**Time is Power: Rethinking Meritocratic Political Selection in China**

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**Supplementary Material**

Appendix A: **Data Sources**

For county leaders, we compiled a name list of county leaders from the Local Leader Dataset,[[1]](#footnote-1) province yearbooks and other sources.[[2]](#footnote-2) Using this name list, we searched for officials’ curriculum vitae on government websites, online official appointment news, *Baidu baike* 百度百科, and other reliable online information sources. Biographical information for 4,146 county Party secretaries in 1,893 counties and county-level cities between 2010 and 2016 was collected. The figure shows that each county has 2.19 county Party secretaries on average during the period of our analysis, which implies that these counties generally experience at least one leadership change.

For the data on prefecture leaders, we first collected a list of names of prefecture mayors and Party secretaries based on province yearbooks, prefecture yearbooks and prefecture government websites. Our list covers the period between January 1997 and October 2015. It includes 332 prefectures from 27 provinces and autonomous regions. With this list, we then searched for these officials’ biographical information and career history from websites such as the Database of Chinese Leaders (*Zhongguo lingdao ganbu ziliaoku* 中国领导干部资料库), prefecture government websites, and *Baidu Baike*, a Wikipedia-like online portal in China. Our variable of interest is economic growth. The data primarily come from *Wind*, a Chinese professional information provider for financial and economic data, similar to Bloomberg.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Appendix B: **Estimation Strategies**

The first estimation strategy is ordinary least squares regression, in which we regress a cadre’s time until promotion with his or her average annual GDP growth rate, together with other control variables and various regional dummies. This is the typical fixed effects model. Our second estimation approach is a multilevel model, in which we treat the individual and local variations in time until promotion as random effects. The advantage of the multilevel estimation is that it allows us to estimate the effects of time-invariant factors at regional levels, which cannot be estimated by fixed effects models. With the current data structure, we treat county Party secretaries as level-1, prefectures as level-2, and provinces as level-3. As recommended by Andrew Bell and Kelvyn Jones,[[4]](#footnote-4) we include the cluster means of all level-1 variables in order to tackle the potential endogeneity between these variables and omitted characteristics of prefectures.[[5]](#footnote-5)

For both fixed effects and multilevel models, we evaluate factors that affect time until promotion by excluding cadres who were not promoted. Although promoted leaders constitute the majority of the observations, it is instructive to examine why promotion fails to take place in some cases. Our last two estimation strategies, which come from the event history analysis, are well-suited for this purpose. As its name suggests, the event history analysis refers to a set of estimation techniques that focus not only on the occurrence of an event (i.e. promotion in our case) but also on the history leading up to it. Our main event history model is the generalized gamma, which is known for its flexibility in modelling the distribution of the duration time to event.[[6]](#footnote-6) The other event history model is the Cox proportional hazards (CPH) model. The CPH model is semi-parametric in the sense that researchers do not need to make assumptions about the underlying distribution of duration time, which may be an advantage for some applications where the researchers are primarily interested in the event occurrence.

Appendix C: **Young County Superstars**

We examine the biographies of the young county “superstars” in our dataset. We use 35 and 38 as the cut-off age for county chiefs and county Party secretaries, respectively. These two numbers are about ten years below the median age of the underlying county leader group. There are 114 county chiefs and 111 county Party secretaries who are at or below the cut-off age. Their township leadership experience is shown in Table A1. It turns out that less than 20 per cent of these promising county leaders have prior experience as a township leader. As a comparison, a large number of these young superstars have held leading positions in some local branches of the Communist Youth League (CYL). The result is consistent with the observations of Chien-wen Kou and Xiaowei Tsai, who point out that the CYL experience provides fast-track promotion opportunities.[[7]](#footnote-7) In fact, many young superstars with prior township experience are also secretaries for the CYL. It is unclear whether their CYL affiliation or their township performance accounts for their fast promotion. If we exclude these ambiguous cases, only 6.1 per cent of these county chiefs and 8.1 per cent of these county Party secretaries are promoted from township leaders.

Table A1: **Young County Leaders**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **Township Leadership Experience** | | | | **Communist Youth League (CYL)** | |
|  |  |  | *All* | | *Excluding CYL* | |  |  |
| Position | Age | *N* | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| County chief | ≤35 | 114 | 20 | 17.5 | 7 | 6.1 | 59 | 51.8 |
| County Party secretary | ≤38 | 111 | 13 | 11.4 | 9 | 8.1 | 43 | 38.7 |

*Source:*

Authors’ calculation.

Appendix D: **Alternative Factionalism Measure**

In the main analysis, we define factions in relation to leaders’ local ties (namely, the variables, home province and locally promoted superior). To check robustness, we adopt an alternative operationalization of local factions: a local leader is considered to be a member of the faction of a superior (i.e. the Party secretary at the next administrative level) who brought him or her to that leadership post. The basic premise is that superiors would only appoint an underling whom they trust to head a lower territorial unit.[[8]](#footnote-8)

We can then compare the time until job change/promotion between factional members (“insiders”) and non-factional members (“outsiders”). For example, if prefecture Party secretaries tend to favour their own followers in cadre promotion, we would then observe that they would move up county Party secretaries whom they brought into the counties faster than those who were not appointed by them.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The main results of our analysis remain unchanged, despite the inclusion of this alternative definition of factions. For example, we re-run the specifications in Table 4 in the main article by adding this new variable. As may be seen in Table A2, the coefficients on the variables of interest are very similar to those in Table 4.

Table A2: **Robustness Checks: Using Alternative Definition of Factions**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **County chief** | **County Party secretary** | **Prefecture mayor** | **Prefecture Party secretary** |
| Log GDP per capita | -0.136\*\* | -0.125\*\* | 0.141\*\* | 0.105\*\* |
|  | (0.016) | (0.015) | (0.022) | (0.025) |
| Economic performance | -0.013\*\* | -0.009\*\* | -0.010 | -0.020\* |
|  | (0.002) | (0.002) | (0.007) | (0.008) |

**References**

Bell, Andrew, and Kelvyn Jones. 2015. “Explaining fixed effects: random effects modeling of time-series cross-sectional and panel data.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 3(1), 133–153.

Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M., and Bradford S. Jones. 2004. *Event History Modeling: A Guide for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kou, Chien-wen, and Xiaowei Zang (eds.). 2014. *Choosing China’s Leaders*. London: Routledge.

Mundlak, Yair. 1978. “On the pooling of time series and cross section data.” *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society* 46(1), 69–85.

Rabe-Hesketh, Sophia, and Anders Skrondal. 2008. *Multilevel and Longitudinal Modeling Using Stata*. College Station, TX: STATA press.

1. The Local Leader Dataset is maintained by People.cn, an online portal for the *People’s Daily*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The order of importance of our data sources is: Local Leader Dataset, province yearbooks, and other sources. Because the Local leader Dataset only provides county leaders who were incumbent at the end of 2015 and province yearbooks often lack a complete name list, we also consulted the website, *Guqiaowang*, which provides a platform for users to voluntarily report information about the career moves of local officials. For quality assurance, we crosschecked the names of officials identified on *Guqiaowang* with *Baidu*. The URL of the Local Leader Dataset is http:// ldzl.people.com.cn/dfzlk/front/firstPage.htm. *Guiqiaowang* is available at http://www.guqiaow.com/. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more details, see http://www.wind.com.cn/Default.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bell and Jones 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Researchers usually deal with such endogeneity using fixed-effects models. As various authors point out, random effects estimation with cluster means of level-1 variables yields similar estimates as fixed-effects models, but the former can avoid losing information pertaining to between effects. Mundlak 1978; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008; Bell and Jones 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Kou and Zang 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Party secretaries have their own terms of office. For instance, a newly minted prefecture Party secretary cannot replace county Party secretaries all at once. When there is a vacant position, however, the prefecture Party secretary can then fill that post with someone he or she trusts. Under such circumstances, a prefecture Party secretary always has some county underlings belonging to his or her faction, and some who do not. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In other words, we define a county Party secretary as an “insider” or an “outsider” in relation to the prefecture Party secretary who subsequently promoted him or her to a higher position. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)