

## Reflection on "Democratic Elections"

Henry Shi

" Democratic Elections edited by Jian Yan(Chief Editor)--(Democratic Governance in CN Theory and Practice edited by Keping Yu(Chief Editor))"

Characteristics of democratic elections in China include the primacy of the NPC elections and the subordination of the electoral system to the Party's cadre selection process.

At the grassroots level, the two-ballot system in essence functions to nominate Party members as the primary candidates, which undermines accountability to voters. In pilot areas of electoral reform, the selection of pilot locations and the nomination of candidates are both heavily dominated by the Party. Even though direct elections exist only at the pilot stage, they have significantly challenged the authority of existing political organizations and, as a result, have faced suppression.

In some of these pilot elections, it became evident that once the electoral system was placed in the hands of the people, they quickly grasped its core principles and used the system to advance their own interests. This fully refutes the notion that a lack of democratic quality among the populace is the reason for not implementing democracy.

Regarding gender, experiments with women's reserved seats and separate voting in pilot elections revealed that categorizing women's ballots separately essentially led to gender segregation. As a result, apart from the protected seats, men dominated all other competitive positions. Protective policies faced strong resistance and further exacerbated gender segregation. However, when positions exclusively for women were provided for female voters to select independently, it was found in practice that women's public participation improved.

"Just as the government is happy to encourage economic competition, it has also been keen to initiate political pilot programs", a hypothesis being mentioned requires renewed consideration in the current era. The long-term suppression of political discourse has made "stability" the defining priority, and this was frequently emphasized even during the political pilot boom at the turn of the century. Therefore, the preference for political reform pilots should not be assumed to persist in the same way today.

Amid the backlash against reform, there have still been pockets of progress. In 2007, for the first time, some regions implemented elections with the same representative ratio for urban and rural areas, and this was later codified with amendments to the Electoral Law. By 2012, the practice of equal representation ratios between urban and rural constituencies was fully implemented nationwide, reflecting a respect for constitutional principles.

Although more than two decades have passed since those pilot programs, recent studies indicate that levels of citizen participation in elections have not significantly improved. Issues such as incomplete institutional frameworks, vote-buying, and the bureaucratization of elections remain prevalent, which is likely closely related to the strong suppressive forces present in the broader macro-environment.[1]

Political reform should ideally be built upon economic reform; however, even after nearly fifty years of economic reform, political changes have consistently been subject to strong suppression, leaving little room for hopes of development. In such a context of low political development, only stronger external interventions and information flows may enable progress.

Appendix:

The book is a combination of several election research articles by CN scholars, for exp. Weiping Huang, Lefu Wang, Weidong Chen...

More info are available in the catalogue of the book.

Ref:

[1] Huang Yuxin. Problems and Causes in the General Election of Village Committees under the Background of Villager Autonomy: A Case Study of L Village, Bijie City, Guizhou Province(in Chinese)[J].Rural Economy and Science and Technology,2025,36(10):126-129.)

#society#reflectiononreading#Records