

**GRASSROOTS ELECTIONS  
IN CHINA: 1993-2013**

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## **Executive Summary**

1. Elections are not new to China. They have been conducted in villages and urban residential communities for about 30 years. In the Chinese Communist Party's latest reform blueprint, the Third Plenum Decision, Party leaders have vowed to improve and expand these elections.
2. Many western observers have once, especially back in the 1990s, expected these elections to be the very first steps of China's democratisation. Some others doubt the competitiveness of these elections or the impact they can exert on the entire party-state system.
3. Four rounds of national public opinion surveys of Chinese citizens in 1993, 2002, 2008 and 2013 reveal that these elections were competitive until in recent years. These elections did provide a meaningful and important channel for Chinese participation in politics.
4. Like in advanced democracies, the educated and politically confident people were more likely to vote or participate in electoral campaigns. However, stronger state intervention and a decline in competitiveness have diminished the credibility of these elections.
5. Chinese voters participate in elections not for democracy but for practical purposes such as punishing corrupt officials.
6. Like elections in established democracies, voting or an involvement in campaign activities increases satisfaction with the local government and with one's own life.
7. Those who stay away from elections are more inclined to express their views through protests than those who take part in voting and campaigns.
8. Beijing has carefully confined these elections to the grassroots level. Initiatives to promote electoral reform to higher levels were frustrated. Political contestation in

villages and residential communities has produced very little dynamics for political reform of the entire system.

9. Overall, grassroots elections in China have yet to pave the way to democratisation. These elections had been important and meaningful to Chinese voters to express their political concerns until in recent years when the government managed to narrow the space for grassroots self-governance.
10. In the long run, analyses show that Beijing may need to revitalise grassroots elections. Providing institutionalised channels for participation is an effective way to increase regime support and reduce contentious activities.