

From Power Balancing to a Dominant Faction in Xi Jinping's China

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Abstract

Many China-watchers argue that Xi Jinping 习近平 has concentrated power in his own hands in a manner unprecedented since the death of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 and Deng Xiaoping 邓小平. This article tests the extent of Xi's power consolidation by comparing the strength of his faction during his time in power to similar periods under his two immediate predecessors, Jiang Zemin 江泽民 and Hu Jintao 胡锦涛. Furthermore, we investigate whether a dominant faction is emerging under Xi Jinping, replacing the power balancing between factions that was the norm throughout the reform era. Analyzing factional affiliations of Chinese leaders in the top four ranks, we find that Xi has formed a dominant faction. Through statistical analysis of promotion chances of provincial leaders, we find that Xi has been unusually successful in promoting his clients as compared to previous leaders. This suggests that Xi has strengthened his faction by promoting provincial leaders to an extent unprecedented since the death of Mao and Deng.

Keywords: Elite Politics, Factions, Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, China

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Introduction

Many China watchers argue that Xi Jinping has concentrated power in his own hands in a manner unprecedented since the death of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Evidence of this includes Xi installing himself as the head of various central leading groups and commissions, his designation as “core leader,” his eponymous ideology inserted into the Party Constitution, his domination of the military, his prominent position in media coverage, the end of term limits that could apply to him, and his unprecedented anti-corruption campaign.¹ Other scholars argue that, rather than establishing “one-man rule,” Xi maintains a system of collective leadership based on factional power balancing which has prevailed throughout the reform era.² This article assesses whether Xi’s purported consolidation of power is visible in factional politics by examining the strength of his faction in comparison with those of his two immediate predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

For top Chinese leaders, informal connections with supporters are a source of power at least as important as their formal position.³ Official positions are insufficient to guarantee power for top leaders as was vividly and repeatedly demonstrated by the downfall of three heads of Chinese Community Party (CCP) in the post-Mao era: Hua Guofeng 华国锋, Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦, and Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳. Without charismatic authority, post-revolutionary leaders need to rely on informal networks of followers. The introduction of a retirement age and term limits marked progress towards institutionalization.⁴ The extent to which institutionalization trumps informal power appears limited, however, as was made clear

¹ Shirk 2018; Jaros and Pan 2018; Luqiu 2016; Ji 2020.

² Miller 2014; Li 2016; Cho 2018.

³ Dittmer 1995.

⁴ Teiwes 2001.

by Xi's 2018 abolition of term limits for his position.⁵ The rules for appointing personnel remain obscure, especially at higher levels and this under-institutionalization of personnel appointment gives top Chinese leaders many opportunities to promote clients. Thus, Lucian Pye's (1980, 180) 40-year-old observation that "personal appointments are pure power questions, and as such they represent the final outcome of all factional conflicts" is still valid, at least for high-level positions.

We investigate Xi's power by examining the strength of his faction in comparison to those of his two immediate predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. The current head of the CCP has the influence to place supporters in high ranked positions and promote them to even higher positions. However, his influence could be checked within the party, by blocking the appointment of some of his clients and balancing his appointments with those of members of other factions. Recent history has shown that the most likely check on the power of the current head of the party would come from a faction connected to a retired party head who could exert influence, especially through his clients in the Standing Committee of the Politburo. We measure the strength of a faction by their share of positions in the top four ranks of the Party-State, including the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the Politburo, provincial party secretaries, and provincial governors. Further, we investigate whether a dominant faction is emerging under Xi Jinping, replacing a power balance between factions in the Hu and Jiang eras.

The number of faction members in high ranked position is both a signal and source of factional power. In order to increase the strength of his faction, the head of the CCP would want

⁵ Shirk 2018.

to promote as many of his clients as possible. Empirically, studies have verified this by finding that factional ties to Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao had positive effects on provincial leaders' promotion chances.⁶ But, while the head of the CCP is likely to exert influence on personnel decisions, his ability to do so would vary depending on the strength of his faction relative to rivals. Success in factional promotion should be self-reinforcing: the more a leader promotes members of his faction, the stronger his position will be to do so in the future. If Xi Jinping, less constrained by rival factions or individuals, was able to bestow significantly larger advantages to his favorites, compared with Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, this would both demonstrate and reinforce the dominance of his faction. Conducting statistical analysis on the chance for promotion of provincial leaders from 1989 to 2018, we find that Xi's clients had meaningfully larger advantages in promotion, compared with Jiang's and Hu's.

This article broadens the understanding of Chinese elite politics in several ways. First, whereas previous studies viewed factional politics through the lens of power balancing,⁷ we have proposed an alternative model: a dominant faction. This is both a theoretical and empirical innovation and one that is needed because Xi Jinping's dominance seems to have ushered in a new era in Chinese politics not just in terms of factions or elite politics, but across Chinese domestic politics and in many areas beyond.

Second, existing studies of factional configurations during the Xi Jinping era have generally been confined to an analysis of top leadership positions. Considering the power concentration at the top in Chinese politics, the importance of these studies cannot be exaggerated. However, due to the small number of top leadership positions, scholars interpret

⁶ Choi 2012; Jia, Kudamatsu and Seim 2015.

⁷ Nathan 1973; Shih, Shan and Liu 2010; Zeng 2018; Li 2007; Bo 2002.

the distribution of factional power differently. Of the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee in the 19th Party Congress, three belong to Xi's faction (Xi Jinping, Li Zhanshu 栗战书, and Zhao Leji 赵乐际), two belong to the Chinese Youth League (CYL) faction headed by Hu Jintao (Li Keqiang 李克强 and Wang Yang 汪洋), one belongs to the Shanghai faction headed by Jiang Zemin (Han Zheng 韩正), and one does not belong to any faction (Wang Huning 王沪宁).⁸ While Cho interprets this as a power balance among different factions, Fewsmith argues that it reveals the dominance of Xi's faction.⁹ If we confine our analysis to this level, it is difficult to resolve the debate. By incorporating factional affiliations of Politburo members and provincial leaders, we demonstrate that Xi Jinping has been more successful in strengthening his faction in comparison to Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

Third, in a separate line of research, scholars have investigated whether factional connections or economic performance affect the promotion of provincial leaders. The findings are mixed. Some conclude that economic performance matters for promotion,¹⁰ whereas others show that only political connections are significant.¹¹ Still others find that both political connections and economic performance matters.¹² Our study suggests that the importance of factional connections for the promotion of provincial leaders could depend on the power of their faction relative to rival factions. If a faction is less constrained by a strong rival faction or

⁸ Gueorguiev 2018.

⁹ Cho 2018; Fewsmith 2018.

¹⁰ Li and Zhou 2005; Bo 2002.

¹¹ Shih, Adolph and Liu claimed that factional ties, but not economic performance, increased the chance for promotion of the Central Committee Members in the CCP. Most provincial party secretaries and governors are members of the Central Committee. Shih, Adolph and Liu 2012.

¹² Choi 2012; Jia, Kudamatsu and Seim 2015.

figures, then membership is likely to bestow a greater advantage in terms of promotion.

A Power Balance vs. a Dominant Faction

Belloni and Beller (1978, 419) define a faction as “any relatively organized group that exists within the context of some other group and which (as a *political* faction) competes with rivals for power advantages within the larger group of which it is a part.” They provide three ideal types of factions, depending on the extent of institutionalization and the importance of horizontal and vertical ties. The first type, factional cliques, form to pursue a single issue. In these groups, recruitment is ad hoc and leadership is based upon charisma, rather than clientelist ties. The second type, personalized factions, are based upon clientelism, consisting of followers of a prominent leader. In these factions, a leader of a faction plays a crucial role in recruiting factional members and chains of command are vertical. For this factional type, the importance of horizontal networks among followers are minimal. The final type, institutionalized factions, develop organizations and recruit members on a non-personal basis. Horizontal networks among members are essential and factional members share a common identity.¹³

The CCP bans the formation of factions within the party so CCP members are not able to form institutionalized factions. Additionally, factional cliques do not usually form to pursue a single issue. We therefore investigate personalized factions which at the top of Chinese politics are generally led by heads or former heads of the CCP. The basis of personalized factions is patron-client relationships, which involve four core attributes: interest exchange,

¹³ Belloni and Beller 1978.

longevity, face-to-face contact, and power inequality.¹⁴ In other words, patron-client relations entail interest exchange between individuals with unequal power who have known each other for a long time through face-to-face contact. While patronage and clientelism are often used interchangeably, patronage entails an additional attribute, the “discretionary distribution of public office” to one’s clients.¹⁵

Some scholars have disputed how useful the concept of factions is for understanding Chinese politics. Skeptics provide two justifications. First, Teiwes (2001, 77) claims that “the utility of the concept of “factionalism” is limited” because objective criteria such as age, qualifications, and tenure gained importance in personnel decisions. It is undeniable that these factors also play an important role in determining promotions in the upper echelons of the CCP. However, given that there are far fewer positions than officials who could be promoted to occupy them, especially at the highest levels, there is still tremendous variation in who might be promoted. From 1989 to 2018, for example, only 21 per cent of official serving as provincial party secretaries would be promoted above that level. Additionally, our findings outlined in the subsequent sections corroborate past findings that factional ties play a crucial role in determining the chance for promotion of provincial leaders, even controlling for age, qualifications, performance, and tenure. Our study, therefore, empirically verifies the importance of factions in Chinese politics.

Second, skeptics argue that factions are a constant and therefore too static to illuminate changes in Chinese elite politics. Indeed, scholars have applied factional models to Chinese

¹⁴ Hilgers 2011.

¹⁵ Ibid.

politics since the era of Mao Zedong.¹⁶ Why then are factions endemic in Chinese elite politics? Pye (1980) attributed it to Chinese cultural traits of relying on superiors. On the other hand, Huang (2000) claimed that a single party system breeds factionalism because competing groups do not have an exit option to create a new party. The ongoing influence of culture and the one-party system, therefore, mean that factions continue to be relevant to Chinese elite politics. While the existence of factions within the CCP is a relative constant, however, power configurations among factions may change in important ways that help us understand corresponding changes to Chinese politics more broadly, as our study demonstrates.

Existing studies on factional politics suggest that factions tend to form a balance of power.¹⁷ Building a deductive model, Nathan (1973, 46) argues that “politicians in a factional system are ‘condemned to live together.’” He claims that if one faction becomes stronger, other factions would make an alliance against it because the main concern of a faction is survival.¹⁸ Examining factional connections of Central Committee members from 1921 to 2007, Shi et al. found that power sharing has been the usual power configuration with a couple of exceptions when the CCP faced serious external threats such as Civil War.¹⁹ Several empirical studies have demonstrated that factional politics during the Hu Jintao era were characterized by a power balance between Hu Jintao’s and Jiang Zemin’s factions.²⁰

To date, no scholarship on factions in China, or similar a context, has clearly defined what would constitute a dominant faction. Therefore, we propose the rough rule of thumb that

¹⁶ Nathan 1973; Pye 1980.

¹⁷ Nathan 1973; Shih, Shan and Liu 2010; Zeng 2018; Li 2007; Bo 2002.

¹⁸ Nathan 1973.

¹⁹ Shih, Shan and Liu 2010.

²⁰ Zeng 2018; Li 2007; Bo 2002.

the dominant faction's percent of positions in top ranks must, on average, near or surpasses twice that of all competing factions combined. When a faction has double the number of clients in top position as compared to rival factions, it prohibits other factions from effectively balancing against the dominant faction. By contrast, if rival factions together control nearly as many top ranked positions, this would indicate a balance of power between factions. This serves as a general guideline rather than a hard rule, yet, by defining and applying this standard we can show a balance of power in the Hu era and a clear shift with the strengthening of Xi's faction marking the emergence of a dominant faction.

We hypothesize that Xi has strengthened his faction by promoting more of his clients than his predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. We test our hypothesis primarily through an analysis of turnover of provincial party secretaries and governors, which are the top two positions at the provincial level. Under the one-level down personnel appointment system in China, top national leaders have the authority to appoint and dismiss provincial leaders. The position of provincial party secretary is often seen as an important stepping stone to moving into top leadership positions in the Politburo or other key regime positions. Provincial governorships are, in turn, an important step to provincial party secretaryships. The two positions act as a bridge between local and national positions. Provincial party secretaries and governors, as the top two officials in a province, also play an important role in channeling the center's directives to localities. A leader's ability to distribute these highly desirable positions to clients and advance them to higher positions is a key facet of his power and an important avenue through which to build support for the leader.

Previous studies suggest that dominant factions are rare, if not unheard of, in the CCP. Under what conditions then, would a dominant faction be likely to emerge? Our data provide

compelling evidence that a dominant faction has emerged under Xi Jinping. However, they shed less light on why this happened. While more research will ultimately be needed, we argue that a combination of three factors contributes to the emergence of a dominant faction under Xi Jinping. First, according to Nathan (1973), a dominant faction is not likely to emerge because other factions would ally against it. However, this external balancing is feasible only when there are several reasonably strong factions. If there are only two significant factions competing with each other, there is no option for a rival faction to form an alliance. It can only rely on internal balancing, i.e., strengthening its own faction, which may not be easy. If they fail to do so, it is possible that a dominant faction could emerge. When Xi took power, there were only two rival factions, the Shanghai faction led by Jiang Zemin and the CYL faction led by Hu Jintao, and the former backed him. Additionally, by failing to name a successor, Xi Jinping has prevented an obvious nucleus around which a new rival faction could form. In a bi-factional system, Hu's faction could not form an alliance with other factions to check the rise of strong faction.

Second, when Xi took the position of General Secretary of the CCP, he faced a favorable power configuration at the top, compared with his two predecessors. Considering that the General Secretary of the CCP had a two term limit, i.e., ten years, and that the CCP has rules that require promoting officials step by step, rather than skipping levels of hierarchy, favorable initial conditions could provide a significant advantage to the heads of the CCP in empowering their factions. However, when Jiang Zemin suddenly took the position of General Secretary of the CCP after the repression of Tiananmen (天安门) movement in 1989, his power was constrained by the revolutionary generation, led by Deng Xiaoping. Similarly, when Hu began

to govern in 2002, five of the then nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee,²¹ the most influential positions in the CCP, were part of the Jiang faction. In contrast, among the seven members of the Standing Committee when Xi started to rule in 2012, only one was from the Hu faction. As we would expect, Xi's faction was generally weaker than Hu's when Xi ascended to the position of CCP leader in 2012. However, because Jiang's faction supported Xi and still had a powerful presence in the Standing Committee, Xi actually enjoyed more influence in the Standing Committee on his first day in office than Hu ever did. Moreover, Xi took the position of Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CCP in 2012 at the same time as the General Party Secretaryship. By contrast, Hu attained this position two years after becoming the General Party Secretary. These conditions may have provided Xi an opening to build his faction quickly.

Third, Xi Jinping launched a massive anti-corruption campaign, targeting both "tigers" (high-level officials) and "flies" (lower-level officials). Punishing Zhou Yongkang 周永康, a previous member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, sent the message that top leadership positions were no longer protected from corruption investigations. Intimidating high ranking leaders with the possibility of corruption charges probably helped Xi weaken opposition to his consolidation of power, rapidly strengthen his faction, and weaken those of his rivals.

²¹ Historically, the Politburo Standing Committee has been composed of between five and eleven members, with all Standing Committees since 1992 varying being composed of seven or nine members. Nathan and Scobell 2015, 39.

Measurement

Measuring the strength of factions is challenging, but considering that factional struggle is fierce in personnel appointment, the proportions of official positions taken by factions indicate the strength of a faction. We examine four top ranks in the Chinese Party-State: Standing Committee of the Politburo, the Politburo, provincial party secretaries, and provincial governors. The Politburo are the CCP's top leaders. In practice, the power of the Politburo is concentrated in its Standing Committee. For the sake of clarity, we use the term Standing Committee to refer to those Politburo members that are on the Standing Committee and the Politburo to refer to those that are not.

Since the significance of official positions varies by rank, we give more weight to positions in higher ranks by calculating the proportions of factional members in each rank and then computing the average of these proportions. A higher rank has fewer positions than a lower rank. Thus, one additional seat occupied by a factional member in a higher rank contributes more to the strength of a faction than that in a lower rank. This measurement is simple, but provides a rough measure of factional strength.

It is challenging to identify factional ties in Chinese elite politics since the official policy of the CCP is that factions are prohibited.²² We follow Cheng Li in identifying factional ties largely based on experience working in the same unit during an overlapping period of time.²³ This criterion clearly satisfies three of the four core attributes of the concept of factions: face-to-face interactions, longevity, and power inequality. The fourth criterion, interest

²² Keller 2016.

²³ See Cheng Li's papers published in *China Leadership Monitor*, accessible at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/clm/>. These papers include the following: Li 2002, 2003, 2004 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b.

exchange, is less clear due to its clandestine nature. In order to identify every factional member in the four ranks we identify, we review the secondary literature on factional affiliations as well as the biographies of provincial leaders to determine whether they had worked with Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, or Xi Jinping. If so, they were coded as belonging to one of these factions.

Jiang Zemin is widely known to have cultivated factional ties based on his experience in Shanghai, forming the Shanghai faction. This includes not only those who worked with Jiang in Shanghai before his appointment as General Secretary of the CCP but also those who spent most of their careers in Shanghai, such as Han Zheng 韩正. Jia Qinglin 贾庆林, who worked with Jiang Zemin in the First Machine Building Ministry, was also regarded as Jiang's client. In addition, analysts identified several provincial leaders as Jiang's clients even though they did not share work experience with Jiang Zemin prior to 1989. We therefore include these five leaders who are usually classified as Jiang's clients: Zhang Dejiang 张德江, Yu Zhengsheng 俞正声, Li Changchun 李长春, Li Hongzhong 李鸿忠 and Xi Jinping (when he was still a provincial leader).²⁴ If we excluded these leaders we would risk underestimating Jiang's factional ties. We use this broader interpretation of Jiang's faction to ensure that we do not bias our data in favor of our hypothesis that Xi's faction is stronger than Jiang's was.

Hu Jintao's faction was based on the CYL and is therefore sometimes called the CYL faction. Following Cheng Li, we identify Hu as having factional ties with those who had positions in the CYL above the provincial level in the years that Hu served as the secretary of

²⁴ Li 2013.

the CYL.²⁵ We identified 23 provincial leaders who satisfied this criterion. Among those who were not members of the CYL, we include Guo Jinlong 郭金龙 and Sun Chunlan 孙春兰 as Hu's clients, following Cheng Li's classification.²⁶ Among Hu's clients, Li Keqiang was designated as the successor to the second most powerful position in China (Premier) in 2007. Li shares the same factional basis as Hu Jintao, the CYL. It is likely that Hu tried to strengthen his faction by incorporating Li's clients into his faction. Following the logic of identifying Hu's clients, we identify Li Keqiang's clients as those who had positions in the CYL above the provincial level while Li served as secretary in the CYL. We identified 17 provincial leaders as Li's clients. Among them, seven also belonged to Hu's faction. Besides the CYL connections, Chen Quanguo 陈全国 and You Quan 尤权 were included as Li's clients since Chen had worked with Li in Henan province and You Quan worked with Li in the State Council.²⁷ We combine Hu's and Li's clients, creating a joint Hu-Li faction. Combining two groups of clients has the obvious risk of overestimating the strength of Hu-Li's faction. However, given that our hypothesis is that this faction is relatively weak compared to Xi's, we want to maximize our inclusion of possible factional members.

We identify Xi Jinping's clients based upon Cheng Li's analyses of Xi's inner circles. He identifies three bases of Xi's connections: Shaanxi-based, friends from Xi's formative years, and work experience.²⁸ Shaanxi is where Xi Zhongxun 习仲勋, Xi Jinping's father, was born, raised, and worked in his early years. Xi Jinping himself spent several years in Shaanxi during

²⁵ Li 2005a, 2006.

²⁶ Li 2012, 2013.

²⁷ Gueorguiev 2018.

²⁸ Li 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b.

the Cultural Revolution as a “sent-down youth.” Among provincial leaders, Zhao Leji 赵乐际 and Li Xi 李希 were regarded as Xi’s followers based upon Shaanxi connections.²⁹ Chen Xi 陈希 is included in Xi’s faction on the basis of having become acquainted with Xi while both attended Qinghua (清华) university.³⁰ Most of Xi’s clients among provincial leaders were those who developed a relationship with Xi while he worked in several provinces, including Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai.³¹ We identified those who had overlapping work experience with Xi in these regions as his clients. In total, twenty-three provincial leaders were identified as Xi’s clients.

The Strength of Factions and Factional Power Configurations

In Figure 1, we compare the strength of factions led by the ruling head of the CCP with those led by the former head of the CCP in the Hu and Xi eras. The number represents the proportions of factional members out of the total number of positions at that level. We show the years the Party Congress was held, when personnel of the Politburo and its Standing Committee changed. Personnel turnover of provincial leaders occurs throughout each term of the Party Congress. Finally, we show 2018 to use the most recent year of available data.

These figures show a similarity in the life cycle of factions. When a leader first becomes head of the CCP, their faction is relatively weak at the highest levels. During their time in power,

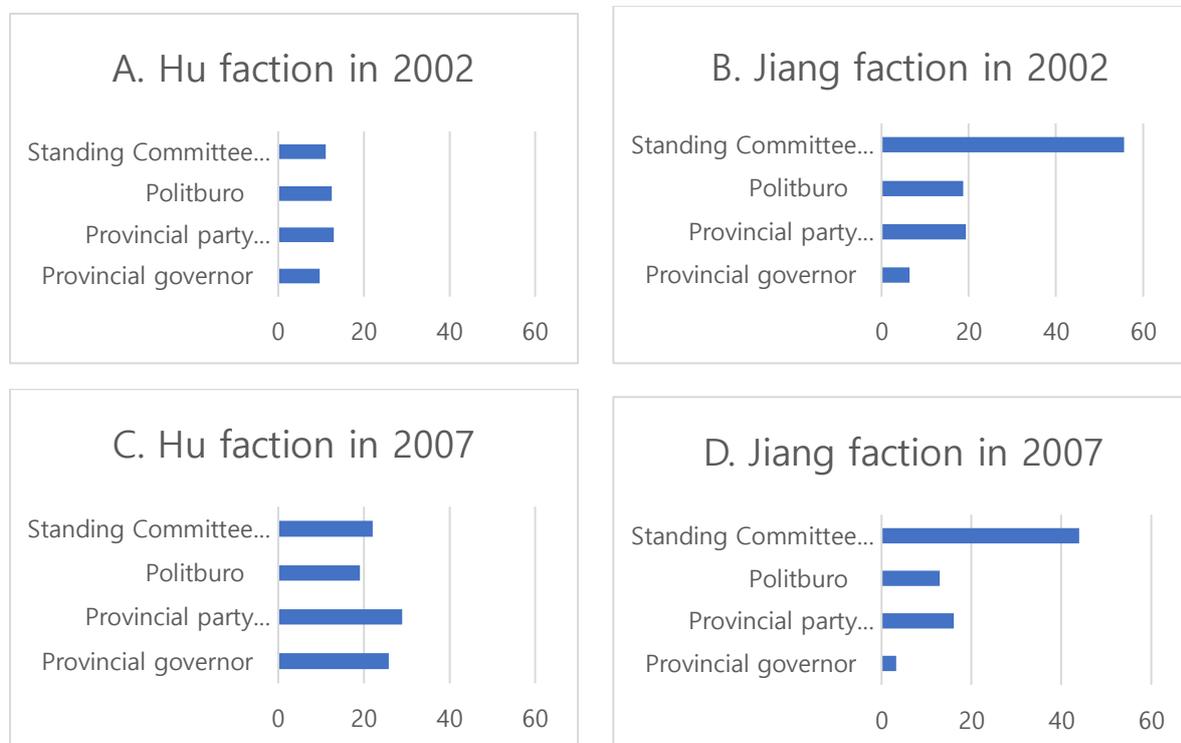
²⁹ Li 2014a.

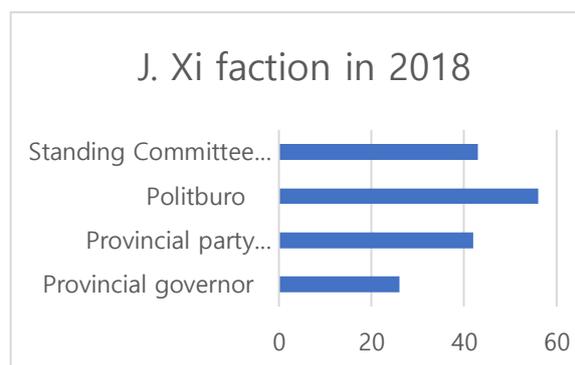
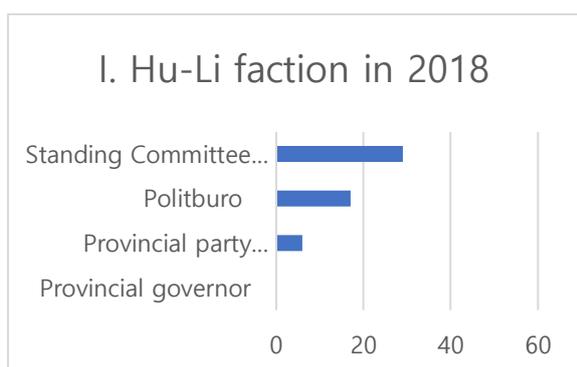
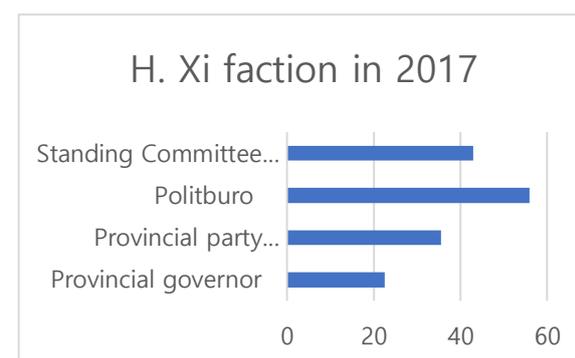
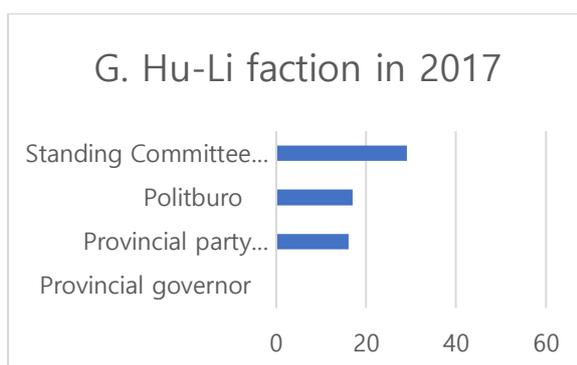
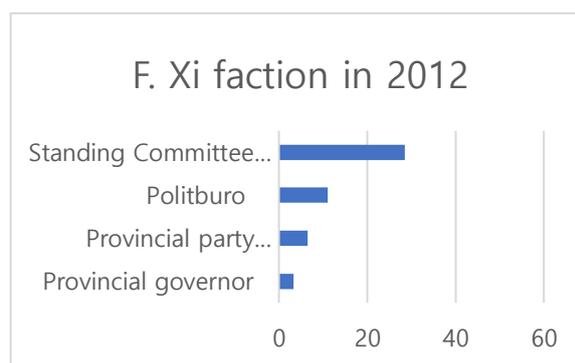
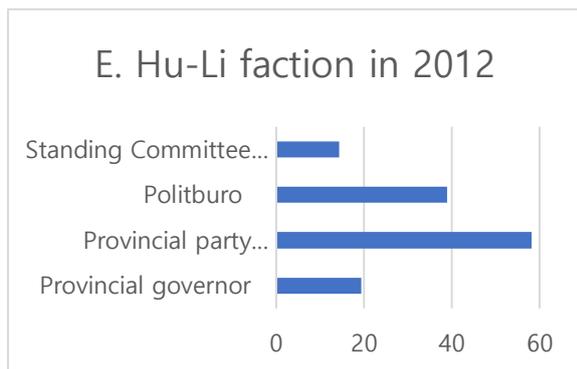
³⁰ Li 2014b.

³¹ Li 2014c.

their faction gains strength. The strength of Jiang’s and Hu’s factions peaked the years they retired, 2002 and 2012 respectively. After their retirement, their factions began to weaken. This is typical of personalized factions because they depend on clientelist ties between the faction head and followers. Figures from 1A to 1D compare Hu’s faction with Jiang’s faction in the Hu era; figures from E to J compare Hu-Li’s faction with Xi’s faction in the Xi era. After 2012, Hu’s faction incorporates Li’s since Li became the number two party leader and allies with Hu.

Figure 1, A-J. The Proportions of Factional Members by Different Ranks (Unit: Per cent)





The growth of the Jiang faction during his rule, which is not presented in these figures, shows similar dynamics. In the 14th Party Congress in 1992, the personnel appointment of the Politburo and its Standing Committee members reflected the will of the older leaders. By appointing Hu Jintao to the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the older generation of leaders intended that Hu would be a successor to Jiang. Liu Huaqing 刘华清 top-ranking general, would exert influence on military. Qiao Shi 乔石 and Li Ruihuan 李瑞环 were well established in the top leadership. This old guard constrained the strength of Jiang's faction in a

manner similar to how his faction would constrain Hu. Under these constraints, Jiang gradually tried to consolidate his power. In the 15th Party Congress in 1997, Jiang promoted four of his clients to positions on the Politburo. In 2002, when Jiang yielded the position of General Secretary of the CCP, his clients held more than half of the positions on the Standing Committee.

When Hu Jintao began to rule, his power was seriously constrained by Jiang's faction. Over the years, however, Hu also strengthened his faction. In 2007 when Hu's second term started, his faction held only 22 per cent of seats on the Standing Committee of the Politburo. However, Hu had more factional members than Jiang in the levels below the Standing Committee. Comparatively, in 2007, although Jiang's faction occupied 44 per cent of seats in the Standing Committee, his faction held only a few positions below this level. When Hu relinquished his positions to Xi at the end of 2012, Hu's faction occupied a significant proportion of positions at the Politburo and provincial party secretary levels but was less successful in placing its factional members in the Standing Committee.

When Xi started to rule, his faction was generally as weak as his predecessors' had been. However, Xi strengthened his faction much more quickly than his two immediate predecessors. In 2018, Xi's faction took 43 per cent of seats in the Standing Committee of Politburo, 56 per cent of seats in the Politburo, 42 per cent of provincial party secretaryships, and 26 per cent of provincial governorships. Even when we compare Hu's faction and Xi's faction in the first year of their second terms (See Figure 1C & 1H), we find that Xi's faction took much higher proportions of seats in each rank, except among provincial governors, the lowest rank among the four.

Interestingly, the proportions of factional members vary significantly by rank. In 2002, Jiang's faction took a significant portion of seats in the Standing Committee of the Politburo

but it held smaller portions of lower level positions. On the other hand, in 2012, Hu's faction took a small portion of seats in the Standing Committee of the Politburo but held substantial portions at lower levels. This suggests that investigating only one rank can provide a misleading picture of the strength of factions. It is noteworthy that Xi's faction has achieved considerable portions in all levels, which indicates the relative strength of Xi's faction.

Considering that power is concentrated at the top in Chinese politics, the head of any faction who wishes to strengthen his power would focus on placing his clients in the upper ranks. But he would also be interested in placing his clients in lower positions because by doing so, the head of a faction could broaden his factional power base, strengthen his influence in the provinces, and lay the groundwork for future promotions to higher levels. Also, in situations where a leader faces severe opposition from competing factions in appointing his factional members into the upper ranks, the head of a faction might promote his clients to lower ranks as a second-best strategy. This seems to have been the case for Hu Jintao. Under the constraint that Jiang's clients dominated the Standing Committee of Politburo, Hu's second best strategy was to place his clients in positions below that level.

Figure 1 shows smaller numbers for Jiang Zemin's faction in provincial level positions. What accounts for this? First, it may be that Jiang was more constrained by other power sources when appointing his faction to provincial leadership positions. In the 1990s, Jiang's influence was highly limited by powerful leaders such as Qiao Shi and Li Ruihuan as well as the elderly generation of leaders who still drew authority from their role in the revolution. From the early 2000s, Jiang's power was constrained by the rise of Hu Jintao's faction. Second, Jiang Zemin had a narrower pool of support than Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. Jiang's career before becoming General Secretary of the CCP was mostly confined to Shanghai. On the other hand, Hu Jintao's

power base was the CYL, which is a nation-wide organization. Xi Jinping had broad connections partly because he was a princeling³² and partly because he worked in several provinces including Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai. Considering Jiang's narrow pool of clients, it seems likely that his strategy was concentrated on appointing his clients to top leadership positions.

Table 1 shows the strength of factions, calculated by the average proportions of all four ranks held by factional members. In 2002, when Jiang relinquished the General Secretary of the CCP to Hu Jintao, Jiang's faction held 25 per cent of seats in top four ranks on average, whereas Hu's faction took only 12 per cent. After five years of Hu's rule, the average proportion of his faction increased to 24 per cent, while that of Jiang's faction decreased to 19 per cent. During this period, the strength of Hu's and Jiang's factions were similar if shifting, creating a balance of power. In 2012, when Hu retired at the end of year, his factional power culminated at an average of 33 per cent of the top four ranks. By this time, Jiang's faction had weakened, holding only 12 per cent of seats. Since Jiang's faction backed Xi to be a successor of Hu, it is reasonable to assume that Jiang's and Xi's factions allied at that time. In total, these two factions took 24 per cent of seats in the top four ranks in 2012, enabling them to check the Hu-Li faction. After five years of rule, however, Xi had dramatically strengthened his faction, taking 39 per cent of seats on average in the top four ranks. This is much higher proportion than the 24 per cent of seats that Hu's faction occupied in the middle of his rule. By 2018, Xi's faction occupied 42 per cent of seats in the top four ranks on average. At the same time, Hu-Li's faction weakened rapidly, holding only 13 per cent of seats in 2018. As Xi's faction overwhelmed the

³² Princeling is a term used to refer to the descendants of senior Communist Party officials.

quickly marginalized Hu-Li's faction in 2018, the power relations between factions changed from a power balance to a dominant faction.

Table 1: The Average Proportions of Factional Members in the Top Four Ranks.

Year	Jiang faction	Hu-Li faction	Xi faction
2002	25%	12%	N.A.
2007	19%	24%	N.A.
2012	12%	33%	12%
2017	5%	16%	39%
2018	4%	13%	42%

Advantages of Factional Members in Promotion among Provincial Leaders

In order to strengthen factions, the heads of the CCP are likely to provide advantages to their factional members in promotion, placing them in higher ranks. We test the hypothesis that Xi bestowed stronger advantages to his clients in promotion compared with his two immediate predecessors. To develop the data on cadre promotions, we first make some choices on how to represent promotions. For every official in the four ranks we examine, we code one of four outcomes for each year. The first is that no change of position occurs; they continue to serve in the same role with no movement in the official hierarchy. This status quo outcome, which includes lateral moves to a different province, is by far the most common for any official in any given year. The second outcome is that an official might be promoted sometime during the year. For provincial party secretaries, this means taking a national leadership position, such as becoming a member of the Politburo. For provincial governors, this means taking ministry-

level positions, including provincial party secretaryships. Third, an official can be retired when their term expires and they are too old to hold their same position and are not promoted to the level above. Those that are retired in this way, usually end up taking an honorary position such as the chairmanship of a provincial people's congress. Fourth, an official can be removed or demoted, including for corruption or other offenses, before the retirement age.

In total, 188 people served as provincial party secretaries from 1989 to 2018. Among them, 39 got promoted. This means that 21 per cent of provincial party secretaries were promoted during this time. Out of 48 provincial party secretaries with factional ties, 26 were promoted. This means that 54 per cent of provincial party secretaries with factional ties were promoted, compared to only nine per cent without factional ties. That factional members had six times the chance of being promoted past party secretary as non-factional members clearly demonstrates the enormous importance of factional ties.

A total of 242 persons served as provincial governors from 1989 to 2018. Among them, 103 (43 per cent) were promoted. The chance for promotion is much higher for provincial governors than provincial party secretaries because it is a lower rank and there are the same number of provincial governorships and party secretaryships. Fifty-six provincial governors had factional ties. Of these, 66 per cent were promoted compared to 35 per cent of those who did not have factional connections. Factional ties are clearly beneficial for governors in gaining promotion, but not as important as for provincial party secretaries.

In order to examine whether Xi's faction had a greater advantage in promotion than Jiang's and Hu's factions, we compared the promotions of provincial leaders in the first six years that the heads of factions ruled. It would be ideal to examine the whole period of rule. However, at the time of data collection, the most recent year was 2018, the sixth year of Xi's

rule. For Jiang Zemin, we regarded 1993 as the first year of rule because he took the position of General Secretary in the middle of the Party Congress' term.

Table 2 shows that from 1993 to 1998, 56 provincial party secretaries failed to gain promotion. Among the four who were promoted, half were Jiang's clients. This clearly shows the disproportionately high chance for promotion that factional membership provided. During the first six years of Hu's rule, six provincial party secretaries were promoted while 48 were not. Among those promoted, two belonged to Hu's faction, two were affiliated with Jiang's faction, and two had no factional ties, indicating not only the power of factional affiliation but also a power balance between factions. Table 2 shows that Xi's clients netted four out of the seven promotions handed out from 2013 to 2018, while two of Hu's clients and one of Jiang's clients were promoted during this period. In short, Xi promoted twice as many of his clients to politburo-level positions as Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao did at the equivalent in time in their rule.

Table 2. Provincial Party Secretaries Promoted (by Factional Affiliation) 1993-2018

	Jiang faction	Hu-Li faction	Xi faction	No faction	Sub-total
Jiang's first six years as General Secretary of the CCP 1993-1998					
Promoted	2	-	-	2	4
Not Promoted	3	-	-	53	56
Hu's first six years as General Secretary of the CCP 2003-2008					

Promoted	2	2	-	2	6
Not promoted	4	9	-	35	48
Xi's first six years as General Secretary of the CCP 2013-2018					
Promoted	1	2	4	0	7
Not promoted	1	5	10	37	53

The uniqueness of the Xi era is even more noticeable at the gubernatorial level shown in Table 3. In the first six years of the Jiang era, only three of Jiang's gubernatorial clients were promoted whereas 17 governors without factional ties were. Similarly, in the first six years of the Hu era, only two out of Hu's 17 gubernatorial clients were promoted while 14 governors without factional ties received promotion. In contrast, in the first six years of the Xi era, his gubernatorial clients obtained 13 promotions. These figures offer clear evidence that Xi's clients were more likely to be promoted.

Table 3. Provincial Governors Promoted (by Factional Affiliation) 1993-2018

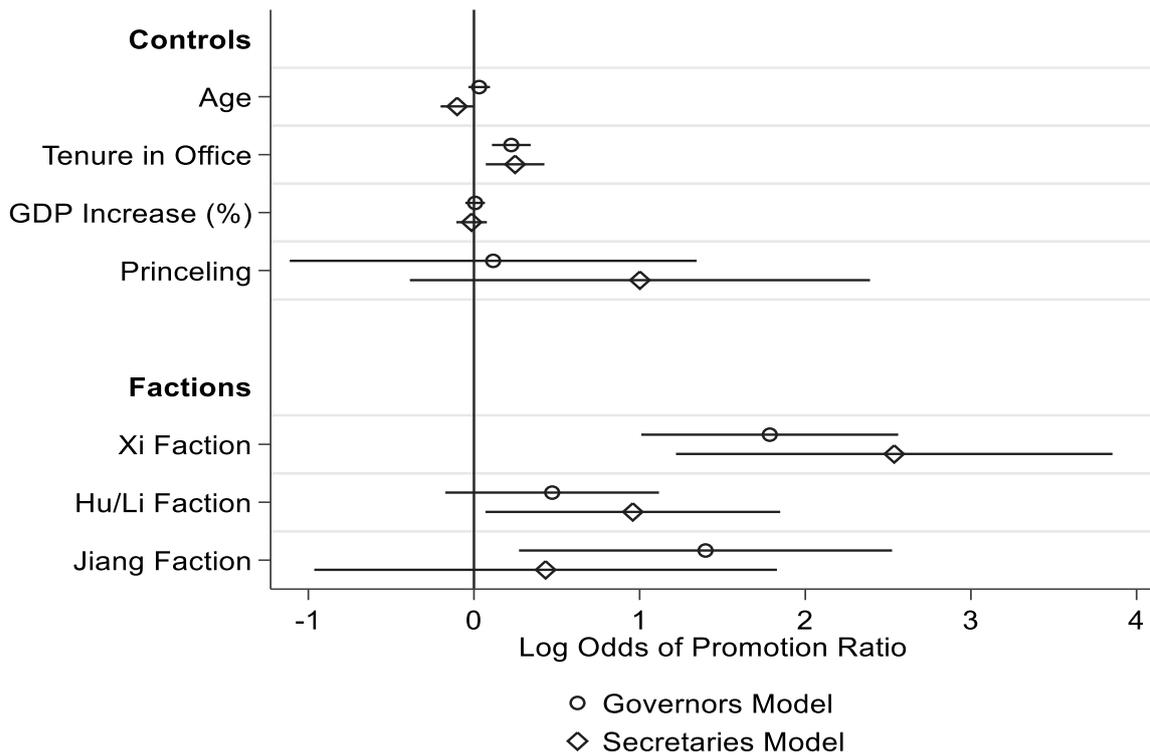
	Jiang faction	Hu-Li faction	Xi faction	No faction	Sub-total
Jiang's first six years as General Secretary of the CCP 1993-1998					
Promoted	3	-	-	17	20

Not Promoted	0	-	-	45	45
Hu's first six years as General Secretary of the CCP 2003-2008					
Promoted	1	2	-	14	17
Not promoted	2	15	-	32	49
Xi's first six years as General Secretary of the CCP 2013-2018					
Promoted	0	1	13	16	30
Not promoted	0	2	7	35	44

There are two alternative explanations for our findings, though we do not believe either detract from our main finding. The first is that promotions make factional allegiance more legible – if an official is promoted, more attention may be paid to their background and they are thus more likely to be considered factionally affiliated than non-promoted officials. This does not detract from our findings for two reasons. First, the data on factional affiliation was coded before the authors coded promotions; promoted officials received the same biographic scrutiny as non-promoted officials. Second, we are primarily concerned with the question of whether the Xi faction was more dominant than previous factions. If factional affiliation becomes more legible due to promotions, this phenomenon should apply approximately equally to every faction. It would not influence the finding that Xi's clients are promoted at a higher rate than members of other factions.

The second alternative explanation is that Xi's clients are being promoted at a greater rate due to their personal characteristics – perhaps they are more capable, more experienced, or perform better than Hu/Li clients and this explains their higher promotion rate. To address the objection that Xi's clients are promoted more rapidly due to their personal characteristics and not factional membership, one should compare officials identical in every relevant characteristic, the only difference being factional affiliation. Typically, regressions are used to approximate this type of comparison – regressions estimate the impact of isolating the key predictor variable (factional membership) on promotion by holding all other variables equal (age, tenure, GDP growth, province, and princeling status). A coefficient plot of such a regression predicting promotion is shown in Figure 2. The plot demonstrates that even while controlling for tenure, age, princeling status, and average GDP growth during their time in the post, Xi's clients appear to have a larger advantage that is statistically significant for both party secretaries and governors.

Figure 2: Regression Results on Promotion Chances, 1989-2018



The details of the functional form of our regression and full results are presented in Appendix 1. Higher log odds (X Axis) indicate that a variable is estimated to lead to a higher predicted chance of promotion. A 95 per cent confidence level is displayed by the bars that connect to the point estimates. If the confidence interval includes zero, one should interpret the coefficient as statistically indistinguishable from having no impact on the odds of promotion. Overall, this model adds support to our argument that the Xi faction has been distinctively successful in increasing the promotion odds of its members. At both the level of governors and secretaries, the point estimate for the Xi faction is larger than either of the other two factions. Additionally, only Xi's faction shows a statistically significant effect for both governors and party secretaries. Because of the small n size, the confidence intervals are relatively large so we do not wish to place undue emphasis on the results of this regression. However, the point estimate differences are substantively quite large and add further emphasis to the findings of

descriptive analysis above.

Conclusion

There has been intense scholarly and popular interest in whether the Xi Jinping era is a break with previous leadership eras or should be seen as a continuation of past trends. Our analysis exhibits both continuity and change in factionalism in the Chinese elite politics. All three recent general secretaries (Jiang, Hu, and Xi) developed personalized factions. Power relations between factions, however, changed from a power balance under Hu and Jiang to the emergence of a dominant faction under Xi. We show that Xi strengthened his faction by providing his clients with bigger advantages in promotion, compared with Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

We suggest that a combination of three factors – no external balancing option for Hu-Li's faction, initially favorable conditions for Xi at the top when he began to rule, and massive anti-corruption campaigns – contributed to the emergence of a dominant faction under Xi. Whether Xi's success in strengthening his faction is due to advantageous initial conditions, his organizational acumen, or some other unobserved factor, we cannot say conclusively. These are important follow-up research questions: why have previous factional heads not been able to promote their faction as effectively as Xi has? To what extent is this due to less favorable initial conditions as our study suggests? Regardless of the reason, the data are clear that the current rules of promotion strongly favor Xi's clients to an extent not seen in previous administrations.

Nathan (1973) argues that the balance of power among factions lead to policy deadlock.

While other factors also affect policy making, it would be interesting to investigate whether the rise of a dominant faction leads to significant policy changes in the Xi era. Some evidence of bolder policies that seem more likely to emerge under a dominant faction are already evident, such as Xi's unprecedented anti-corruption drive. Indeed, Elizabeth Economy (2018) goes so far as to call Xi's reforms a Third Revolution. While we show that a dominant faction has emerged under Xi, this raises many more questions and avenues for future research.

Appendix 1: Full Regression Details and Results

For our regression form, we use a fixed effects panel data logit approach. A fixed effects panel data model means that any unique features of a province that affect promotion are controlled for. Our unit of analysis is each cadre's chance, each year, of being promoted. We organize our regression and data this way for two reasons. First, because an official's chance of promotion changes each year – as their tenure increases, their age increases, and their economic performance changes each year, so do their odds of promotion. We use a panel data approach to capture the fact that observations are not truly independent – the odds of being promoted in year two versus year three of their tenure are, in fact, related. A panel data approach helps account for both of these factors and regressions of similar form have been widely employed in the literature on leadership politics, both within China and without.³³

Previous studies suggested that economic performance affected provincial leaders' chances for promotion. Thus, we included this variable in our models in order to control its effect.³⁴ For economic the performance of provincial leaders, we calculated the annual GDP growth rates of the province, adjusted for inflation.³⁵ We used the average of GDP growth rates over the years that a provincial party secretary governed the province. For example, GDP growth rate in the second year of the provincial party secretary's term is the average of the first year and second year growth rates. Other variables included are standard controls for overall turnover rate, age of the official, and the length of tenure of the official. We also included a

³³ Guo 2009; Landry et al. 2018, Sidorkin and Vorobyev 2018.

³⁴ Bo 2002; Choi 2012.

³⁵ We drew GDP data from the China Statistical Yearbook. We used the GDP deflator available at the IMF website:

http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2013/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=1993&ey=2012&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=924&s=NGDP_D&grp=0&a=&pr.x=81&pr.y=12#download

variable for Princelings to examine whether sons and daughters of high-ranking officials had advantages in promotion.

The results displayed in Table 1A show that Xi's faction is uniquely successful at promoting its clients while the Hu-Li and Jiang factions are estimated to be only moderately successful at promoting their members. Provincial party secretaries in Xi's faction were estimated to be roughly 12 times as likely to be promoted, *ceteris paribus*, as compared to provincial party secretaries not in the Xi's faction. Provincial governors in the Xi faction were estimated to be six times more likely to be promoted. Being in the Hu-Li faction increased the odds of promotion for a provincial party secretary by roughly 2.6 times, but the odds of being promoted for a governor were statistically insignificant. The odds of promotion for governors in the Jiang faction was about four times higher than for those outside it. However, for a provincial party secretary being in Jiang's faction did not confer a statistically significant advantage in terms of promotion. Hu-Li's faction appears to be more successful in promoting provincial party secretaries while Jiang's faction appears to be more successful in promoting governors. However, both factions' promotional power pale in comparison to the increase in promotion odds afforded to members of the Xi's faction.

Table 1A: Fixed Effects Panel Data Regression Results on Promotion Chances, 1989-2018

	<i>Secretaries</i>		<i>Governors</i>	
	(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)
<i>Age</i>	0.903*	0.923	1.032	1.030
	(0.045)	(0.146)	(0.341)	(0.370)
<i>Tenure</i>	1.282**	1.238*	1.253**	1.269**
	(0.006)	(0.020)	(0.000)	(0.000)
<i>GDP Growth</i>	0.986	0.971	1.007	1.005
	(0.763)	(0.527)	(0.819)	(0.858)
<i>Princeling</i>	2.723	2.869	1.123	1.203
	(0.157)	(0.137)	(0.853)	(0.770)
<i>Xi Faction</i>	12.640**	-	5.963**	-
	(0.000)		(0.000)	
<i>Hu Faction</i>	2.609*	-	1.604	-
	(0.035)		(0.151)	
<i>Jiang Faction</i>	1.541	-	4.047*	-
	(0.544)		(0.015)	
<i>N</i> ³⁶	532	532	690	690

Outcome variable: promotion (range: 0-1)

Results are reported as odds ratio estimates.

*p values displayed below odds ratio estimates: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$*

³⁶ Note that a few provinces did not have any promotions for secretary or governor in our dataset; because of this, the fixed effects model excludes these cases. Using a random effects model, which does not exclude such cases, produces a very similar result to our fixed effects specification.

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摘要: 许多中国观察家认为，自毛泽东和邓小平逝世以来，习近平以前所未有的方式将权力集中在自己手中。本文通过比较习近平和他的两位前任，江泽民和胡锦涛，在任时期的派系力量来检验习近平权力巩固的程度。此外，我们还考察了在习近平的领导下，是否出现一个主导派系取代整个改革时代的常态，即派系间权力平衡。从对中国高层四个级别的领导人派系关系的分析中，我们发现习近平已经塑造了一个主导派系。通过对省级领导人的晋升机会进行统计分析，我们发现与以往的领导人相比，习近平在晋升其亲信方面取得了不寻常的成功。这表明习近平通过提拔省级领导人加强了自己的派系，并达到了毛和邓逝世后前所未有的程度。

关键词: 精英政治；派系；胡锦涛；习近平；中国

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