that concern the efficacy of harmonising interventions. Above all, there should be a powerful, resourceful, and exogenous intervenor. Autocrats who lack power and resources to employ carrot-and-stick approaches or who themselves are contesting in the elections are ill-suited for harmonising interventions. Second, it stands to reason that the interventions work effectively only in elections at the level of a small county. Information-gathering through consultations and deliberations, and electoral "campaigns" through persuasion and coercion all become unendurably expensive in terms of time and human, and material resources when applied to a large population. Finally, when there are harmonising interventions in elections, the legitimacy of the electoral outcomes will be acknowledged by voters who care most about material benefits but are unlikely to be accepted by those whose primary concern is safeguarding procedural justice and democratic values.

Future research that pays attention to electoral interventions in different authoritarian contexts, at different levels and magnitudes, and with different types of voters will tell us more about the potential of such interventions to manage conflicts, reshape state-society relationships, and reconstruct power apparatuses in authoritarian regimes.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Hong Kong Research Grants Council (GRF-12607217) for providing financial support for fieldwork in Guangdong Province, China, between 2019 and 2020.

Manuscript received on 11 May 2021. Accepted on 19 January 2022.

References

- ACEMOGLU, Daron, and James A. ROBINSON. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BLAYDES, Lisa. 2011. *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BOIX, Carles. 2003. *Democracy and Redistribution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BRADY, Henry E., and David COLLIER. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- BUNCE, Valerie J., and Sharon L. WOLCHIK. 2010. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *World Politics* 62(1): 43-86.
- CHEN, Feng. 2020. "Local State Adhocracy: Infrastructural Power and Stability Maintenance in Grassroots China." *Problems of Post-Communism* 67(2): 180-92.
- CORNELIUS, Wayne, Todd A. EISENSTADT, and Jane HINDLEY. 1999. *Subnational Politics and Democratization in Mexico*. La Jolla: Centre for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego.
- DENG, Yanhua, and Kevin J. O'BRIEN. 2013. "Relational Repression in China: Using Social Ties to Demobilize Protesters." *The China Quarterly* 215: 533-52.
- DUNNING, Thad. 2011. "Fighting and Voting: Violent Conflict and Electoral Politics." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55(3): 327-39.
- GANDHI, Jennifer. 2008. *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GANDHI, Jennifer, and Ellen LUST-OKAR. 2009. "Elections under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 403-22.
- GUO, Zhenglin, and Thomas P. BERNSTEIN. 2004. "The Impact of Elections on the Village Structure of Power: The Relations between the Village Committees and the Party Branches." *Journal of Contemporary China* 13(39): 257-75.
- HU, Rong. 2005. "Economic Development and the Implementation of Village Elections in Rural China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 14(44): 427-44.
- LANDRY, Pierre F. 2008. *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LEVITSKY, Steven, and Lucan WAY. 2002. "Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51-65.
- LI, Li, and Peng WANG. 2019. "From Institutional Interaction to Institutional Integration: The National Supervisory Commission and China's New Anti-corruption Model." *The China Quarterly* 240: 967-89.
- LI, Lianjiang. 1999. "The Two-ballot System in Shanxi Province: Subjecting Village Party Secretaries to a Popular Vote." *The China Journal* 42: 103-18.
- LIAO, Xingmiu, Wen-hsuan TSAI, and Zheng-Wei LIN. 2020. "Penetrating the Grassroots: First-secretaries-in-residence and Rural Politics in Contemporary China." *Problems of Post-Communism* 67(2): 169-79.
- LIPSET, Seymour Martin. 1960. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. New York: Doubleday.
- LITTLE, Andrew T. 2017. "Are Non-competitive Elections Good for Citizens?" *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29(2): 214-42.
- LUST-OKAR, Ellen. 2009. "Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East." *Journal of Democracy* 20(3): 122-35.
- MAGALONI, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MANION, Melanie. 2009. "How to Assess Village Elections in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(60): 379-83.
- MATTINGLY, Daniel C. 2016. "Elite Capture: How Decentralization and Informal Institutions Weaken Property Rights in China." *World Politics* 68(3): 383-412.
- MERTHA, Andrew, C. 2005. "China's 'Soft' Centralization: Shifting Tiao/Kuai Authority Relations." *The China Quarterly* 184: 791-810.
- MORSE, Yonatan L. 2012. "The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism." *World Politics* 64(1): 161-98.
- O'BRIEN, Kevin J., and Rongbin HAN. 2009. "Path to Democracy? Assessing Village Elections in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(60): 359-78.
- O'BRIEN, Kevin J., and Lianjiang LI. 2000. "Accommodating 'Democracy' in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China." *The China Quarterly* 162: 465-89.
- OI, Jean C., and Scott ROZELLE. 2000. "Elections and Power: The Locus of Decision-making in Chinese Villages." *The China Quarterly* 162: 513-39.

- PASTOR, Robert A., and Qingshan TAN. 2009. "The Meaning of China's Village Elections." *The China Quarterly* 162: 490-512.
- PERRY, Elizabeth J. 2019. "Making Communism Work: Sinicizing a Soviet Governance Practice." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61(3): 535-62.
- . 2021. "Missionaries of the Party: Work-team Participation and Intellectual Incorporation." *The China Quarterly* 248(S1): 73-94.
- POWELL, Robert. 2009. *Persistent Fighting to Forestall Adverse Shifts in the Distribution of Power*. Manuscript, Department of Political Science, Yale University.
- SCHAPIRO, Leonard. 1964. *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. New York: Vintage Books.
- SCHEDLER, Andreas. 2006. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- SCHUBERT, Gunter. 2002. "Village Elections in the PRC: A Trojan Horse of Democracy?" *Project Discussion Paper No. 19/2002*. Germany: Institute for East Asian Studies/East Asian Politics, Gerhard-Merator-University Duisburg.
- SHI, Tianjian. 1999. "Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy." *World Politics* 51(3): 385-412.
- SIMPSON, Alberto. 2013. *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections: Theory, Practice, and Implications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SNYDER, Jack. 2000. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- SU, Fubing, Tao RAN, Xin SUN, and Mingxing LIU. 2011. "Clans, Electoral Procedures, and Voter Turnout: Evidence from Villagers' Committee Elections in Transitional China." *Political Studies* 59(2): 432-57.
- SUN, Xin, Travis J. WARNER, Dali L. YANG, and Mingxing LIU. 2013. "Patterns of Authority and Governance in Rural China: Who's in Charge? Why?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 22(83): 733-54.
- TSAI, Lily L. 2007. *Accountability without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TSAI, Wen-hsuan, and Xingmiu LIAO. 2020. "Mobilizing Cadre Incentives in Policy Implementation: Poverty Alleviation in a Chinese County." *China Information* 34(1): 45-67.
- WANG, Juan, and Mou YU. 2021. "The Paradigm Shift in the Disciplining of Village Cadres in China: From Mao to Xi." *The China Quarterly* 248(S1): 181-99.
- WANG, Shuna, and Yang YAO. 2007. "Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance: Evidence from Rural China." *World Development* 35(10): 1635-49.
- WONG, Siu Wai, Bo Sin TANG, and Jinlong LIU. 2020. "Village Elections, Grassroots Governance and the Restructuring of State Power: An Empirical Study in Southern Peri-urban China." *The China Quarterly* 241: 22-42.
- YEO, Yukyung. 2016. "Complementing the Local Discipline Inspection Commissions of the CCP: Empowerment of the Central Inspection Groups." *Journal of Contemporary China* 25(97): 59-74.
- ZASLAVSKY, Victor, and Robert J. BRYM. 1978. "The Functions of Elections in the USSR." *Soviet Studies* 30(3): 362-71.
- ZHAN, Jing. 2009. "Decentralizing China: Analysis of Central Strategies in China's Fiscal Reforms." *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(60): 445-62.
- ZHANG, Xiaobo, Shenggen FAN, Linxiu ZHANG, and Jikun HUANG. 2004. "Local Governance and Public Goods Provision in Rural China." *Journal of Public Economics* 88(12): 2857-71.
- ZHONG, Yang, and Jie CHEN. 2002. "To Vote or Not to Vote: An Analysis of Peasants' Participation in Chinese Village Elections." *Comparative Political Studies* 35(6): 686-712.
- ZHOU, Ya. 2017. "Study of Rural Grass-roots Party Building in China from the Perspective of Marxist Theory." *International Journal of New Developments in Engineering and Society* 1(2): 23-6.