Chinese visitors learn democracy's details while in America

Written by Samantha Schmidt
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While standing in line at the poll center, most voters don’t wonder about the lack of law enforcement members present.

But that’s one of the main observations made by a Chinese delegation visiting Indiana this week.

The delegation spent the past week observing the American election process. They visited poll sites, met Gov. Mitch Daniels, traveled to Republican headquarters in Indianapolis and took part in other Election Day events.

Fenggang Yang, professor and director of Purdue’s Center on Religion and Chinese Society, worked with the Carter Center in Atlanta to host the group of about 20 delegates. They represented elite members in academia, business, media and government.

“They have all learned so much and have a sense of the local level of politics,” Yang said. “This experience has provided them with the details of democracy.”

Yang hopes that the delegates take these ideas back to China.

“It takes time to implement a democratic system, but we hope to see democracy develop in China,” Yang said.

Hu Wei, a member of the delegation, professor and founding dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, echoed Yang’s thoughts.

“It is a long, difficult process, but most of all, it is an incremental process with reform happening step by step. Sooner or later, China will develop into a democracy, so to experience the process in the United States is important because the American election system is to some extent a model for China,” he said.

Wei also noted the strong mobilization in the voting process, with candidates traveling across the country to reach as many people as possible. Wei said if democracy develops in China, there would be a great need to educate citizens about the process.

The delegates also took notice of the campaigns’ focus on details and technology, specifically at the local level.

Weidong Li emphasized the grass-roots support present in the American system.

“In China we have a long way to go to get that grass-roots support, but in the five years there has been more access to Chinese media available,” Li said.

“The election,” he added, “is not about the president, it’s about the citizens who elect the president. We don’t have that in China.”