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Decentralization and Veiled Corruption under China's “Rule of Mandates”

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Summary. — This paper shows why corruption is especially difficult to detect under China's system of decentralized authoritarian rule, which I call a “rule of mandates.” Local officials must pursue high priority political targets but have immense discretion over which laws to implement. A relative standard for corruption consequently arises since non-implementation of laws may be mandate-serving or may be corrupt; and determining which requires extra information on *why* non-implementation occurred. The theory is supported by evidence from original survey and case research on the implementation of the village elections law. I discuss implications for anticorruption efforts, development patterns, and future research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption in China is widely seen as an intractable problem despite the fact that the ruling Communist Party has publicly prioritized fighting corruption and issued ambitious reforms to do so. While studies of corruption in China have illuminated much about the patterns, causes, and consequences of corruption, there remains the puzzle of why the regime has so much difficulty fighting corruption despite the use of its powerful oversight and disciplinary systems. Prominent existing explanations for the regime's failure focus on lack of central commitment, resistance from local officials, and too-limited strategies. Beyond these factors, in this paper I propose an underappreciated institutional explanation: that China has a governing system in which it is inherently difficult to even *identify* corruption.

This explanation may seem counterintuitive, given the reputation of the Chinese Communist Party for invasive monitoring, but here I show why it may be an important missing part of the equation. My reasoning is *not* premised on the notion that the party's information on its officials is especially poor, but rather on the idea that the information the party requires to identify what it would count as “corruption” is unusually great and hard to obtain. This additional information burden arises, I argue, as a consequence of China's particular governing system, which I call a “rule of mandates” system, as opposed to a more familiar rule of law system.

Under a “rule of mandates,” the regime does not hold its officials accountable to fixed standards but rather to relative standards. Instead of directing officials to implement the regime's laws and policies unconditionally, the party directs them to implement a subset of “mandates” according to their relative prioritization. As I invoke the term here, mandates do not simply represent an alternate set of laws parallel to the public body of laws. In contrast to a body of laws, mandates are directives that are hierarchically ranked against each other. Lower officials are expected to give more weight to the higher priority mandates, and they are authorized to adjust the implementation of laws and lower priority mandates to aim at the desired ends. In this system, the implementation of laws is thus conditional on their compatibility with higher priority mandates.

Under both a rule of mandates and a rule of law, we can think of corruption as occurring when officials deviate from the duties of public office for personal gain. Yet, identifying such a deviation from the duties of public office is much more straightforward under a rule of law system than under a rule of mandates system. When laws govern, the failure to implement laws and policies—a readily observable measure—is an indicator of a potentially serious problem, likely corruption. Yet when mandates govern, officials' failures to implement policies and laws are not red flags for corruption, so long as the deviations do not involve policies designated with the highest priority. The officials might have exercised their discretion to decide that a lower priority mandate, like environmental protection programs and the relevant laws, should not be locally implemented lest it hinder a higher priority mandate, like economic growth. Thus, in a rule of mandates system, the standard for corruption is a *relative* one. To have reasonable suspicion that officials are corrupt, leaders also need to evaluate *why* a law or policy was not implemented (unless the policies are designated as highest priority), not just see that it was not implemented. The information needed to make such an evaluation is detailed, costly to collect, difficult to analyze, and often unavailable.

In Part I of this paper, I develop the theoretical argument above and relate it to different ways of defining corruption and the problem of detecting corruption.

In Parts II, III, and IV of this paper, I ground the theory in survey and case evidence consistent with its arguments. While the data are not adequate to establish where corruption exists, it does establish that, under a rule of mandates, lower officials can easily veil corruption behind the rhetoric of meeting mandates. Original evidence pertaining to the implementation of China's village elections law is used to show that the rule of

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mandates system makes corruption particularly difficult to detect in China. First, I show that it is difficult for higher officials to obtain accurate information on the base line situation, the extent to which the election law was implemented in locales. Reports from local officials often seem unreliable when compared to reports from surveyed villagers.

Second, I show that it is even more difficult to interpret *why* the elections law was poorly implemented, as local officials generally claim that their interference with village elections was for the purpose of promoting one of the highest priority mandates, namely political “stability,” even as the evidence is that their interference does not do so. Case study evidence shows how local officials may actually sometimes be hiding behind the mandates to shelter their own corruption.

In Part V, I conclude with a discussion of three implications. First, I underscore how the relationship between decentralization and corruption depends on broader governing institutions. Second, I discuss the possibility that a rule of mandates might be used in developmental ways and yet still destabilize over the long term. Third, I discuss why common approaches to anticorruption that are compatible with a rule of law are in tension with a rule of mandates.

2. THE RULE OF MANDATES AND THE CHALLENGES OF DETECTING CORRUPTION

China is relatively decentralized fiscally, yet centralized politically, in large part through a system of targets and incentives that control local cadres and influence which policies and laws they implement. Collectively, we can think of the targets and incentives as authoritarian mandates from above. Mandates differ from laws principally in that they are attached to hierarchical rankings such that higher priority mandates take precedence over lower priority ones. In practice in China, mandates are also typically hidden from the public, regard fewer issues in less detail, and call for adherence to particular outcomes rather than particular processes. These additional features also distinguish typical mandates from typical laws, but should not be mistaken for their defining feature. The key fact that mandates are ranked against each other means that not all policies need to be, or should be, pursued locally, depending on how they interact with each other and local conditions.

Under a rule of mandates, lower officials are given significant discretion; they are authorized to adjust the implementation of laws and lower priority mandates as they aim at the desired outcomes. This means that the standards for corruption are effectively relative rather than absolute, as explained below. This system is useful for the regime because it ensures that high priority targets will be locally implemented even when central officials have little knowledge of the local implementation challenges. Yet, I argue, one major drawback of the rule of mandates paradigm for China is that it makes it especially difficult to reliably detect potentially corrupt behavior. Because variations in the local implementation of central policies are *supposed* to occur under a rule of mandates, higher officials must know *why* variations occur in order to judge if the variations are the result of good-faith efforts to meet mandates or corruption. In this system, local corruption can easily mask itself as deference to the centralized mandates.

(a) *The rule of mandates model in China*

China’s system for maintaining political control of lower level officials relies on well-defined incentives and sanctions

designed to uphold party directives (Landry, 2008). Broad party directives, which are separate from if sometimes consistent with the public law, are issued at the highest level. Consistently among the highest national priorities are economic development, social stability, and the birth control policy, which are measured by figures such as income per capita, incidences of collective protests, and the population growth rate. At lower levels, more specifics are developed about the exact targets, priorities, reporting requirements, rewards for success, and penalties for failure; these thus vary from area to area. Local leaders now actually sign contracts that acknowledge the targets and terms surrounding them. The most serious targets are those with veto power (*yipiao foujue*), followed by hard targets (*ying zhibiao*), and soft targets (*yiban zhibiao*) (Heimer, 2006). Some laws and issues are such low priority that there are no targets corresponding to them.

Most important of all for cadres are the veto-level targets. If a township fails to meet targets with veto power by the end-of-the-year evaluation, the failure would eliminate all credit to township leaders for other successes achieved that year (Edin, 2003). Poor performance evaluations may not only result in the loss of an annual bonus or prospects for promotion of individual officials, but may even result in large fines and penalties for all their colleagues. In other words, the “cadre responsibility system” makes extensive use of strict liability, collective liability, and vicarious liability (Minzner, 2009). Collective responsibility implies that officials have an institutionalized individual incentive to aid their colleagues—or equally, to overlook or assist false reporting by their colleagues.

Mandates are pre-set, often by formula, and cover only a limited number of items that are hierarchically ranked against each other. For items that are high priority, accountability is tightly tied to apparent outcomes; for items that are low priority or not explicitly mentioned, there may be limited or no accountability at all. For instance, in one Shanghai county studied by Susan Whiting, growth in township- and village-run industries was worth up to 33 points, and “party building” activities like educating party members were worth 21 points—and provision of public education was worth only nine points (out of a possible total of 200 points). The specific formula used to evaluate performance in these areas was further specified, and depended on quantitative data such as the “increase in industrial profits” and “the completion rate for compulsory education” (Whiting, 2004). With such criteria, at its best, the cadre responsibility system is set up to incentivize a precise but narrow space of accountability. At its worst, it does not incentivize actual accountability but only apparent accountability, since the criteria for evaluation are often not directly visible to higher cadres so data may be easily fudged or made up by lower cadres.

Variation in the local implementation of laws is thus an inherent outcome of the rule of mandates, even in the absence of corruption. To meet the mandates, cadres are supposed to adjust the implementation of lower priority laws and policies to better meet higher priority targets. Moreover, unless public grievances pertain to a target, public pressure may be safely ignored by cadres. Effective public grievances are partly managed by secrecy; as explicit as the targets are to cadres, they remain mysterious to the public. Party directives and contracts are generally treated as confidential internal documents, so that the public generally remains unaware of the specifics or even the existence of them. At the same time, targets do not necessarily correspond to public laws let alone local public preferences, nor are they subject to them. In fact, in indicating to cadres which laws and issues to prioritize, and which they

may safely ignore, the mandates drive deeply political choices about which the public is usually in the dark.

(b) *Relative standards for corruption*

Since local variation in the implementation of laws and policies is an inherent goal of the rule of mandates, impermissible variations—those implying corruption—must be distinguished from permissible variations. Accordingly, common definitions of corruption take on a different meaning in the context of a rule of mandates. Definitions of corruption that are understood to invoke an absolute standard elsewhere actually invoke a relative standard under China's rule of mandates. By a relative standard, I mean that activities that are officially viewed as corruption under certain circumstances are not viewed as corruption under other circumstances, since local officials are given discretion to adjust the implementation of laws to achieve higher political priorities.

To illustrate this, consider one widely used definition of corruption, as the "misuse" or "abuse of public office for private gain" (Manion, 2004; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; The World Bank, 1997). Under this definition, the law is commonly used as the absolute benchmark for corruption. As Svensson writes, "Misuse, of course, typically involves applying a *legal standard*" (*italics mine*) (Svensson, 2005). By a legal standard, this definition of corruption encompasses practices that are against the law, such as bribery, extortion, embezzlement, or manipulating elections. However, in China, these practices may not always be against the mandates, because, first, the mandates set different standards than the law, and second, the standards they set are relative ones.

On the first point, mandates may set different standards than the law or imply contradictory standards. For instance, even though the law states that village heads should be elected by villagers and that any eligible voter can be elected, one common mandate states that village heads should be party members, implying that electoral choice might need to be curtailed. For another instance, even though embezzlement and extortion are against Chinese criminal law, mandates sometimes distinguish minor malfeasances as a separate, less significant category. Officials are often given exemption from prosecution for cases involving limited monetary amounts, sometimes even if legal action has already been started (Manion, 2004). Instead, they might be modestly disciplined by the party. Although this approach might appear to represent a corrupt "rule of man" in which officials are modifying rules at whim, it is in fact rule-abiding if the relevant rules are mandates rather than laws. Thus, when mandates are used as the standard for corruption, as they are by the Communist Party in China, the meaning of "abuse" or "misuse" of public office is often different than when laws are used as the standard. The same technical definition of corruption—as the abuse of public office for private gain—takes on a different, non-law-based meaning under regime standards.

Second, under mandates, the standards for corruption are relative rather than absolute. Since the distinctive features of mandates is that they are hierarchically ranked, what constitutes "abuse" or "misuse" may additionally depend on circumstances and motives. Recognizing that implementing the full slate of mandates is impossible for most local governments, the rule of mandates allows non-implementation of lower priority mandates including laws. For instance, officials do not have to implement village elections, even though it is the national law, in places where they might threaten the highest priority mandate, social stability. However, officials are not supposed to cancel or undermine elections for the sake of

personal gain, versus party objectives. The same logic may be applied to whether or not low priority laws like environmental protection, historical preservation, or government open information acts should be implemented when they potentially create a conflict with higher priority goals like economic development or social stability.

This relative standard for corruption grows out of an institutional difference, a mandate-based governing system versus a law-based governing system. Thus, it is distinctive from cultural explanations for shifts in the meaning of corruption, although both provide reasons why corruption and law implementation might vary across units under a single governing structure. While cultural differences may also generate relative standards for corruption (Triesman, 2000), the degree of corruption in China cannot be fully explained by the values of the Chinese public (Sandholtz & Taagepera, 2005). Indeed, from a cultural standpoint, the Chinese public may be increasingly inclined toward an absolute legal standard for corruption. O'Brien and Li argue that public laws have set new expectations for the public, such that they feel entitled to rights they never historically enjoyed (O'Brien & Li, 2006). This means there is a potential gap between what the public might count as corruption and what officials might count as such. The former might be concerned with what we could call law-violating corruption (an absolute standard) whereas the latter are focused on mandate-violating corruption (a relative standard).

(c) *Higher information requirement to detect corruption*

A consequence of the relative standards for corruption is a heightened information requirement to detect corruption. Since the system authorizes uneven implementation of non-priority laws and policies, officials must generally not only know that a law or policy was violated, but why it was violated. As I explore below, non-implementation of the village elections law would be acceptable if in the service of a higher mandate like stability or development, but corrupt if designed to facilitate personal theft of village assets. For another example, if illegal taxes are levied, the action could be viewed as accountable if the funds were redirected to support a priority unfunded mandate, perhaps a capital outlay for an infrastructure project. Even if the funds were redirected into the salaries of local officials, this still might accord with mandates, since local officials' salaries are often unfunded or underfunded, plus more officials might have to be hired to ensure tax collection (Lin, Tao, & Liu, 2003). But if the reason for the illegal taxes was so an individual official could simply pocket the funds, the behavior would be more akin to extortion or corrupt rent-seeking. Thus, depending on circumstances, an identical activity could be interpreted as mandate-abiding or as a form of corruption. Such activities could range from graft to rent-seeking to prebendalism (Lü, 2000), i.e., non-monetary corruption.

This heightened information burden (that more information is needed) is in addition to any information detection problems (that information is hard to obtain), so the corruption monitoring problem is magnified under a rule of mandates. Standard methods of detecting corruption in a rule of law context, such as investigating deviations in implementation, noting illegal fees and transfers, and public oversight, do not provide the required information on why laws and policies may have been violated with reference to mandates. Consistent with this, in recent history, China's approach to detecting corruption relies on party agencies that begin investigations in response to reports of party member misconduct, in contrast to the public security approach of beginning with a crime

and investigating to find a criminal (Manion, 2004). The need for greater information and the difficulty of obtaining it mean that corruption in a rule of mandates environment is more easily veiled.

3. THE RULE OF MANDATES AND VILLAGE ELECTIONS IN CHINA

In this and the following two sections, I use empirical evidence to ground the theory that corruption in China is particularly hard to detect because it can mask itself as mandate-driven variations in policy implementation. I choose to examine evidence surrounding the implementation of China's national law requiring village elections, for three reasons. First, the national law sets a universal standard for when village elections should be held. Since 1998, all administrative villages, which are the lowest administrative units in rural areas, should have competitive public elections that meet minimum procedural requirements set out in the Organic Law on Villager Elections. Second, the extent of implementation is widely observable by villagers, so it is possible to assess implementation without relying on official reports, through surveying villagers as I do here. Third, there are two main competing reasons for officials to fail to implement village elections: they might be corrupt, or they might be trying to meet party mandates that subordinate village elections to critical targets such as social stability. By exploring the gap between the legal standard for village elections and the reality of their implementation, and by examining the ambiguity over why this gap exists, I illuminate how China's rule of mandates can veil corruption.

Village elections are useful to the CCP overall, and local officials are expected to implement them unless they conflict with higher priorities. The establishment of village elections in China was the controversial solution to a crisis of party legitimacy in the countryside that was believed to be driven by parasitic local leaders (Wang, 1997). By effectively delegating to the public certain duties normally performed by township and county authorities (to select, discipline, and monitor certain village leaders), top authorities hoped to overcome the authoritarian system's information problems, save the energy and political capital of higher officials for other tasks, and shed responsibility for disliked village leaders and contentious politics (Alpermann, 2003; He & Lang, 2002; O'Brien & Li, 2000). In essence, they hoped to enlist villagers as occasional agents of the higher government in disciplining its everyday local agents, the village officials. For the elections to achieve this objective, they would need to be at least semi-competitive—not just for show. In line with this, an increasing body of evidence is showing that village elections are able to challenge village establishments and create better governing at the village level. At that lowest level, elections seem to bring about more trustworthy leaders, more political responsiveness, fairer land allocations, and increases in public goods (Birney, 2007; Brandt & Turner, 2003; Luo, Zhang, Huang, & Rozelle, 2007; Martinez-Bravo, Miquel, Qian, & Yao, 2011; O'Brien & Han, 2009).

To the extent that elections are effective in creating weak accountability to the public, they serve both the public and regime interests in political stability. Consistent with this role of village elections, central authorities have established minimal incentives for lower officials to implement village elections, at least to some degree. For instance, two of the variables that may figure into the evaluation of township and county governments are the percentage of turnout in the village elections and the percentage of “failed elections” (elections not held to

completion). The former has resulted in heavy mobilization of voters. While many voters may be reluctant or uninterested, especially when the elections are not particularly competitive, the relatively high turnout rates and public awareness of voting is certainly partially attributable to the turnout targets. Failed elections may occur when the township decides to cancel an election, when no one candidate gets a majority in the first round and the township does not bother to hold a second round, when voter turnout is below 50%, or when serious problems occur.

At the same time, the regime appears wary that village elections may create accountability that is much stronger than it would like and ultimately destabilizing for Communist Party rule. After all, if the elections are not somewhat controlled, wouldn't villagers be able to use the elections to instead demand that village officials act as *their* own agents in interfacing with higher levels of government? This possibility that elections would inspire elected officials to try place pressure on higher officials, working together with villagers or collectively across villages, is not just hypothetical. In one dramatic example in Shandong province, 57 elected village heads in the Qixia area resigned en masse to make a statement, following repeated and unsuccessful petitions to higher levels to discipline local party officials for the embezzlement of public funds, political violence, and other illegal activities (Beech, 2001; Eckholm, 2002). The mass resignation can be taken as both evidence of their own abilities to coordinate and the unwillingness of the party at any level to address their grievances. The idea that village elections would facilitate significant political pressure beyond the village level is contrary to the purpose for which the regime created them. Elsewhere, I have argued that China's system of internal authoritarian rule, the rule of mandates system described above, places a dynamic check on the possibility of unintended consequences of village elections beyond the village level. Therefore, instances such as the Qixia one are not as common as they would otherwise be. This is because township or other mid-level officials can adjust the implementation of the village election law in their area, should they expect that the outcomes would hinder their top priority objectives.

Thus, the optimal situation for the regime is that the village elections law be implemented to the degree it helps create stability (by generating weak accountability of poorly-monitored village officials to the public), and no more than that (in order to evade the destabilizing effects of strong accountability). In short, the optimal situation is to strike a balance. China's rule of mandates system allows this balance to be achieved with a fair amount of precision, as it incentivizes local officials to adjust village election implementation in order to meet centrally-mandated targets.

The regime effectively delegates to township-level officials the responsibility for striking a balance between the stabilizing and destabilizing effects of village elections. It does so through the high prioritization of the “social stability” mandate, which in China, refers to a directive to maintain *political* stability. This central directive to avoid political tensions with the public translates, at lower levels, into specific targets to prevent collective public political activities. Typical stability targets mandate a low threshold for the manifestation of collective protests, collective complaints, and petitions to higher levels. These targets seem to be generally set as veto-level (the highest) targets.

The social stability veto targets may sometimes help and sometimes hinder the implementation of the elections law, depending on local circumstances and the discretionary judgment of local officials. Mid-level officials realize that good

elections could result in better leaders and reduce tensions with the public, whereas a highly controlled or missing election might spur protests and complaints. But, especially when there is a contentious issue like a land dispute with the higher government, authorities might also fear that the election of an outsider would provide stronger leadership and organization to discontented villagers. Or, even if an elected outsider did not threaten the stability target, he might use his position within the system to threaten other priority targets like economic development plans. The requirements of the elections law have less relevance to implementation than calculations about the degree of implementation that is most likely to meet the social stability target and minimally threaten other targets. As one county official in charge of overseeing village elections explained to me, an official like him would never gain much from implementing elections well according to law, but his evaluation would take a severe hit if there were even a single protest or piece of negative media coverage that could be related to an election.

At the same time that township leaders are supposed to adjust the implementation of the village election laws to meet central mandates, they may be tempted to curtail elections for personal gain. There are certainly strong incentives for corrupt officials to interfere with village election to gain control of the village committee. Control of the village committee facilitates control of all the village lands (villagers do not own their land, but rather the village does); access to the village coffers; the power to assess fees, spend and borrow; and the ability to fabricate or conceal village records. Control of the village land is especially valuable to corrupt officials when land sales, land leasing, or enterprises are possible. For instance, given the lack of transparency around transactions and accounts, a typical problem is that village officials will report that village land was sold for much less than the actual price in order to pocket the difference. Government grants from above may also be skimmed; for instance, farmers in Henan province in particular benefit from direct cash payments for grain subsidies, cash that must first travel through the county and village coffers, making tempting opportunities for corrupt officials (Cheung, 2004).

Under a rule of mandates, identifying corruption would require, first, determining that elections fell short of the law, and second, determining that the reason was not a good faith effort to meet higher targets. Below, I show how difficult it is establish both of these matters, lending support to my theoretical argument that the rule of mandates system veils corruption through imposing a higher information requirement for identifying corruption.

(a) *Description of the data*

To understand the extent of interference in village elections and assess the possibility that corruption plays a significant role, I use original survey data from the 2005–06 China Village Democracy Survey in Shandong and Henan. Shandong and Henan provinces border each other, well-represent China's heartland, and at the time of the survey were the country's two largest provinces; together, they encompassed 14% of the country's enormous population. The multilevel spatial survey was collaboratively designed and implemented; analyses are my own. The data are usual in their depth of political content, and also in containing village- and township-level information on top of individual-level information. It includes individual surveys of 574 respondents over 14 townships and 26 administrative villages; qualitative interviews with the village leaderships; village election historical data; and interviews

with supervising township officials in China's two most populous provinces.

These data are not sufficient to establish where corruption really occurred—though it would be ideal to examine data that could do so in a future study. Yet, it is sufficient to test the theory that corruption is veiled under a rule of mandates, that is, that because of relative standards of accountability, it is near impossible to distinguish corruption from mandate-compliance.

4. DETERMINING IMPLEMENTATION UNDER A RULE OF MANDATES

Simply determining whether or not a law was implemented can be a challenge in China's system of top-down oversight, which relies largely on reports by cadres who may have an incentive to mislead higher officials. Information that is revealed by the public—through petitions, protests, hotlines, and other self-initiated contact with officials—is frequently used as a check on reports that lower officials provide. In exceptional situations, investigatory teams may be sent to specific locations to collect more information from locals, but ordinarily higher officials would not have much access to the information that villagers have on the local implementation of laws, as it is too costly to systematically collect, as we have done in the China Village Democracy Survey. Yet, much information is lost when the party relies so heavily on internal reports, as discrepancies often exist between the reports of cadres and the reports of villagers, sometimes substantial ones.

As shown in the charts below, local officials seem to over-report the degree to which they implement elections laws. As Table 1 shows, official records on the village elections in the China Village Democracy Survey indicated that all the villages had held elections. However, when interviewed, village leaders in one village admitted theirs had never been held. Moreover, the quality of the elections is often not in accordance with the national law, which demands that 100% of registered adult villagers be allowed to vote. When asked if they were allowed to vote in the village election, in only 38% of the villages did 100% of registered adult villagers say they were allowed to vote. While enfranchisement was generally high, it was not uniformly so. In 15% of the villages, less than two thirds of registered adult villagers said they were allowed to vote. Among the reasons why villagers were effectively disenfranchised were "there was no election," "only the men vote," "only party members vote," "only one member of each household can vote," and "I was never informed that there was an election."

From the standpoint of higher leaders, the fact that many villagers are effectively disenfranchised is not a central concern. The mandates do not require that the letter of the election law is upheld, although they generally seem to award credit for holding an election on schedule, require 50% turnout for elections to be deemed "successful," and award modest bonuses for meeting an array of other conditions. For instance, extra evaluation points might be obtained for holding the elections within a certain timeframe or should it produce a winner who is a party member.

Local officials are even brasher in misrepresenting the nomination process that they employ in village elections. As Table 2 shows, official records on the village elections in the China Village Democracy Survey indicated that 85% of the villages had held a "sea election"-style (*haixuan*) nomination, that is, a nomination in which all villagers are eligible to vote for who they want the candidates to be. Yet, in only 69% of villages

Table 1. Reports from different sources on whether a public village election was held

Village #	Village records or interview with record-keeper	Open-ended interviews with village leaders	Estimated enfranchisement based on survey of villagers** (%)	Discrepancy between records, reports of village leaders, and/or reports by villagers?***
S1	Yes	Yes	95	Some
S2	Yes	Yes	100	No
S3	Yes	Yes	100	No
S4	Yes	Yes	100	No
S5	Yes	Yes	92	Some
S6	Yes	<i>nr</i> *	100	No
S7	Yes	Yes	88	Some
S8	<i>nr</i> *	Yes	95	Some
S9	Yes	Yes	100	No
S10	Yes	Yes	100	No
S11	Yes	No	0	Large
S12	Yes	Yes	61	Large
S13	Yes	Yes	100	No
H1	Yes	Yes	86	Some
H2	Yes	Yes	100	No
H3	Yes	Yes	100	No
H4	Yes	Yes	95	Some
H5	Yes	Yes	82	Some
H6	Yes	Yes	86	Some
H7	<i>nr</i> *	Yes	94	Some
H8	Yes	Yes	90	Some
H9	Yes	Yes	87	Some
H10	Yes	Yes	81	Some
H11	Yes	Yes	100	No
H12	Yes	Yes	62	Large
H13	Yes	Yes	44	Large
%Total	92	92	86	
Percent villages with large discrepancy				15
Percent villages with any discrepancy				62

Note: Sx villages are in Shandong province; Hx villages are in Henan province.

* *nr* indicates a non-response

** The total estimated enfranchisement is one minus the percent of villagers who reported being disenfranchised for reasons other than being registered as a member of a different village.

*** Discrepancies were coded as large if more than one third of surveyed villagers registered in the village reported being disenfranchised in practice.

did village leaders make the same claim when interviewed. Meanwhile, only 15% of surveyed villagers across the villages reported being allowed to participate in a nomination process. In all, in 92% of villages, leaders or village records claimed a sea election nomination was held even though the reports from villagers did not sustain the idea that a true sea election nomination had happened in any of them. In 23% of villages, no one surveyed said they could participate in the nomination process, and in only one village did more than a third of surveyed villagers say they could participate in the nomination process. The discrepancy between the reports and the reality might be driven by the contradictory mandates that lower leaders face. While they are encouraged to hold sea election nominations—indeed, it is the official policy in Shandong province—they are also held accountable for which types of people win the elections and the actions they might take later, so they have strong incentives from their mandates to control the openness of the nomination process in reality. Alternatively, they might choose to control the elections for reasons of corruption—a possibility taken up in the next section.

The data above suggest how difficult it is for the government to obtain accurate information on whether laws are being fully implemented. But the difficulty that higher officials face in assessing the performance of local officials is far greater than

this problem alone. Under a rule of mandates, to detect corrupt behavior, the party must determine not only whether laws were ignored, but also *why*. As the next section shows, this is a massive additional challenge.

5. SUSPECTING CORRUPTION UNDER A RULE OF MANDATES

When officials fail to implement the elections law, is it because other mandates take priority or because the official is corrupt or sheltering corrupt officials? Both are plausible. On the one hand, limiting the competitiveness of the elections reduces the probability that villagers could elect assertive village leaders who would stand in the way of the highest-priority mandates, like political stability, or the implementation of the one-child policy, or the pursuit of economic growth over economic equity. On the other hand, limiting the competitiveness of the elections increases the likelihood that corrupt officials can control the village committee with an eye to raiding the village coffers or making under-the-table real estate deals over valuable village land.

In this section, I show how lower level officials in our sample normally explained their violations of village elections laws as

Table 2. Reports from different sources on whether the public could vote in the nomination process

Village #	Village records or interview with record-keeper	Open-ended interviews with village leaders	Estimated inclusion** of public based on survey of villagers (%)	Discrepancy between records, reports of village leaders, and/or reports by villagers?***
S1	No	No	0	no
S2	Yes	Yes	26	Large
S3	Yes	Yes	6	Large
S4	Yes	Yes	26	Large
S5	Yes	Yes	13	Large
S6	Yes	<i>nr</i> *	46	Large
S7	Yes	Yes	25	Large
S8	<i>nr</i> *	Yes	11	Large
S9	No	No	14	no
S10	Yes	Yes	0	Large
S11	Yes	No	0	Large
S12	Yes	No	5	Large
S13	Yes	Yes	0	Large
H1	Yes	Yes	10	Large
H2	Yes	Yes	0	Large
H3	Yes	Yes	11	Large
H4	Yes	Yes	17	Large
H5	Yes	Yes	60	Some
H6	Yes	No	13	Large
H7	<i>nr</i> *	Yes	21	Large
H8	Yes	Yes	13	Large
H9	Yes	Yes	33	Large
H10	Yes	Yes	16	Large
H11	Yes	Yes	13	Large
H12	Yes	No	10	Large
H13	Yes	No	0	Large
%Total	85	69	15	
Percent villages with large discrepancy				88
Percent villages with any discrepancy				92

Note: Sx villages are in Shandong province; Hx villages are in Henan province.

**nr* indicates a non-response

**The total estimated inclusion of the public in the nomination process is the percent of surveyed villagers who reported they were allowed to participate in the nomination process.

***Discrepancies were coded as large if fewer than half of surveyed villagers concurred with village leaders or village records that the public could vote in the nomination process.

being in the interests of stability, when they explained it. Whether their claims are true or not is difficult to assess—which is precisely the problem that higher officials face when trying to identify corruption by lower officials. One piece of evidence that is suggestive of either corrupt or incompetent behavior is that interference with village elections does not seem to produce the results claimed; that is, interference does not increase stability over time. This evidence cannot conclusively reveal why interference actually occurred; but the point of this analysis is not to actually do so, but rather to reveal how difficult it is to ascertain why officials violate elections laws.

(a) Township interference in village elections

Because township governments—the level of government directly above the village level—are charged with overseeing village elections, in this section I analyze what causes townships to limit the implementation of village elections, and to dismiss or replace elected leaders. To do so, I analyze the qualitative reports from each of the villages in the sample. These reports are based on both close-ended interviews with township officials and open-ended interviews of village heads and village party secretaries, both conducted as part of the China Village Democracy Survey. One of the most striking revelations from

these interviews is the astonishing amount of township interference in village elections and the results. The interference, when explained, is usually justified by the purpose of maintaining “social stability,” the euphemism in China for the prevention of collective citizen activity and civic unrest, as shown in Table 3.

The open-ended interviews underscore the enormous importance of concerns about social stability in how the township engages with village politics and, in particular, implements village elections. Most townships seem to believe holding elections will foment rather than limit further unrest. For instance, one township refused to allow a village election after villagers successfully petitioned them to dismiss a corrupt village leader. There is not clear evidence that the township was pursuing corrupt ulterior motives through its actions; after all, it supported the villagers in dismissing the allegedly corrupt leader. Rather, it seems to have wanted to avoid the possibility that villagers might collectively petition again—something that would be a black mark on the township’s record—by removing any flashpoints for grievances. In doing so, the township overstepped the bounds of the law, but not necessarily the mandates, by refusing to hold the election.

When the targets that are set up in China’s rule of mandates system are taken into account, the power and propensity of

Table 3. *Unlawful official interference with village elections*

Village #	Township selects election candidates	Township approves election candidates	Township approves election oversight committee	Township refuses to hold election or invalidates election	Township dismisses or appoints elected offices	Explanations by village leaders (open-ended interviews)*
S1	—	—	—	—	—	—
S2	—	—	—	—	—	—
S3	—	—	—	—	—	—
S4	—	—	—	—	—	—
S5	—	—	—	—	—	—
S6	—	—	—	—	—	—
S7	—	—	—	—	—	—
S8	—	—	—	—	✓	Stability
S9	—	—	—	—	✓	Stability
S10	—	—	—	—	—	—
S11	—	—	✓	✓	✓	Stability
S12	—	—	✓	✓	✓	Stability
S13	—	—	✓	—	—	na
H1	—	—	✓	—	—	na
H2	—	—	✓	—	—	na
H3	✓	—	—	—	—	na
H4	✓	—	—	—	—	na
H5	—	—	✓	—	✓	na
H6	—	✓	✓	—	✓	Ineffective official
H7	—	✓	✓	—	✓	Stability
H8	—	✓	✓	—	—	na
H9	—	✓	✓	—	✓	Election failed
H10	—	✓	✓	—	✓	Stability
H11	—	✓	✓	—	—	na
H12	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	Stability
H13	✓	✓	✓	—	—	na
%Total	15	31	54	8	31	

*na indicates that the respondent was not asked to provide an explanation, as the information provided came via a closed-end questionnaire. Only those respondents interviewed for the last two questions (on whether an election was held and whether Village Committee members were dismissed or appointed) were asked for explanations during open-ended interviews. Note that unlawful official interference was not observed in villages S1–S7, and S10, so no explanations were required.

the townships to violate elections laws makes sense. With social stability such a critical target for local officials, townships seem to try to do as little as possible to rock the boat—which may mean avoiding elections much of the time or ignoring problems around them. For example, a top village official reported that township officials did not bother to organize a second round of a recent election after the initial vote was unsuccessful, reportedly due to ballot stuffing. Instead, they asked the incumbent village head, who was not even seeking re-election, to continue in office. In another township, a top village official reported that the township had asked the elected village head to resign in the name of social stability, after some election problems that the township had earlier declined to resolve led to villager complaints. He refused, yet the instance demonstrates the township's disregard for the national village elections law that only permits the voting public to recall elected officials, as well as its reactivity to potential instability.

Much of the time, the actions of the township in the survey were justified as necessary to block or remove corrupt officials who might create local instability. Sometimes, townships seem to benevolently remove corrupt officials; in one village I visited outside the survey, a village party secretary was dismissed after it was discovered that he had secretly rented out the village hall to a business and was pocketing the rent. Consistent with the claim to be fighting village-level corruption, the evidence is that townships interfere more in elections when there are high levels of local corruption, as measured by the reports of surveyed villagers. The relationship shown in Figure 1 is a statis-

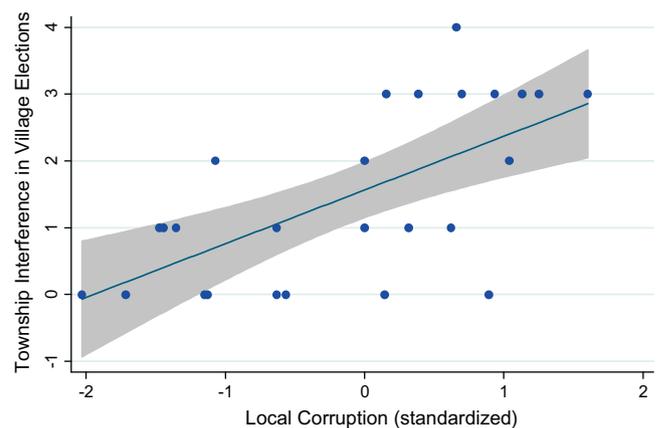


Figure 1. *Township interference in village elections coincides with local corruption. Note: shaded area indicates a 95% confidence interval.*

tically significant one. But what is not clear from this data is whether townships typically interfere to deter and punish corrupt officials—versus to protect and assist corrupt allies.

Certainly, cases in which allegedly corrupt townships interfere with village elections are widely reported in China. For instance, in another village that I visited outside the survey sample in Shandong province, higher officials allegedly refused to provide villagers with the legally required levels of compensation for land seizures, keeping the money for themselves.

After an independent elected village head challenged them to provide the compensation and produce the past village accounting books, the next village election date was conveniently moved by a year for supposedly administrative reasons, and widespread bribery ensued. Some villagers claim the township orchestrated the bribery, which they say ensured that the independent village head lost his re-election bid to a township lackey. The corruption accusations are unresolved, but resemble many other stories in which township officials control elections in order to sell land in a corrupt deal, or fake village records in order to skim funds rightfully belonging to villagers.

Within the survey sample itself, the evidence also suggests not all townships intended to uphold stability or other high-priority mandates when they curtailed the implementation of elections, removed elected officials, or appointed officials to supposedly-elected offices. Villagers and village leaders in one surveyed township have accused it of being in league with local mafias. What we know from the aggregate data is that the elections in one of their villages failed after the alleged widespread illegal use of proxy voting, the alleged cooperation of corrupt election officials, a spontaneous villager protest at the election, and the dramatic theft of one of the ballot boxes with all its ballots. The township responded by annulling the election and taking over the village government directly, filling the posts with township officials. From the standpoint of higher officials, the township's actions may seem designed to prevent further demonstrations, contention, public accusations, and such "instability." Yet those same actions might instead, or in addition, be sheltering the corruption of township officials who could have orchestrated the ballot box theft so that they could install their own people in control of the village. The evidence is inconclusive. But this example well-illustrates that one price of a rule of mandates system is a substantially reduced ability to monitor and check corruption. At least in a rule of law system, deviations from the law would be easily recognized as corrupt or suspect. In a rule of mandates system, they are likely to be given the benefit of the doubt—making corruption both more pervasive and harder to root out.

There is a further reason to wonder if some townships in the survey are acting in a corrupt manner when they undermine elections: township interference in village elections does not seem to decrease friction between village leaders and the public, as one might expect it to do if done in order to achieve so-

cial stability or root out corrupt elements. As Figure 2 shows, township interference does not increase the extent to which villagers trust the village committee members, who are legally supposed to be elected. That relationship is statistically insignificant; and if anything, the raw data seem to suggest a possible *negative* relationship, which would be consistent with corrupt behavior. That said, because the n of this analysis is small, containing 26 villages, it is possible that a larger n is necessary to detect the true relationship if the true relationship is not strong. Yet, even if this is so, the weakness of the relationship is consistent with the idea that township interference has limited impact either way, implying either a corrupt motivation or limited ability, and underscoring the difficulty of determining whether illegal township actions are corrupt or mandate-complying.

Altogether, the qualitative and quantitative data underscore that it is highly difficult to obtain information on *why* the elections law was poorly implemented. Local officials often claimed that their interference with village elections was for the purpose of promoting one of the highest priority mandates, namely political "stability," even as the evidence is that their interference does not do so. Case study evidence suggests that local officials may actually sometimes be hiding behind the mandates to shelter their own corruption. While we cannot say for certain whether this happened in the surveyed villages nor estimate the extent to which it happens, the relevant point is that it is very hard to tell why lower officials do what they do.

And yet, under a rule of mandates system, it is essential to know what officials' motives are since the standard for corruption becomes a *relative* one. That is, the very same type of violation of the village elections law would be viewed differently by overseeing officials depending on the motive. If the deviation from the national elections law were driven by an attempt to meet higher mandates given local circumstances, it would not be considered to constitute an "abuse of public office for private gain." Otherwise, it would be considered corruption, invoking the same definition.

Higher level officials would have the same difficulties that we confront here in trying to determine why township officials curtail village elections. Under a rule of mandates system, mandate-driven variations in the implementation of the election law are very difficult to distinguish from corruption-driven variations in implementation.

6. IMPLICATIONS

In the paper, I have argued that China's rule of mandates paradigm makes it particularly difficult to identify corrupt official behavior with certainty in China. The problem is not that the party has less information on its officials than it would under a rule of law paradigm, but rather that more information must be processed to identify corrupt behavior. Since a rule of mandates encourages officials to adjust the implementation of laws and policies in order to meet priority targets, variation in implementation is not an innate problem. In such a system, for all but the highest priority issues, officials must also know *why* variation occurred in order to determine how likely it is that corruption is present. A rule of mandates thus effectively veils corruption.

What are the implications of this research for approaches to fighting corruption? Here I discuss, first, that it underscores how the relationship between decentralization and corruption depends on broader governing institutions. Second, I discuss the possibility that a rule of mandates might be used in devel-

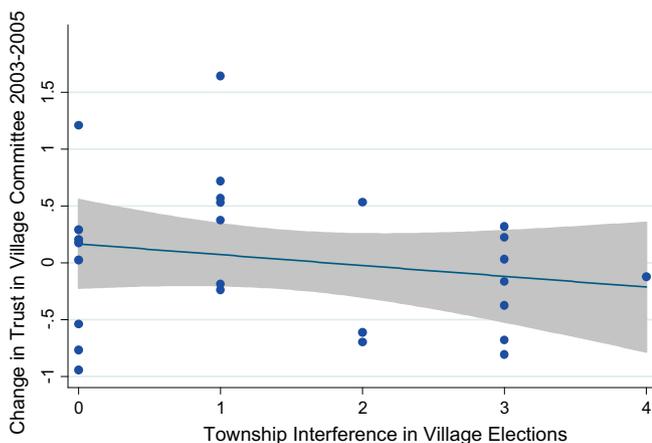


Figure 2. Township interference in village elections and local political tensions. Note: shaded area indicates a 95% confidence interval. The relationship is insignificant at the 95% confidence level.

opmental ways yet still destabilize over the long term. Here, I raise the question of whether it may be possible to strategically shift the locus of predatory corruption away from priority issue areas even as overall corruption is harder to control over the long term. Third, I discuss whether new models of anti-corruption reforms are needed for a rule of mandates.

(a) *How governing institutions shape the impact of decentralization on corruption*

A rule of mandates governing system represents a non-law-based form of decentralization in which some aspects of political accountability remain centralized, especially the determination and enforcement of political priorities, even as other dimensions may be highly decentralized. This balance of centralization and decentralization serves a purpose; it drives variations in the local implementation of laws in such a way that they serve regime priorities. Others have noted that the system of cadre accountability in China is robust, even when regime priorities change dramatically (Nathan, 2003); for instance, when top leaders switched their objectives from building a communist state to building a capitalist state, the system responded (Heimer, 2006). Yet, attention has not been brought to how, given an agenda that is set at the top, the system contributes to difficulties in observing and thus controlling corruption. One of the main lessons of this paper is that corruption may be particularly difficult to root out in a political system like China's, because the governing system inherently imposes a higher information requirement for detecting corruption.

This finding contributes to an emerging literature on the impact of decentralization and governing systems on corruption. To date, much of the research on how governing institutions affect corruption has focused on democratic and/or liberal institutions (Svensson, 2005), such as the design of electoral systems (Kunicova & Rose-Ackerman, 2005; Persson & Tabellini, 2004) and press freedom (Besley & Burgess, 2001; Brunetti & Weder, 2003). Similarly, much research on how decentralization affects corruption has taken place in democratic and/or law-based contexts. This has illuminated a debate about whether and when improved accountability occurs under centralization versus decentralization (Bardhan, 2002; Gerring & Thacker, 2004; Seabright, 1996). Yet non-law-based contexts also merit further independent attention as they may contain different dynamics, as I hope I have shown in this paper. As I discuss below, these distinct dynamics may imply a different pattern of impact and call for different anticorruption strategies.

(b) *Is a rule of mandates developmental, corruption-enhancing, or both?*

While this paper has been about the detection of corruption, it also raises an intriguing pair of hypotheses about the impact of corruption on development and stability in China. Since officials might care to shift corrupt behavior into less detectible arenas, could it be that the rule of mandates moderates the nature of corruption in high priority versus lower priority arenas? At the same time, since the rule of mandates veils corruption, might it increase the aggregate amount of corruption? These hypotheses present avenues for further research and speak to major debates in the literature.

One major puzzle about China is how development has proceeded so rapidly in recent decades even as the state has been characterized as extensively corrupt. Some have postulated that corruption might be less harmful in China, perhaps due

to high party discipline or a particular cultural heritage (Rock & Bonnett, 2004; Sun, 2004; Svensson, 2005). While illuminating, this literature has had difficulty explaining why China's top-down monitoring and disciplining system would be ineffective at controlling corruption if party discipline is so high (Dimitrov, 2005) despite an array of apparently sincere anti-corruption reforms in recent years (Wedeman, 2012; Yang, 2004). Similarly, it is puzzling that economic development targets do not incentivize more effective anticorruption work when corruption might threaten development and development is a high priority mandate (Manion, 2004). The concept of a rule of mandates offers a possible explanation for why there is party discipline in achieving high priority goals alongside enormous difficulty in identifying and fighting corruption. The mandates may effectively demand that a few high priorities are met, even as the resultant relative standards for corruption help veil corruption.

At the same time, the degree to which corruption is veiled by a rule of mandates—and thus patterns of corruption—might vary between the highest priority issues and lower priority issues. Since veto targets are mandatory or near mandatory, whereas other targets are discretionary, the simple existence of deviations from veto targets are sufficient to constitute red flags for corruption or incompetence, whereas reliably detecting corruption in other arenas requires information on the reasons for deviations. This raises the question of whether a rule of mandates shifts corruption out of high priority areas into lower priority ones, or perhaps changes the nature of corruption from predatory to developmental forms in high priority areas. Comparative evidence already suggests that officials will shift corrupt activities away from higher detection activities toward lower detection activities (Bardhan, 1997). For instance, large infrastructure projects may harbor more corruption because it is easier to maintain secrecy in this arena (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993). Research in China indicates that patterns of corruption and developmental activities are responsive to institutional restructuring (Ang, 2012; Chen, 2004). Further research might explore whether a rule of mandates limits predatory corruption in veto-target, highest priority areas in China (where less information is needed to detect corruption due to more absolute standards for corruption) even as it might increase it overall and in other areas (where more information is needed to detect corruption due to relative standards for corruption). In doing so, such research would also help elaborate the particular costs and benefits of a rule of mandates.

(c) *Political stability and anticorruption reforms under a rule of mandates*

How can effective anticorruption measures be pursued under a rule of mandates system? This study implies that reforms should look for ways to diminish the additional monitoring problem that is created by the system's relative standard for corruption. Also, since mandates regulate which laws are implemented, reforms should engage the mandates system, not simply the legal system. Two prescriptions that are typically applied in rule of law situations—limiting the discretion given to local officials and enlisting the public in actively overseeing local officials—are solutions that may be especially difficult to apply under a rule of mandates, as I discuss below.

When it comes to village elections, reports to higher officials contain inaccurate—sometimes highly inaccurate information—on the implementation of provisions of the elections law. Reports from villagers may be more reliable but are costlier to obtain and interpret. Yet might there be a way for the

party to reduce the costs of collecting and applying villagers' local knowledge by, for instance, institutionalizing more participatory processes? After all, comparative research has shown that one of the most effective ways of preventing corruption is to institutionalize local public oversight using democratic processes, at least under a rule of law paradigm.

Unfortunately, unlike under a rule of law, higher leaders in a rule of mandates system do not seem to have incentives to directly enlist the independent public, media and civil society as monitors of corrupt officials. An authoritarian rule of mandates system makes it harder for the public to play a useful role in identifying corrupt officials. In part, this is because the authoritarian regime is generally wary of allowing the public to organize around corruption concerns, especially as the public might be inclined to seize the opportunities with ferocity as they have in decades-past anti-corruption mass campaigns (Li, 2001). Yet, even beyond these are difficulties particular to the rule of mandates environment. First, the public does not generally know the mandates that local officials are given, so they have no way to judge how conscientiously an official met the mandates. So, while higher officials may wish to collect the information that locals have on local conditions—through welcoming and recording complaints for instance—they have no reason to expect that the public, politically excluded as it is, could distinguish between mandate-driven and corruption-driven behavior by officials who fail to implement laws. Second, if the public were told the particulars of the mandates, many might object to the priorities implicit in them, exacerbating the party's difficulties. Indeed, the public's own policy priorities are diverse and often differ from the priorities in the mandates. For instance, while the central mandates most strongly prioritize order and economic growth, 51% of respondents thought that rights protections should be among

any society's top two priorities, and 24% thought that public participation should be.

Another policy solution that could make it easier to monitor local officials would be to give them less discretion in deciding how to pursue their mandates. Indeed, corruption control measures often emphasize the need to limit the discretion given to lower officials. Of course, such a policy would be difficult for China to implement because it undermines a crucial feature of the rule of mandates paradigm, which is that lower officials must have the flexibility to adjust which laws and policies they follow in order to focus on the highest priority outcomes. This paradigm has benefits for the Chinese regime that it may be loathe to part with in the short term. For one, it helps the regime to achieve high priority outcomes without central officials having to understand specific local areas of the country. Second, as I have argued elsewhere, it stabilizes the regime in the short run by preventing the unwanted spillover effects of policies like village elections.

In the long run, however, if the system consistently faces overwhelming information challenges in detecting corruption—as I have suggested in this paper—the rule of mandates may undermine China's long-term prospects. In the end, the policies that are needed to greatly reduce corruption in China may not be neutral or quick fixes. Rather they may need to be fundamentally related to political reform, not only in terms of methods of choosing and overseeing officials, but also in terms of whether officials are held to absolute or relative standards. Further research is needed to determine empirically how much corruption is sheltered by a rule of mandates system, to measure the extent of any development benefits or costs of a rule of mandates, and to assess the extent to which various reforms might help fight corruption. Yet, I hope that this study has laid out clear reasons to believe that a rule of mandates system helps to veil official corruption.

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APPENDIX A

The Village Democracy Survey in Shandong and Henan was implemented in three stages, beginning in November 2005, as a collaborative effort with the Research Center on Contemporary China at Peking University, Pierre Landry, and Shiru Wang. Stage One was an in-person survey of a random sample of individuals in Shandong and Henan. These individuals were selected through a geographic sampling technique that proceeded as follows: within each of the provinces (Shandong and Henan), seven counties were selected at random according to a population-density weighting scheme that made it more likely that densely populated counties would be selected. Within each county, a township was selected at random, again according to a population-density weighting scheme. Within each township, two geographic squares, delineated by GPS measurements, were randomly selected; and the dwellings within those squares were enumerated. In practice, the 28 geographic squares, 14 in each province, encompassed 26 villages, 13 in each province. This is because, in two townships, both of

the selected geographic squares randomly happened to fall within the same large village. Within each of the dwellings included in the final sample, one resident was randomly chosen to be interviewed. Because the interviews were conducted in person and multiple attempts were made to contact each individual, the overall response rate to the survey is quite high, at about 65%. One township was resurveyed in November 2006, as some rural respondents had originally been inadvertently administered an urban version of the survey.

In Stage Two, qualitative interviews were conducted of the Village Committee Chairs (Village Heads) and Village Party Secretaries of the administrative villages included in the survey. Shiru Wang conducted these personally in November and December 2005. Knowledgeable residents were also interviewed about village facts and local politics, by the team leaders and enumerators in charge of the individual level survey. Information from these additional interviews provides a qualitative supplement to the leadership interviews.

In Stage Three, which took place in November 2006, all of the townships in the sample were re-visited; and a survey was administered to a senior township leader with the responsibility for overseeing village elections. At the same time, detailed election histories were collected on all the villages in the sample, through township and village official records where available, along with interviewing of local officials.

(a) Individual-level survey questions used to measure village election implementation

The following measures were used to assess the quality of the latest Village Committee election. These measures were constructed from the responses to individuals' survey questions, specified below, or from information from qualitative interviews, as noted.

(i) Latest election—contestation

Qualitative information from leadership interviews was used.

(ii) Latest election—enfranchisement

Responses to the following questions were used, in combination, to determine the percentage of villagers, by village, who believed they were welcome to vote in the election.

C4: Have you ever voted in a Village Committee election?

C4a: Why haven't you voted? Is it because you don't have the right to vote, or for another reason? (*open-ended responses noted*)

C10: Did you vote in the last village election?

C10a: Why didn't you vote in the last village election? (*open-ended responses noted*)

(iii) Latest election—nomination openness

C11: In the last election, could you directly nominate a candidate?

(b) Survey questions used to measure township intervention

Township checkpoints for intervening in village elections (asked of township official in charge of election oversight).

A count index (0, 1, 2, 3) was created to represent the number of checkpoints revealed in response to the questions below.

T8: In the last round of village committee elections in this township, which department or leaders were responsible for confirming the members of the village election organizing committees? (coded 1 if any, coded 0 if none)

T9: In the last round of village committee elections in this township, which department or leaders were responsible for suggesting the lists of candidates for village committee chair? (coded 1 if any, coded 0 if none)

T10: In the last round of village committee elections in this township, which department or leaders were responsible for confirming the lists of candidates for Village Committee Chair? (coded 1 if any, coded 0 if none)

Open-ended Interviews with Village Committee Director (aka Village Heads) and Village Party Secretaries were used to determine whether or not elections had not been held as scheduled, whether or not elected village leaders had been dismissed or new ones appointed, and the explanations for why.

(c) *Survey questions used to measure local corruption*

(i) *Public perceptions of local corruption: (asked of surveyed villagers; and then averaged by village)*

H6: How much corruption would you say there is among officials in this area?

1. None

2. There's very little
3. There's some amount
4. It's very common
5. Don't know

(d) *Survey questions used to measure public's priorities*

(ii) *Public priorities: (asked of surveyed villagers)*

G5: In any society, not everyone can receive everything they want. Let's consider society that has the four goals below; which do you think is the most important goal?

1. Giving people more input when the government is making a decision.

2. Economic development.

3. Protecting people's basic rights.

4. Upholding social order.

G6: And what do you think is the next most important goal?

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