

Who Are True Voters? Village Elections and Women's Participation in Voting in Rural China¹

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Summary

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

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

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