

**Election Observation Report
Fujian, People's Republic of China
May 1997**

An Update to 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

Mission Statement

From May 17-28, 1997, a four-member delegation sponsored by the International Republican Institute (IRI) traveled to Fujian province in the People's Republic of China to observe village committee elections in Xin Luo and Si Ming Districts. The delegation consisted of *Mr. Douglas S. Foxley*, an election attorney and former Chief Elections Officer from the State of Utah, *Mr. Paul Grove*, Director of IRI's China Programs, *Ms. Dulcy Ricciani*, Superintendent of Elections for the County of Mercer, New Jersey, and *Mr. Stephen Yates*, a policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

The purpose of the delegation's trip was to observe and assess the development of village committee elections in Fujian province, where IRI first observed village elections in 1994, (since 1994, IRI has observed dozens of elections throughout China). The delegation to Fujian observed primary and final elections in Ya Jin and Hong Xie villages, which are located in mountainous, poor Xin Luo District near Longyan. In coastal, prosperous Si Ming District near Xiamen city, the delegation observed a final election in Zeng Cuo An village.

As benchmarks to assess electoral developments, the delegation relied upon the observations and recommendations contained in IRI's 1994 Fujian Election Observation Report. During that cycle of committee elections, IRI sponsored the first international team of observers ever invited to observe village elections in China. The 1994 delegation released a report that made recommendations for procedural improvements in twelve areas of electoral administration.

The following report is an assessment of the changes in Fujian's election practices between 1994 and 1997. The 1994 and 1997 delegations observed elections in the same counties, though not in the same villages. The delegation noted several significant improvements in village elections, including the mandatory use of secret ballots and secret voting booths, the abolishment of proxy voting, the use of enlarged photographs as campaign materials, and the standardized training of election workers. In addition to general observations, this report contains the delegation's specific suggestions which they believe might further improve the administration of village committee elections.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Located in southern China, Fujian province has gained a reputation of holding the most credible and best managed village committee elections in all of the country. After observing elections in villages near Longyan and Xiamen in both 1994 and 1997, the IRI delegation believes that this reputation is well deserved. In the past three years, significant changes and improvements to election practices and procedures have been made by both provincial and local election officials.

According to Fujian officials, village committee elections were not always free and fair. In the first two rounds of elections, held in 1984 and 1987, candidates were chosen through indirect means or by outright appointment. Election officials acknowledged that there was no experience with direct elections at the grassroots level. Direct elections were held for the first time in 1991, but they continued to be deficient with respect to certain basic democratic characteristics, such as secret balloting. Fujian officials believe that successive rounds of elections and the implementation of new election regulations in November 1996 have raised the standard of village committee elections. The delegation is of the same opinion.

1997 marks the tenth anniversary of village elections. The delegation believes that the elections are a significant political development that enjoys the popular support of an emerging Chinese electorate. Village committee elections have a direct impact on the lives of ordinary citizens through more responsive and accountable government. The delegation acknowledges that though they may be limited in their ability to affect any greater political change in China, they are credible elections deserving of continued study and support.

Village Committees and Election Procedure

The laws and regulations governing village committee elections in Fujian province include the national Organic Law of Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China (Experimental), promulgated by the National People's Congress in 1987, and the Electoral Code of the Village Committee of Fujian Province, which was passed in 1990.

Village committee members are elected for three year terms of office. The committees usually consist of three to seven members, with one chairman, as many as two vice chairmen, and one or more members. The chairman's seat in Fujian is a full-time, paid position. Although there is variation from province to province and county to county, village committees generally oversee all administrative matters of a village, including budget management, public utilities, dispute resolution, public safety matters, social security, health issues, and local business management.

There is no single election day for village committee elections in Fujian province. During the

province's designated election year, the counties and townships within the province work together to determine the election days for the villages in their jurisdiction. In May 1997, when the IRI delegation conducted its election observation, Fujian had completed approximately 60 percent of the 1997 elections for village committees.

While the quality of elections may vary widely throughout the province, each election adheres to the same basic framework. The first step in the electoral process is the registration of voters. This is typically handled by village election commissioners who are selected by the incumbent village committee and approved by the village representative assembly.¹ According to provincial regulations, a list of registered voters must be compiled, published, and publicly displayed 15 days before the final election is held. Voters are allowed to challenge registration lists to ensure their accuracy.

Following voter registration, candidates are nominated by petition. Any five or more villagers can nominate a candidate to compete for the positions of chairman, vice-chairman, or committee member. In poorer, less-developed areas, some village committees do not have a position of vice-chairman. A standardized nomination form is used by the electorate throughout the province (see Attachment A), and the nomination process must be completed eight days before the final election. Within a three day period after the nomination process, all nominees must be reviewed by township and village election commissions to ensure that they are qualified to hold office. According to Fujian officials, nominated candidates must be residents of the village, older than 18 years of age, and able to vote.

The third step in the electoral process is the primary election. Provincial regulations allow candidates to be selected by direct or indirect means. In some areas, all registered voters may participate in an open primary election to select the formal candidates who then compete in final elections. In the primary elections observed in Longyan however, formal candidates were determined in an indirect election in which the village representative assemblies and heads of all households selected formal candidates through secret balloting (see Attachment B). Primary elections are held two days before final elections.

Final elections are required to be *direct* elections. The use of secret ballots and secret voting booths or private voting rooms is mandated in provincial regulations. For an election to be considered valid, a majority of eligible voters must cast their ballots; winning candidates are required to receive 50 percent-plus-one of all ballots cast. When no candidate receives a majority, a run-off election is held within three days. In run-off elections, candidates are only required to receive 33 percent of all votes cast. Winners of final elections and run-off elections

¹ The village representative assembly is a local body generally comprised of village leaders, elders, and heads of households, which serves as a guidance body for the village committee on major policy decisions (e.g. major infrastructure or agricultural projects).

(if necessary) assume their positions immediately.

In poor areas such as Longyan, all positions on the village committee are elected together on a single ballot (see Attachment C). In Xiamen, the electorate is given a different ballot for each position and may participate in several separate elections to select membership to the committee (see Attachment D). These elections may or may not be held on the same day.

Recent Changes in Electoral Procedure

Provincial and local officials are pleased with the progress village committee elections have made between 1994 and 1997. In meetings with the IRI delegation, Longyan and Xiamen officials identified specific changes and improvements to election practices that were implemented prior to the current fourth round of elections (see Attachment E). Longyan officials noted fifteen specific changes to procedures, which included:

(1) mandatory use of secret ballot and secret ballot booths or private voting rooms in all elections; (2) mandatory review of primary candidates by township and village election commissions to ensure they are qualified to hold office; (3) optional use of polling stations to provide villagers with more convenient voting venues; (4) provincial ban on the use of proxy voting during elections; (5) mandatory audits of the income and expenditures of incumbent village committees and public display of the audits; and, (6) permission for candidates to appoint monitors to oversee voting at polling stations.

Fujian election officials were most appreciative and commended IRI for the suggestions contained in the 1994 observation report. In observing elections, the delegation verified that improvements had indeed been made. Some were more readily apparent than others, such as the universal use of secret ballots and secret ballot booths or private voting rooms. Three years ago, IRI observed voters filling in ballots at communal tables. Today, secret ballot booths and private voting rooms are employed in polling stations managed by trained election workers. In one polling station in Xiamen, an 81 year old man voted for the first time using a secret ballot and private voting booth at a local polling station located in a religious temple.

New regulations provide that candidates for the election can only be nominated by a petition signed by five or more registered voters. In the past, the Communist Party branch and local civic organizations could field their own candidates. Now, Party members and others can sign on to a petition to nominate a candidate, but their organizations do not formally put forward their own candidates.

On election day, ballot boxes are now required to be locked and sealed. Roving ballot boxes must also now be sealed and accompanied by two or more election officials. Additionally, two

election workers are on hand at each polling station to assist illiterate voters who request assistance in completing their ballots.

Another change in voting procedure, which was also implemented to assist illiterate voters, is the use of photographs of candidates, which are prominently displayed on the walls of each polling station along with a sample ballot. In Longyan, only the chairman candidates had their photographs placed on the wall, while in wealthier Xiamen, both chairman and vice-chairman candidates were displayed. New regulations have also replaced proxy voting with an absentee voting system in which non-resident villagers can request ballots and cast them through the mail.

All election workers interviewed by the delegation had received extensive training by county and township officials, and were given election manuals and reference materials. For the most part, voting at polling stations in the three villages was orderly. In Longyan's Ya Jin village and Xiamen's Zeng Cuo An village, candidates appointed monitors to oversee voting and the final ballot count.

Winning candidates in final elections are no longer required to receive a majority of all *registered votes* as they had been in 1994. Today, only a majority of the *total votes cast* are needed for an election to be considered valid. In instances where no candidate receives a majority of votes, run off elections are held and only 33 percent of votes cast are needed to determine a winner. Write-in candidates are permitted in run-off elections.

In other areas of village committee elections the delegation found deficiencies. While the nomination process is relatively open, the process by which nominees become final candidates in both Longyan and Xiamen continues to be a closed process. Village representative assemblies, heads of village groups, and heads of households vote by secret ballot to determine who the final candidates will be; this process, known as democratic consultation, was troubling to the delegation.

Candidates who win primaries are subject to a review by township and village election commissioners to determine their qualifications for office. One major concern is that Fujian's laws and regulations leave the qualifications vague and undefined. The delegation also believes that the short length of time between the primary and final election is inadequate to allow for proper distribution of sample ballots and other civic education materials and for effective campaigning by candidates. Finally, the "drop down" rule had not been abolished as recommended in 1994, and in Xiamen, single balloting is not used in village committee elections.

Elections in Longyan and Xiamen

The elections observed in Longyan and Xiamen were credible and competitive elections. In Ya Jin village, 23 candidates competed for the single chairman position (21 candidates were write-ins; nearly one-quarter received more than five votes), and 46 competed for the four member seats (41 were write-ins). With a voter turnout of 81 percent, no single candidate received a majority in the chairman's race. Despite receiving 42 percent of the vote, the incumbent chairman -- who was also a member of the Communist Party -- was forced to participate in a run-off election (which took place several days after the IRI delegation left the area), when he lost a potential 17 percent of the to a write-in candidate. Interestingly, the write-in candidate was a 30 year old factory manager -- not a member of the Party -- who had a reputation for being a good businessman.

The voter turnout in Hong Xie village was 82 percent. Sixteen candidates competed for the single chairman seat (14 candidates were write-ins) and 25 candidates ran for the two member positions (22 were write-ins). As in the neighboring village, no single candidate for the chairman position received a majority of votes. The two top competitors had current leadership positions in the village: one was an incumbent member of the village committee (and Party member) who received 32 percent of the vote, and the other, the head of a household group who received 46 percent. The latter, non-Party member candidate could have won the election had a write-in candidate not received 14 percent of ballots cast. As in Ya Jin village, a run-off election was held to determine the chairman.

In Zeng Cuo An village, the chairman was handily elected. With an 88 percent voter turnout, 8 candidates competed for the single chairman position (six were write-ins) and 11 for the single vice-chairman seat (nine were write-ins). After the final tally, the female incumbent vice-chairman -- who was also a member of the Party -- won the chairman's seat with 87 percent of the votes. A vice-chairman was elected with just four votes over the 50 percent-plus-one rule. As Xiamen does not use single balloting, a second election was scheduled for the next day to elect the additional four committee members.

Conclusion: Electoral Administration and Electoral Environment

When observing elections, IRI makes a distinction between electoral administration (the technical quality of the elections) and the electoral environment (the atmosphere or conditions in which the elections take place). The delegation believes that Fujian's electoral administration is unquestionably sound and that its electoral system is effective and comprehensive. The electoral regulations are clear, election workers are trained and knowledgeable, and the basic electoral framework is in place, from procedures for candidate nomination to voter registration to ballot tabulation.

The electoral environment in Fujian is difficult to evaluate and generally can be seen as a way to understand whether the election is meaningful to the voters and whether the government respects the outcome of the election. High voter participation rates, a competitive open nomination process, and high numbers of voters turning out to watch the ballots being counted are all strong indicators that the elections are meaningful. The presence of independent election monitors and the immediate transition of power from the old committee to the new committee on election day suggest that the government respects the outcome.

A number of the concepts of a free and fair election exist in Chinese village elections: open nomination of candidates in the initial stage, reasonable candidate qualifications (e.g. a candidate does not have to be a member of the Communist Party to compete or win election), equal campaign opportunities and access to public forums, and the ability to develop a campaign platform independently. Though these concepts do not exist on a macro-level in China, on a micro-level, that is at the village level, they are permissible and even encouraged. While villagers and officials are clearly supportive of elections, at present the process is limited to the village level.

The purpose of this report however is to assess the technical merits and deficiencies of the elections observed in Fujian and make recommendations for ways to modify and revise the existing electoral procedure. Technical reform of the electoral process would presumably impact not only the electoral administration, but also the electoral environment. Though IRI focuses exclusively on electoral administration in this report, it is hoped that Chinese election officials will continue to work towards improving the electoral environment.

Overall, the quality of the elections was sound and the delegation commends Fujian election officials for the tremendous progress made in the short period between the third and fourth round of village committee elections. The delegation believes that election procedures will continue to improve with each additional round of elections and specific modifications to current practices. With over 15,000 villages in Fujian alone, the delegation recognizes the immense task election officials face in educating and holding village committee elections. IRI is willing and prepared to assist Fujian officials as they meet the challenges of continuing to improve village elections.

1997 Recommendations

The following section is a list of recommendations to be considered as benchmarks in the next election cycle.

I. Primary and Final Elections

Primary elections should be direct, open elections in which all registered voters participate. The length of time between the primary and final election should be increased by 3-7 days to allow for more civic education and campaign activities. Qualifications for candidates should be clarified in provincial regulations and a fair appeals process should be established and guaranteed. The use of the “drop down” method of voting should be universally prohibited, and there should be at least two candidates competing for each position on the village committee.

II. Civic Education Activities

Aggressive civic education campaigns should be conducted on a regular and on-going basis. Target groups should include registered voters as well as primary and secondary students and women. Civic education materials should be as visual as possible and should include things like posters on voting procedures, such as the one developed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 1996, and other informational flyers and pamphlets. Election officials should distribute sample ballots to voters prior to primary and final elections.

III. Campaign Activities

Candidates should be provided with an extended period of time to campaign, and should be given venues for publicly announcing platforms before both the primary and final elections. Campaign posters for all candidates should be displayed at polling stations, and platforms or biographical information should be publicly displayed in or near polling stations on election day.

IV. Election Worker and Monitor Training

Election officials should continue to train election workers aggressively and to distribute written manuals and other standardized materials. Election monitor training programs should be established and instructional manuals developed and distributed to all monitors. Provincial regulations should specify the scope and authority of monitors.

V. Roving Ballot Boxes and Absentee Ballots

The use of roving ballot boxes should be abolished. Absentee ballots should be sent to voters

outside the village, the sick, and the elderly so that all may participate in primary and final elections. Extending the time period between primary and final elections will allow for ballots listing all formal candidates to be distributed and collected before the tallying of votes.

VI. Ballot Secrecy and Security

Election officials should continue to promote and enforce the use of secret ballots and secret ballot booths or private voting rooms. Secure ballot boxes and transportation of ballots should remain a top priority.

VII. Election Fraud and Enforcement

National and provincial election officials should clarify the definition of election fraud and practices. Provincial regulations should detail fines and punishments associated with election fraud, and a fair appeals process should be established.

Observations and Recommendations

The following section details the observations of the 1997 IRI delegation, analyzes the 1994 benchmarks, and makes recommendations for further modifications of the electoral procedure. For comparative purposes, the 1997 report will be presented in the same fashion as the 1994 report.

Issue 1. Civic Education for Voters

The delegation recommends the implementation of a comprehensive civic education program using visual teaching aids to educate voters on their rights and responsibilities in a village election.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

Voter turnout was high in all of the elections observed by the delegation, with 81 percent of eligible voters casting their ballots in Ya Jin, 82 percent in Hong Xie, and 88 percent in Zeng Cuo An village. These high rates of participation can be attributed in part to the perceived importance of village committee elections to rural Chinese and to the successful civic education activities of Fujian election officials.

Through interviews and observation at polling stations in Ya Jin, Hong Xie, and Zeng Cuo An villages, the delegation learned that voters received instruction on election procedures through posters displayed in public areas, household group meetings with election officials, and public broadcasts at markets and from moving vehicles. According to villagers interviewed, these methods of civic education generally begin a week or so before the final election is held. As a testament to the effectiveness of current civic education activities, numerous voters, including a 75 year old woman in Ya Jin village articulated a sound understanding of the importance of secret balloting.

The delegation was also impressed by the placement of photographs of the candidates for chairman in every polling station visited. Attached to a sample ballot, the photographs appeared to be a useful tool in assisting illiterate and other voters during the election. In Zeng Cuo An village, photographs of vice-chairman candidates were also publicly displayed, as were written campaign materials of the two formal chairman candidates (see Attachment F).

While Fujian officials should be commended for these efforts to educate the electorate on the basic principles of village elections, the delegation observed that in every polling station a backlog of voters were waiting to receive their ballots because election officials were busy explaining voting procedures to villagers. In some polling stations, the delegation observed that written instructions on how to vote were posted on the walls. The congestion of villagers waiting

to vote suggests that much more time and effort may be needed in instructing voters on how to mark their ballots properly. In 1994, IRI recommended using animation or posters or videos to demonstrate how to participate in an election as civic education tools. Neither these recommendations nor similar activities have yet to be implemented.

The voter backlog at polling stations may also be an indication that a more aggressive, long term civic education effort must be undertaken by election officials. A more educated electorate would not only increase support for village elections, but also allow for a less disruptive flow of voters at polling stations on election day. While some delays can be attributed to the layout of certain polling stations (which in some instances were private homes), election workers at all of the polling stations visited were observed explaining the ballot format to voters. In one polling station in Ya Jin village, election monitors selected by candidates were also observed discussing voting procedures with the electorate.

A further indication that additional efforts are required in civic education can be found in the number of invalid or unmarked ballots cast in the elections. While not alarmingly high, all three villages had approximately 3 percent of the total ballots cast declared invalid because they were improperly marked or not marked at all. On some ballots seen by the delegation in Zeng Cuo An, villagers had voted for both of the formal chairman candidates. The delegation believes that as villagers gain more voting experience through regularly scheduled committee elections, both the number of invalid or unmarked ballots will decrease and the need for officials to explain the balloting process to voters will diminish.

1997 Recommendations

Civic education continues to be of paramount importance to the success of village elections in China. The delegation believes that while voters in Longyan and Xiamen appeared enthusiastic and supportive of village elections, election officials should consider dedicating more time and resources to ensure that all voters have a more firm understanding of the election process and procedures and their rights and responsibilities on election day. Election officials should also consider implementing more creative means for educating voters on the proper method for completing ballots.

The delegation believes that Fujian election officials deserve praise for their current civic education activities, but reemphasizes the importance of comprehensive civic education programs to the overall success of village elections. The delegation suggests that election officials consider implementing civic education programs on a more regular and on-going basis - not just for the period of time immediately before an election is scheduled. Programs should be targeted to both eligible voters and younger citizens, including students in primary and secondary school.

Civic education materials should continue to highlight the rights and responsibilities of citizens

in elections, such as the right to a secret ballot and freedom of choice. Election officials may want to consider including more comprehensive instructions on voting procedures in their current civic education activities, such as more detailed explanations of the informal candidate nomination process and ballot format. This instruction should be carried out well in advance of any election. While provincial election officials are more familiar with the challenges in implementing civic education programs in Fujian's 15,000 villages, the delegation suggests that standardized civic education programs and materials be utilized as widely as possible.

The delegation again recommends the use of animation print and film materials as educational tools, as well as entertaining skits and radio and television programs. While a large portion of China's population is literate, the delegation believes visual instruction methods can more quickly and effectively educate voters. Costs could be minimized by enlisting local artists in civic education efforts; they could copy standardized posters developed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs showing the voting process, which would then be prominently displayed in public areas and at polling stations (see Attachment G). From farmers to retired cadres to teenagers voting for the first time, all materials should be targeted to as broad an audience as possible.

Finally, the delegation recommends that enlarged sample ballots -- along with candidate campaign materials, such as speeches delivered during the primary election -- be made more readily accessible to voters prior to final elections. The delegation suggests that election officials print, mail, or hand deliver sample ballots to all registered voters to increase the electorate's awareness of the candidates and their placement on the ballot. The sample ballots should indicate the times polls open and close, the location of the polling station, and instructions to voters on voting procedures. Distributing sample ballots would be more effective if the period of time between the primary and final elections were extended, a move the delegation also supports.

Issue 2. Electoral Commission Composition and Election Official Selection

Federal election officials should develop guidelines governing the eligibility of election commissioners and electoral officers that minimize conflicts of interest by using people from outside the village and that maximize mutual supervision by involving representatives of different village constituencies.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

In 1994, the IRI delegation noted that regulations specifying the composition of village election commissions and election workers were few and vague. The updated regulations of November 1996 state that the composition of village election commissions should include a director, one or two vice-directors, and up to 40 members (depending on the size of the village). At least one woman should serve on the commission.

In 1997, election officials informed the delegation that members of village election commissions are nominated by incumbent village committees and approved by the representative assemblies.

While perhaps a minor modification, this change does allow a directly elected body to indirectly select election commissioners.

Provincial election officials expressed reluctance to the appointment of officials from outside villages to serve on village election commissions as was recommended by the 1994 delegation. The officials explained that the village committee election process is an exercise in self-government, and only villagers should serve on village elections commissions in order to preserve their autonomy. While the logic in this argument can be appreciated, the integrity of elections may be better guaranteed by employing officials from outside the electoral jurisdiction.

County, district, and township election commissions continue to provide oversight to village election commissions. At the Central Polling Station in Hong Xie, the delegation was pleased that township and village commissioners were equally represented during the voting and counting process. Officials from outside of the electoral jurisdiction can generally be understood to be impartial participants in the election and more resistant to coercion or corruption. By using non-resident officials in oversight capacities, the transparency of the elections process is further enhanced. The delegation believes that the oversight and instruction provided by the township commissioners is important to the conduct of free and fair elections. However, if village election commissioners are to be seen as the primary authority during the elections process, township officials may want to assume a more supervisory role at polling stations in future elections.

The delegation notes that the appointment of monitors by candidates to oversee the elections process is a significant development. In its 1994 report, IRI suggested that more citizens from different constituencies serve as monitors to guarantee the openness and transparency of the voting and counting process. In Ya Jin and Zeng Cuo An villages, both formal chairman candidates appointed one monitor to each polling station. These monitors went beyond the traditional role of monitors however and assumed the role of election officials once voting began. In most every polling station, monitors were seen conversing with voters and assisting them in understanding how to complete the ballots.

In all three villages, the counting process was open to the general public and election officials encouraged villagers to attend the final tally. In Ya Jin village, voters stood out in the rain to observe the final count, a strong indication of their interest in the election. At the Central Polling Station in Hong Xie, over one hundred men, women, and children stood for over two hours during the counting process.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation suggests that provincial election officials continue to encourage the participation of township officials as supervisors of village committee elections. Optimally, some members of the village election commission and election poll workers should be from outside the electoral jurisdiction. The selection of village election commissioners by the incumbent village committee

is an improvement over the direct appointment by village representative assemblies. The delegation suggests that no person should serve concurrently on the village committee and the election commission.

Candidates should be encouraged to appoint monitors to oversee elections and provincial election officials should work with local officials to develop specific province-wide training manuals and programs to ensure that monitors understand their role and responsibilities on election day. Regulations should be developed to limit certain activities of monitors, such as instructing voters on the proper way ballots should be marked. The function of monitors is to ensure the integrity of the voting and counting process through observation not instruction. They should never serve as additional election officials.

Finally, the delegation suggests that election officials continue to encourage villagers and the candidates to attend the final ballot count in elections. Local election officials should try to ensure that the central counting center or location is large enough to accommodate villagers and other groups interested in watching the final tally.

Issue 3. Nomination of Formal Candidates

Formal candidates should be chosen by a direct primary election and voters' understanding of their right to write in the candidates of their choice should be further enhanced.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

The nomination of formal candidates continues to be an issue of concern to the IRI delegation, primarily due to the closed nature of the process. The delegation believes that the electorate's will would be better expressed through an *open, direct primary* in which all villagers participate.

Since 1994, there has been little change in the way candidates are nominated and primary elections held. Informal candidates continue to be nominated by petition, and any five or more voters can nominate the candidate of their choice. According to updated Fujian election regulations, civic organizations and the Communist Party can no longer submit nominations, although their members may do so individually if they choose. The nomination process appears to allow for a broad range of interests to be expressed. At the Second Polling Station in Hong Xie village, the delegation spoke with a 35 year old Christian mother who, together with other women in the village, nominated a candidate to stand in their village committee election.

The large number of informal candidates nominated by villagers reflects both the electorate's interest in local elections and the healthy functioning of an open nomination process. In Ya Jin, five nominations were submitted for the chairman position (two nominees voluntarily withdrew themselves prior to the primary) and 19 were submitted for the four committee member

positions.² In Hong Xie, ten candidates were originally nominated for the single chairman position (six nominees later voluntarily withdrew themselves prior to the primary), and 12 nominees were submitted for the two member positions.³

Following the nomination process, Fujian regulations stipulate that election commissioners at the township and village level investigate nominees to ensure they are qualified to stand in the primary election. While no qualifications are noted on the nomination form, election officials stated that there are three primary qualifications for all nominees: (1) they must be over the age of 18 and a resident of the village; (2) they must not be currently deprived of their political rights, and; (3) they must be of sound mental health.

When asked by the delegation if any candidate had been investigated and found in violation of these regulations, election commissioners from Bai Sha and Yan Shi Townships in Longyan indicated that each disqualified a single candidate this year. They explained that one nominee was under the age of 18 and the other was not a resident of the village in which he was nominated.

Once the nominees' qualifications have been determined, representative assemblies or the heads of villagers' groups typically vote in a primary election to select formal candidates to stand in a general election two days later. A prescribed number of candidates compete for a prescribed number of committee positions. For example, in Ya Jin the village representative assembly selected two candidates from a field of three to compete for the chairman's position, and five candidates from 19 to compete for four member seats.

The delegation remains unclear on exactly how village representative assemblies are formed. In some instances it appears that they are elected by secret ballot, while in other cases they are appointed. *The delegation believes that regardless of how the assemblies and heads of villagers' groups are formed, the primary election process should be open and direct.* When asked by the delegation for their preference of direct or indirect primary elections, a group of male voters in Hong Xie indicated they would prefer to select the final candidates themselves.

A final election is held two days after the primary election. The IRI delegation is concerned that the short time between elections may not provide enough opportunity to educate voters on balloting procedures and that candidates have an unreasonably limited amount of time to meet with voters and to circulate their campaign materials.

² Due to its size, Ya Jin has no vice-chairman position on the village committee.

³ As in Ya Jin, Hong Xie village is small enough that it does not require a vice-chairman position on its committee.

The 1994 report noted that the permission of write-in candidates and the fact that candidates need a majority of the votes cast to be declared a winner act as a checks on the process when the representative assembly fails to provide voters with popular candidates. These supervisory mechanisms remain in place. It should be noted that the 1996 Fujian regulations changed the requirement in place in 1994 that candidates had to receive at least *50 percent-plus-one of all registered voters* -- regardless if they participated in the election. Winning candidates must now receive a majority of the total votes cast. If no candidate receives the required number of votes, a run off election is held with the stipulation that winning candidates receive at least 33 percent of the votes cast.

The combination of write-in candidates and the “50 percent rule” continues to result in a large number of required run off elections. Provincial election officials estimated that in 1994, 15 percent of all committee elections in Fujian resulted in run off elections. In Ya Jin and Hong Xie villages, the significant number of write-in candidates resulted in run off elections for both chairman races.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation proposes three specific suggestions relating to the conduct of primary elections in Fujian. First, the current method for selecting final candidates should be abolished in favor of an open primary in which all villagers can participate. The delegation believes that an open primary would allow greater expression of the electorate's will and could reduce the overall number of run off elections. In a direct, open primary, voters are able to express their will by supporting candidates nominated by other villagers or by writing-in their own selection. The frequency of run off elections and the high number of write-in candidates is an indication that voters do not generally have clear favorites to choose from among the final candidates. An open primary would result in final candidates who benefit from the greatest amounts of popular support within the village. Run off elections are costly for the village and frustrating for voters and election officials alike. Fujian officials should study the use of the open primary process currently utilized in other provinces in China.

Second, candidate qualifications should be defined explicitly in the election regulations and a reasonable appeals process should be established for those candidates who believe they were unfairly disqualified from running for office. Provincial election officials should be responsible for guaranteeing that investigations and reviews of candidates by township and county election personnel are impartial and fair. The delegation believes that the current investigation process could be open to abuse by special interests at the village level -- such as clans -- and at other levels.

Finally, the delegation suggests that the length of time between primary and final elections be extended by 3-7 days, depending on the size of the village. In Ya Jin, Hong Xie, and Zeng Cuo An villages, the delegation observed a large number of voters receiving instruction on how to

vote --- *on election day*. An extended period of time between primary and final elections would allow officials to conduct effective civic education campaigns. Enlarged sample ballots with fictitious names or with the names of formal candidates could be printed and circulated by election officials and heads of household groups.

An extension of time would also allow candidates to campaign more effectively. In large villages, a single day does not afford a candidate the opportunity to engage in any public discourse, such as door-to-door campaigning or public speaking. With the exception of the chairman candidates in Hong Xie, whose speeches were posted at all polling stations and a single candidate in Ya Jin who visited a voter, the delegation found almost no evidence of campaigning.

With regard to absentee balloting, an extension of the time period between the primary and formal elections would allow for complete ballots (i.e. listing all formal candidates) and other election materials to be mailed to villagers outside each village. Currently, absentee ballots are mailed before primary elections occur and recipients are required to write-in their choice for election without having adequate information to make an informed decision. Ballots could also be mailed to the elderly and infirm, eliminating the need for roving ballot boxes.

Issue 4. Number of Candidates and Number of Elections

All candidates for all offices should be elected on a single ballot to avoid the need for multiple elections. The principle of two formal candidates per position should be expanded to include all committee member seats, and not just the officers.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

In 1994, the IRI delegation observed only one election in which the chairman, vice-chairman, and members of the village committee were all elected on a single ballot. The mission observed two elections in which three separate ballots were used: one for chairman, a second for vice-chairman, and a third for committee members.

Three years later, the IRI delegation observed four elections in which single ballots were used (primary and final elections in Ya Jin and Hong Xie villages) and one in which separate ballots were used for all three positions on the committee (Zeng Cuo An village). According to election officials, in poorer areas such as Longyan, a single ballot is the preferred method of voting. Often, no vice-chairman position exists and with limited resources, township and village officials are eager to minimize the number of elections and their corresponding costs.

In prosperous villages around Xiamen, committee elections typically use separate ballots. In Zeng Cuo An, the final election for chairman and vice-chairman occurred simultaneously, while the final election for village committee members was scheduled one day later. Those candidates who are not successful in the chairman or vice-chairman races can automatically "drop down" to participate in the committee member race, by-passing the nomination and primary election

procedures. Election officials explain that the success of economic development in prosperous villages requires that the most qualified candidates sit on village committees as a rationale for the use of the “drop down” method. According to these officials, losing candidates in the chairman and vice-chairman elections are more qualified than the formal member candidates.

The delegation was informed that a third type of election noted in the 1994 report is no longer permitted. These elections allowed members to be elected first, followed by the chairman and vice-chairman, in three separate elections.

All of the elections observed by the delegations were multi-candidate. However, the number of formal candidates in committee member races was only one more than the number of seats. In Ya Jin village, for example, only five candidates competed for the four open committee seats.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation recommends that the “drop down” method of voting be abolished in favor of single ballot voting in one election. This would streamline election procedures throughout the province and would ensure that all candidates are treated equally. In addition, by using a single ballot the number of required elections would be reduced. Theoretically, a prosperous village utilizing the "drop down" method could hold as many as six elections to form its village committee: one each for chairman, vice-chairman, and committee members; and, three run off elections if no candidates receive a majority in any of the races.

The delegation also suggests that there be two formal candidates competing for each open village committee seat. For example, two-person committees would have at least four formal candidates, while an election for a five-member committee would have at a minimum ten candidates.

Issue 5. Candidate Qualifications and Constituency Representation

Civic education should encourage women to participate as candidates. The delegation recommends electoral system reform in those villages where a majority of citizens come from the same family clan in order to permit diverse constituency representation. As happens in some elections already, Party and non-Party members should be treated equally.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

Though a woman candidate won the chairman's race in Xiamen, in the other elections observed by the delegation, no other women candidates were nominated for any of the elected positions. The delegation noted that very few women participated in the primary process both as candidates and as voters. In Ya Jin, only four women voted in the primary election. However, large numbers of women voters were observed at the final elections in all villages that were visited and numerous women served as election workers.

Candidates competing in all three final elections were a mix of both Party and non-Party members. For example, in Ya Jin village only one of the five formal candidates belonged to the Communist Party. There are no national or provincial regulations which state that candidates must belong to the Party, and the delegation did not hear or observe any instances where a non-Party member was deprived from participating in an election as a candidate or as a voter.

The delegation did not observe clan-based politics in which a single family or clan dominated the primary or final election.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation again emphasizes that the sole criterion for choosing informal or formal candidates should be voter support. Regulations specifying qualifications for candidates should be made clearer and nomination forms should continue to be free of language which limits villagers' choice. Election officials should ensure that the process of investigating candidates is transparent and fair, and not open to influence by any village group or clan or individuals serving on the election commission.

Specific civic education programs should be targeted toward women to encourage their participation in elections as both voters and candidates. A component of these programs should highlight that the decision to nominate or support a candidate is a personal choice, and should not be unduly influenced by husbands or fathers.

Issue 6. Campaigns

Rules for campaigns should be developed as soon as possible. Practices such as town meetings and door-to-door campaigning that allow potential candidates to educate voters on their positions should be encouraged, while practices that attempt to influence voters by coercion or vote-buying should be strictly outlawed.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

According to provincial election officials and Fujian regulations campaigning is allowed by all candidates in the period between the primary and final elections. If a candidate chooses to do so, he or she may conduct door to door campaigning, publish and distribute materials such as fliers, hang posters in designated areas, and make public speeches at the village committee office. Campaign expenses are the responsibility of each candidate. Election officials stated that only two campaign practices are prohibited: negative campaigning, which they defined to be speaking adversely of one's opponent; and, campaigning on the day of the final election.

In all five elections in Longyan and Xiamen, only three campaign practices were observed by the delegation. In the primary elections in Ya Jin and Hong Xie, candidates for the chairman positions delivered short speeches to the representative assemblies immediately before ballots were cast. Prepared speeches noted each candidate's experience and platform for improving the village's economic development and quality of life. The incumbent chairman in Ya Jin noted the economic progress the village had made during his tenure as chairman: specifically, a US\$12,000 investment in the village's veneer plant and US\$2,800 spent on the construction of a new kindergarten. He also promised to continue to promote the village's welfare through forestation and water conservancy efforts and the construction of a teacher's dormitory.

In all three villages, photographs of the chairman candidates were displayed at every polling station. Election officials explained that the primary objective of the photographs was to assist illiterate voters in completing their ballots. The delegation believes that the pictures also serve a useful campaign purpose.

In Zeng Cuo An village the formal candidates for chairman and vice-chairman not only had their pictures displayed at each polling station, the chairman candidates also posted summaries of their campaign platforms under their photographs. When asked what she had done to campaign for the office, the female chairman candidate stated that in addition to posting her platform summary, she gave a speech before the representative assembly on the day of the primary.

In conversations with villagers in Hong Xie, the delegation learned one of the candidates for village committee chairman had done some door-to-door campaigning. According to one voter, the candidate had visited his home the day before the election for tea and brief discussion. No village issues were discussed and no requests for support were made. The chairman candidates interviewed by the delegation uniformly echoed that they had faith and trust in villagers to elect

them to office and did not need to rely on campaigning to convince the villagers to vote for them.

The delegation concluded that with the exception of chairman candidate speeches made immediately before the primary elections, little effective campaigning occurred in Longyan and Xiamen. The primary reason for the absence of campaign practices appears to be that villagers have a negative view of those of who campaign on their own behalf. The term for campaigning, "pulling votes," carries a strong pejorative connotation. A second reason for the lack of campaign activities may be that through daily interaction in the village, voters and candidates feel confident that voters can make an informed decision without hearing campaign speeches or promises.

Given its own observations in Fujian, the delegation believes that the statistics offered by election officials on campaign practices may be inflated. According to officials in Longyan, 50 percent of the candidates in the 1997 elections held to date printed and distributed their speeches and platforms, 25 percent of the candidates went door-to-door, and 25 percent engaged in no measurable campaign activity.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation again recommends that the period between the primary and final election be extended to allow candidates more time and opportunities to campaign. All registered voters should participate in the primary process and campaigning should be allowed for a defined period before both primary and final elections.

Election officials should provide a public forum for voters to hear candidate speeches and to ask questions. Candidates should be permitted to distribute campaign materials and platform summaries at these gatherings and again on election day in a manner prescribed by Fujian's regulations. Restricted election day activities should not interfere in the voting process at polling stations.

Finally, all candidates should have their photographs displayed at polling stations. Election officials should consider posting candidate-authored biographical information by each candidate's photograph to ensure that the electorate is familiar with the candidates and empowered to make an informed choice. Each candidate should be responsible for preparing his or her own biographical summary.

Issue 7. Polling Place Procedures and Training of Election Officials

Polling place procedure should be standardized, and election officers should be trained according to their specific function. Provincial officials should develop a simple training manual divided into sections that emphasize the most important rules for each different type of election officer.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

The delegation was generally impressed with the quality of the election workers at each polling station. Those workers interviewed by the delegation indicated they had received repeated training by county and township officials. Fujian's regulations provide that the county and township are responsible for the training of village-level election officials.

In Longyan, election officials informed the delegation that one month prior to the elections, 150 village-level election workers participated in a training course. During the course, the officials received manuals and other materials on election practices and procedures. At polling stations in Longyan and Xiamen, the delegation observed that election officials had some of their manuals available for quick reference. Longyan election officials estimated that approximately 20,000 election workers received training between the third and fourth round of village committee elections.

The delegation observed election workers at polling stations in Ya Jin and Hong Xie villages engaged in practices that are prohibited in other countries. This included reviewing ballots with the electorate and handling ballots as they were posted in ballot boxes. Monitors selected by candidates were also engaged in practices that exceeded their authority, such as hovering around secret ballot booths as voters marked their ballots.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation recommends that election workers continue to participate in training programs sponsored by county and townships. The delegation believes that with additional training and hands-on experience election workers will increase their understanding of Fujian's election regulations and of their own role and function at polling stations.

The delegation also recommends that election monitor training programs and manuals be developed to assist monitors in better understanding their role on election day. An extension of the time period between primary and final elections would allow candidates to select monitors and for those monitors to receive training by village election officials. Provincial regulations should also specify the scope and authority of monitors on election day.

To ensure the efficient operation of polling stations on election day, the delegation suggests that election officials consider increasing the number of election workers at each station. Current regulations provide that at least three workers must be at each polling station. The delegation believes that additional election workers may assist in decreasing voter backlog.

Issue 8. Ballot Distribution

The system for ballot distribution should be standardized to prevent mistakes and

irregularities, and should involve greater supervision by outsiders and by representatives of different village groups. The delegation recommends abolishing the current system that allows three proxy votes, as it presents opportunities for fraud and may disenfranchise women in more traditional roles.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

The delegation was satisfied with the distribution of ballots and noted that all polling stations checked voter registration cards against a list of registered voters before handing out ballots. In every village with the exception of Ya Jin, the voter registration card was marked by pen. At polling stations in Ya Jin, the card was either taken by registration officials or marked on the back. No standardized procedure or mark was utilized.

The placement of monitors in each polling station varied. In Longyan monitors were located by the registration table and private voting rooms and in Xiamen the monitors were positioned by the secret ballot booths. The monitors appeared to be in fixed, designated areas throughout the election.

Provincial and local election officials informed the delegation that the use of proxy votes was abolished in Fujian's updated election regulations and practices. The delegation observed several instances where voters were refused a proxy ballot to vote for their family members.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation was generally pleased with ballot distribution and recommends that monitors be allowed to move freely within each polling station to observe all aspects of the voting process. A standard process for reviewing voter registration cards and marking registration lists should be adopted uniformly throughout a given village.

Issue 9. Ballot Secrecy

The delegation believes that the most urgent electoral reform is providing voters with practical opportunities to exercise their right to a secret ballot. County election officials should provide villagers with secret voting booths, and voting at communal tables should be strictly outlawed.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

In contrast to 1994, the delegation saw no instance in which a voter was deprived of filling out their ballot secretly. In all polling stations visited, secret ballot booths or private voting rooms were utilized and two election workers or monitors were at each booth or room to ensure that no voter's privacy was violated. Standard materials were found in every booth or room: an ink pad, a ballot marker, and pen for write-in candidates. All the venues were adequately lit.

Most impressive were the secret ballot booths used at the Central Polling Station in Hong Xie village. Two booths were built from plywood with a curtain across both the entrance and exit. Voters were permitted to enter the booth by one election worker while the second assisted voters in depositing their ballots in properly sealed and locked boxes. The booths ensured not only the privacy of voters but also the smooth flow of traffic in the busy polling station.

The private voting rooms used in several of the polling stations in Ya Jin were acceptable to the delegation. However, some tables were placed too close to open windows, through which voters could be observed filling out their ballots. Election officials at the two polling stations took measures to improve secrecy during the delegation's visit. One station taped newspaper over the bottom window panes to obstruct the view, while in another station, tables were moved to the back of the room away from public viewing.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation suggests that election officials continue their commendable efforts to implement the universal use of secret ballot booths and private voting rooms in polling stations and general voting areas. In instances where private voting rooms are used, election officials should ensure that tables are not placed in full view of open windows or doorways. Finally, election officials should conduct aggressive civic education programs to ensure that all voters understand the concept of the secret ballot and voting procedures.

Issue 10. Ballot Box and Roving Ballot Box

Election officials should standardize the system of supervising the roving ballot box, and should require written advance request in order to arrange for a visit by the roving ballot box on election day.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

Fujian election officials have done a commendable job in securing ballot boxes with locks and seals. Ballot boxes at polling stations in Longyan and Xiamen were uniformly sealed by a red strip of paper, which in some cases was pasted over the lock. At the Central Polling Station in Hong Xie, the boxes were opened in the morning at the start of the election and shown to the public to demonstrate that they were empty; seals were then affixed and signed by election workers. Upon the closing of the polls, strips of red paper were glued over the slots of the box, and the seals again were signed by election workers. In Ya Jin, election monitors as well as election workers signed the seals.

Ballot box transportation to central counting centers did not follow any standardized form with boxes arriving in cars and on the back of motorcycles. Village election officials were responsible for transporting ballot boxes to the counting center, and in some cases monitors accompanied the boxes. In no instance did less than two election workers deliver a ballot box to the central

counting center.

Roving ballot boxes continue to be used in Fujian province to allow the sick and the elderly to vote in final elections. While the delegation believes this practice is open to fraud and abuse, some measures have been taken to limit opportunities for voting irregularities. In Xiamen, eight voters required the use of the roving ballot box. Their names were placed on a list that was publicly displayed outside the Central Polling Station prior to the election. Election officials informed the delegation that only the eight voters whose names were listed could cast their ballots by roving ballot box.

The delegation followed the roving ballot box to the home of a thirty year old man who had been injured in a tractor accident and was confined to a wheelchair. Four election workers accompanying the ballot box gave the man one of the eight ballots they were carrying, which he filled out and placed in the ballot box while lying in his bed.

In Ya Jin village, there was little control over the roving ballot box. Election officials stated that the sick and elderly could use the box to vote -- *as well as anyone who had not voted at a polling station*. In Zeng Cuo An, the delegation was surprised to learn that six roving ballot boxes were used by some 200 people.

Because of difficulties in adequately supervising the roving ballot boxes, election officials in Xiamen indicated that election officials in a neighboring district want to completely abolish their use. District officials are aware that without absentee balloting, the sick and elderly may not be able to participate in elections. According to Xiamen officials, every effort would be made to transport the sick and elderly to polling stations on election day.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation suggests that locked and sealed ballot boxes should continue to be used in all primary and final elections. Election officials should safeguard all keys to the boxes, and should keep the keys under supervision at all times. Officials may want to consider securing all the keys at the central counting location. The practice of election officials and monitors signing ballot seals at the beginning of an election (to seal the box) and at the end (to seal the slit on the box) should also continue.

The delegation agrees with Huli District officials that the use of roving ballot boxes is undesirable and should be abolished completely. The delegation suggests that permanently disabled voter lists be established so that absentee ballots can be sent to all sick and elderly voters prior to a primary and final election. Provincial officials should amend regulations to codify the use of absentee ballots in lieu of roving ballot boxes.

Issue 11. Election Fraud and Enforcement

Each province should establish a fair elections commission with branches in each county to investigate cases of election fraud. The committee should develop and publicize a schedule of fines, and bar those convicted of electoral irregularities from holding office for a fixed term. Enforcement of a fair electoral process is essential to prevent manipulation and fraud.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

The delegation did not witness any instances of voter fraud in the primary and final elections in Longyan and Xiamen.

According to provincial election officials and Fujian regulations, election complaint centers have already been established at the provincial, county, and township levels to handle cases of fraud and voting irregularities. Voters are allowed to take their complaints directly to the provincial level, where the center is located within the Bureau of Civil Affairs.

The delegation was informed that a total of 562 election-related complaints were received by the Bureau of Civil Affairs in 1994. Most of the cases were resolved, but in 24 villages the final elections were determined invalid and new elections were held. Although the 1997 elections are still ongoing, over 80 election complaints have been received by the complaint centers, most of which reportedly concern irregularities in voter registration.

Provincial officials admitted that Fujian's regulations are unclear on the definition of election fraud and the penalties imposed on violators, and informed the delegation that this issue was currently being discussed in Beijing.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation encourages national and provincial election officials to continue to clarify and amend regulations and laws pertaining to election fraud and enforcement. Civic education campaigns should contain a segment on election fraud to alert voters to different methods and types of influence buying or coercion. Voters should also know the method of reporting fraud and election abuse if they suspect it.

Issue 12. Demonstration Counties

The delegation suggests that the recommendations contained in this report be implemented as a package in a number of counties as soon as possible. The experience gained in these demonstration counties will help Chinese election officials develop practical programs to expand electoral reform nationwide.

-- 1994 IRI Election Observation Report

The delegation notes that numerous recommendations in the 1994 election observation report were implemented in Longyan and Xiamen counties. Election officials informed the delegation that following the completion of the 1997 election cycle, 20 demonstration counties will be selected by the Fujian Bureau of Civil Affairs based on the quality and success of their elections.

1997 Recommendations

The delegation again recommends that the suggestions made in this report be considered and discussed by Chinese election officials. In addition, the delegation recommends that election officials from numerous counties and provinces regularly meet in official and unofficial capacities to share election experiences and to exchange information on voting procedures and civic education activities.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs and the provincial Bureaus of Civil Affairs should continue to expand the model county system, perhaps setting a goal to designate a certain number of new model counties at the conclusion of each election cycle.

Glossary of Terms

Clan

A clan is an extended family that usually shares the same last name. Some natural villages in China are inhabited primarily by members of the same clan, and for this reason these villages are simply known as the “Zhao family village” or the “Liu family village.”

Chairman of Village Committee

The chairman of the village committee essentially serves as the village mayor. He is the chief executive officer in the village and is responsible for handling village finances. In Fujian and many other provinces, the chairman of the village committee must be chosen in a direct, multi-candidate election.

“Drop-down” Method

The “drop-down” method of voting is an electoral system used in some Fujian villages. Under this system, the losing candidate for chairman drops down to become the alternate for vice chairman; the losing candidate for vice-chairman drops down to become an alternate for the committee at large. This method requires multiple rounds of elections and limits the total number of candidates.

Formal Candidate

A formal candidate is a candidate whose name is printed on the ballot. Under Fujian law, the ballot must present voters with a choice of multiple formal candidates for each position on the village committee.

Informal Candidate

An informal candidate is a candidate nominated by a petition with five or more signatories. Once candidates have been nominated by petition, they are reviewed by the village and township election commissions. Informal candidates compete in primary elections to become formal candidates.

Proxy Vote

An abolished practice, villagers unable to participate in elections were once able to provide written authorization to another person to vote on their behalf.

Roving Ballot Box

The roving ballot box is a small ballot box that is carried to the homes of the aged, infirm and others who are unable to go in person to the polling station.

Village Groups

The small village group is a smaller organizational unit in the village. Just as the village committee and representative assembly are successors to the commune structure, small village

groups have replaced production brigades.

Village

Throughout this report, the term “village” refers to the political unit of local government at the grassroots level. A village may in fact consist of several geographically distinct natural villages that are organized under a common political structure.

Village Committee

The village committee is the executive branch of government at the local level. There are three to seven members on most committees, usually presided over by a director, vice-director(s), and member(s). According to Chinese law, members of the village committee must be chosen by direct elections.

Village Representative Assembly

The village representative assembly provides policy guidance to the village committee on issues such as infrastructure and agriculture development. It usually consists of twenty to sixty village elders who meet several times a year to establish village priorities, and to hear reports for the chairman of the village committee.

Write-In Candidates

A write-in candidate is a candidate whose name is not printed on the ballot, but has been written in on the ballot by voters. In Fujian, printed ballots have a designated space to enable voters to write in the candidates of their choice.