

CHINA VILLAGE ELECTIONS PROJECT

THE
CARTER CENTER



THE DEMOCRACY PROGRAM

The Chinese government began direct village elections in 1988 to help maintain social and political order in the context of rapid economic reforms. Today, village elections occur in some 700,000 villages across China, reaching 75 percent of the nation's 1.3 billion people.

In a groundbreaking agreement, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China granted The Carter Center permission in 1998 to observe village election procedures; provide assistance in gathering election data, educating voters, and training election officials; and host Chinese officials to observe U.S. elections. After the Center's completion in 1999 of a successful pilot project, The Carter Center and the Ministry signed a three-year cooperative agreement. Upon invitation, the Center also began observations of township elections—elections above the village level—in conjunction with the National People's Congress in 1999. The Center is working with Chinese election scholars and political reform experts to assess local elections in China and to design procedures that increase the openness and competitiveness of these elections.

The project has achieved impressive results, including:

- Developing a data information system with 233 computers at the county, municipal, and provincial civil affairs offices in the Hunan, Fujian, Jilin, and Shaanxi provinces and training 260 computer operators
- Hosting a national seminar in 2000 to revise the National Procedures on Villager Committee Elections, following which 50,000 copies of the handbook were printed and distributed
- Training 730 local election officials to foster better understanding of election procedures and to compare experiences across the provinces
- Training 165 elected chairs of villager committees in Shandong province on villager self-government procedures,

including managing village finances, organizing villager assemblies, and resolving conflict

- Printing 40,000 posters on electoral procedures for use in villages



- Sponsoring the National Information Network on Villager Self-Government (www.chinarural.org) to facilitate the national and global exchange of information on grass-roots democracy
- Sponsoring publication of eight books on contemporary China's rural governance and election observation
- Organizing three random surveys of the status of villager committee elections in Hunan, Jilin, and Shaanxi

- Exchanging more than 10 delegations between MCA officials and Center experts

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter traveled to China in September 2001 to open the International Symposium on Villager Self-Government, an unprecedented conference between 120 Chinese officials and scholars from around the world. For three days participants talked

face-to-face about election issues. President Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, observed an election in the Quanwang village in Jiangsu province and met with top Chinese leaders as well as officials from the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the National People's Congress. During his visit, President Carter asked Chinese



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- Conducting pilot projects to improve competitiveness of township elections with new methods of nominating preliminary candidates and of determining final candidates; to improve campaign procedures; and to revise voting procedures, such as ensuring the secrecy of ballots, reducing proxy voting, and verifying absentee balloting



and election affairs and gives scholars worldwide the opportunity to study Chinese politics and offer reform measures. Users can access news, articles, academic papers, laws and regulations, and data on Chinese elections and governance on all levels. The site also features special reports on election and governance matters commissioned by the project and carries recommendations generated by the project. With more than 15 million Chinese characters and 3,000 articles online, it is growing every day and is the most authoritative resource on Chinese elections and governance.

officials to move open and direct elections above the village level.

In the Center's work with the National People's Congress, which supervises all elections above the village level in China, and with Chinese research institutions that advise the government on electoral reform measures, the project's initiatives include:

- Observing township and county elections for People's Congress deputies
- Designing electoral procedures for both direct election of township People's Congress deputies and indirect election of township magistrates

- Convening conferences on the status of Chinese local elections
- Supporting scholars in writing and submitting recommendations on electoral reforms
- Conducting pilot projects on good governance and accountability measures at the township level

In September 2002 the project launched the Web site www.chinaelections.org on Chinese elections and governance, available in both Chinese and English. The site provides Chinese officials at all levels a resource center for governance



Elections are giving the Chinese a taste of grassroots democracy. Village elections give rural citizens a say in their community life, such as land contracting, village finance, road building, and economic activities. A provisional 1987 national law, called the Organic Law on the Villager Committees, gave villagers the right to elect their leaders directly. The law became permanent legislation in 1998, introducing many universally recognized election procedures such as fixed term, open and free nomination, secret ballots, and recall.

The Carter Center

The Carter Center is a not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization founded in 1982 in Atlanta, Ga., by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in partnership with Emory University. The Center seeks to wage peace, fight disease, and build hope in a world where people live every day under difficult, life-threatening conditions caused by war, disease, and famine. The ultimate goal is to help create a world where every man, woman, and child has the opportunity to enjoy good health and live in peace.



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