

*The Political Consequences of Deliberative Democracy and Electoral Democracy in China: An Empirical Comparative Analysis from Four Counties**

Deyong Ma and Szu-chien Hsu

Abstract

Recent research suggests that both electoral democracy and deliberative democracy under a nondemocratic regime may help to sustain existing authoritarian rule but is likely to eventually lead to the democratization of authoritarian regimes by eroding its basis in the long term. However, few studies have used comparative methods to empirically analyze the political effects of these two types of democracy together. In this article, we use survey data and in-depth interviews to empirically analyze two local political reform experiments in China. Four fieldwork sites were selected: two where democratic experiments have been implemented and two where no political reform has been implemented. We compared the political consequences of the two locations of democratic reform experimentation using indicators such as political trust, administrative performance, and democratic aspirations. The results show that the electoral

Deyong Ma is Professor in the School of International Studies, Renmin University of China.

Szu-chien Hsu is Associate Research Fellow in Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Correspondence should be sent to sh81@gate.sinica.edu.tw.

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democracy experiment delivered better governance and higher political legitimacy than the deliberative democracy experiment, while deliberative democracy performs better than the usual township governance system. Although the results show that the electoral democracy experiment fosters higher democratic aspiration, strong evidence verifying the causal mechanism between deliberative democracy experiment and appeals for democracy has not been found. Based on the empirical findings, we discuss the implications of the two experiments for China's politics.

In the literature discussing the survival of authoritarian regimes, there are two major categories. The first emphasizes how political institutions, based on competitive election and interest representative (such as political parties and parliament), can help the regime to be more responsive and incorporative, thus supporting the legitimacy of the authoritarian political order.¹ In the case of China, despite studies showing that grassroots elections at the village or township level contribute to increasing the level of governance,² it is still unclear whether this kind of electoral democracy under an authoritarian regime is helpful in maintaining the continuation of authoritarian regimes or will contribute to democratization. On the one hand, the implementation of formal electoral democracy under a nondemocratic regime is likely to foster the demands of ordinary people for genuine electoral democracy and threaten existing authoritarian rule. On the other hand, it provides national government a means of restraining local or grassroots political elites from abusing their power and increases the responsiveness of authoritarian regimes, thereby gaining popular support and increasing legitimacy. Because of the double-edged sword of the political consequences of electoral democracy, authoritarian countries such as China face a dilemma over whether or not to expand the existing local electoral democracy experiment to a higher level.

Another stream of literature, mainly using China as a case, focuses on how noncompetitive institutions, such as co-optation, corporatism, consultation, and deliberation, help authoritarian regimes to be more resilient and endure.³ Baogang He, Fishkin, and many other researchers have argued that deliberative democracy plays a positive role in China's political development. Using the case study of Wenling, these scholars contended that deliberate democracy makes the "government more responsive to public needs and in the long term it contributes to