

Connections and the Selection of China's Political Elite

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Abstract

We examine the role of connections in the selection of China's Politburo, the country's highest governing body. We use hometown, college, and workplace ties to current Politburo members as measures of connectedness, and obtain the counterintuitive finding that hometown and college ties are negative predictors of selection: after controlling for candidate birth city and college of attendance, we find that hometown and college ties are each associated with a 7 - 8 percentage point reduction in selection probability. These results suggest that at least for the most visible and heavily scrutinized levels of the Chinese polity, connections may be a liability rather than an asset, possibly because leaders aim to avoid the appearance of favoritism.

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1 Introduction

We study the selection of officials into the Central Politburo (hereafter Politburo), the most powerful body in the Chinese government. Beyond the direct importance of understanding what determines the top leadership of the world's second largest economy, studying elite political selection in China may provide insights into the selection of high-level officials in non-democracies more generally.

The Politburo's members are selected every five years from among the members of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party (hereafter the Central Committee), with candidates drawn from the top ranks of provincial officers, top military leaders, and central government ministers. While the Central Committee is nominally responsible for electing the Politburo (much as individual citizens are nominally responsible for electing Chinese officials at lower levels), in practice the Politburo itself is thought to have a decisive role in selecting new members (Shirk (2012); Li (2008)). In our paper, we examine whether Central Committee members with connections to current Politburo members are more likely to be elected to the next Politburo.

We focus on several forms of connections that have well-established precedence in earlier work: hometown ties, college ties, and past employment relationships.¹ We find, counterintuitively, that both hometown and college ties lead to a much *lower* probability of Politburo selection. For hometown ties, in our favored specification (which includes hometown fixed effects and a range of individual controls) we find that a connection to the Politburo reduces the likelihood that a Central Committee member is elected by 6.9 percentage point (a 55 percent decline relative to the baseline election rate). For college ties, the comparable figure is a 9.1 percent reduction in election probability. We observe no detectable effect of workplace ties on Politburo selection. Overall, our results stand in sharp contrast to the positive role of connections documented in earlier work (see Cai (2014) for a book-length treatment), which focused largely on promotion at lower levels of the Chinese bureaucracy, indicating that different - possibly more stringent - standards govern selection at the upper echelons of government.²

Overall, our results indicate that, at least for the highest and most visible levels of the Chinese

¹Recent studies that examine the benefits of these types of connections in China include Cai (2014), Heidenheimer and Johnston (2011), Shih et al. (2012), Jia et al. (2015), Wang (2016), and Shih and Lee (2017) who explore their role in promotions in the Chinese bureaucracy, and Fisman et al., (forthcoming) who studies their role in election to the Chinese Academies of Science and Engineering. There is, ex ante, reason to expect that such ties may provide a leg up in the Politburo selection process in particular. For example, in writing about selection of the 17th Politburo, Shirk (2012) observes that it was commonly perceived that Politburo selection, "revolve[s] around the distribution of seats among personalistic factions - the networks of loyalty between senior political figures and the officials who have worked with them, are from the same region or studied at the same university and who have risen through the ranks with their patrons."

²For the provincial leaders in our sample, we may also look at the potential role of merit in promotion to the Politburo, using GDP growth as a performance measure. Consistent with Shih et al. (2012), we find no relationship. However, ours is a low-powered test as provincial leaders comprise only 20 percent of our sample.

polity, connections may reduce the chances of promotion. While this is at odds with much conventional wisdom, it would be a natural result of government efforts to limit the effects of favoritism throughout the political hierarchy. These efforts have led, for example, to rules requiring that officials recuse themselves from evaluating underlings from their region.³ While there are no formal strictures constraining the behavior of Politburo members, our findings suggest that the Politburo may in this respect lead by example, erring on the side to caution to avoid even the appearance of favoritism in the case of readily discernable connections like hometown and college ties.

The readiest alternative to the preceding interpretation for the negative connection effect involves geographic quotas for the Politburo, i.e., an attempt to ensure that no single area benefits from disproportionate representation. However, we find no effect of ties based on birth province. If geographic quotas were responsible for the negative effect of hometown ties, one would expect to see a negative home province effect, since the central government primarily controls province-level (rather than municipal) appointments and hence has greater need to show impartiality at the province level.⁴ Second, quotas are less plausibly responsible for the negative college tie effect for which, to our knowledge, there has never been any discussion of quota allocation, even informally.

We contribute to the literature that aims to understand the selection of officials in China specifically, and in non-democracies generally. In prior work on China, the evidence on the role of favoritism has been mixed. Most recently, Francois et al. (2016) study the benefits of factional ties for promotion within the Communist Party. They find a benefit from factional connections to the General Secretary, the highest-ranking position in the Chinese government, but also a tendency for factional power sharing at lower levels. This work builds on related earlier work by Shih et al. (2012), which similarly find that individuals with factional ties to top officials via hometown, college, or workplace ties have an advantage in promotion. We view our work as complementary to these earlier studies which, owing to their data and emphasis, tend to focus more on lower-level promotions (in particular from the rank of Alternative Central Committee to Central Committee membership) rather than accession to the Politburo. This difference, along with our more inclusive measure of connections to any Politburo member (rather than the highest-ranked individuals), may account for our apparently contradictory findings. Furthermore, as will become apparent in our analysis, accounting for hometown and college fixed effects is crucial to examining the effects of

³See, for example, article 69 of the Civil Servant Law of the People's Republic of China (2005), which states that, "Where a civil servant assumes the leading post of an organ at the township level or county level or the relevant department thereof, a regional avoidance shall be carried out, unless it is otherwise prescribed by law." See <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=4123> for the full text of the law (last accessed April 16, 2017). The law was superseded by a comparable set of regulations through the Interim Rules for Civil Servant Recusal issued in 2011; we know of no English translation of this text.

⁴In the Chinese administrative hierarchy, provinces are under the direct control of the central government, while municipalities are under the direct control of provincial leaders. See, for example, Chung (1995).

(time-varying) connections, since some hometowns and educational institutions tend to produce many more high-ranked officials than others. We view this additional aspect to our empirical analysis to represent an advance on prior work, enabled by the richness of our connections data and the length of our panel.⁵

Our work also links to a larger body of research on the determinants and consequences of promotional structures throughout the Chinese hierarchy. Jia et al. (2015), for example, report a complementary effect of connections and performance in determining provincial leaders' promotions,⁶ while Persson and Zhuravskaya (2015) explore the role of promotions and thus career concerns in governing policy choices of provincial leaders (Kung (2014), in his analysis of grain distribution during the Great Famine, shows in particular how such promotional concerns can misfire). Our work relates also contributes to our understanding of the role of connections in China more broadly, linking to the vast literature on *guanxi* ties (for recent empirical examples see, for example, Fisman et al., (forthcoming) on the role of connections in election to the Chinese Academies of Science and Engineering, and Kung and Ma (2016) on the value of connections for small business growth).

2 Background and data

2.1 The organization of the Chinese polity

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Central Committee) is a political body that comprises the top leaders of the Communist Party. Its members are “elected” every five years at the convening of the National Congress of Communist Party of China, under the guidance of the Politburo. While the number of Central Committee members fluctuates from term to term, it has had approximately 200 members in each term since the early 1970s.

Members of Central Committee are composed of national leaders (i.e., premier and vice-premier level officials), chief officers at institutions that are under the direct control of the Central Committee (for example, the Organization Department, Propaganda Department, the General Office of the CPC, and so forth), heads of ministries under the control of the State Council (China's chief administrative body), provincial governors and provincial party secretaries, chief military officers, and leaders from eight “People's Organizations” (e.g., the all-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Communist Youth League, the All-China Women's Federation) who also hold the rank of minister.

⁵Furthermore, as Francois et al. (2016) emphasize, workplace ties may be a problematic measure of connections because of the endogeneity of promotion of faction members through the hierarchy. This creates a potential problem for the analysis of Shih et al. (2012), which aggregates all connection types. We view this particular concern as less likely to apply to college ties and especially hometown ties.

⁶We do not observe any effect of performance - whether directly or conditional on connections - in our own data, but provincial leaders represent only about a fifth of our sample.

The Central Committee meets at least annually, to discuss and refine formal government policies.

The de facto leadership of the government resides within the Politburo, also called “the leaders of the Party and the People’s Republic of China,” a collection of approximately two dozen top leaders selected from the membership of the Central Committee every five years. While the Central Committee is nominally responsible for selecting the Politburo, according to Li (2008), “the notion that the Central Committee “elects” the Politburo is something of a fiction.” (In fact, the Politburo selection follows a “single candidate election rule,” whereby there are no more candidates than available seats, so once the slate is chosen, the Central Committee acts as a rubber stamp.) Li goes on to suggest that Politburo members themselves (particularly those on the Standing Committee) hold sway in the selection process.

The power of the Politburo manifests itself in a number of ways. Most importantly, higher levels of government generally direct the selection of candidates at lower levels, giving the Politburo control over the choice of provincial leaders. Additionally, given the relative infrequency of Central Committee meetings, the direction of China’s central government is largely left up to the Politburo and in particular members of its Standing Committee, who are selected from among the Politburo’s membership.

2.2 The role of social connections in Chinese politics

Guanxi is the network-based system of favor exchange that plays a central role in political, economic, and social life in China (Chen and Chao (2004)). Often, *guanxi* is built on social connections, including hometown ties, work ties, college ties, family ties, and mentor-mentee relationships.

We focus on hometown, college, and workplace ties both because of their prominence in establishing *guanxi* and also because they are observable - albeit subject to measurement error - based on readily obtainable biographical information. Perhaps the most widespread source of *guanxi* is hometown connections. As expressed by anthropologist Leo Douw in his introduction to a book-length treatment of the topic, “[t]he cultivation of hometown ties is part and parcel of the Chinese culture of establishing *guanxi*, or relationships of mutual obligation between individuals, and is therefore also an inherent part of the social structure in which doing business in China is embedded at present. Moreover, ethnic Chinese communities abroad have usually preserved a distinctly Chinese cultural identity which is centered on the sharing of roots in the hometown” (Douw (2013)). Social organizations based on place of origin are very common, and are used to facilitate communication, strengthen within-group networks, enlarge the group’s political power in the new location, and also to form coalitions to better compete in commercial enterprises.⁷

⁷See, for example, Fisman et al., (forthcoming) for an empirical analysis on the importance of hometown ties in election to the Chinese Academies of Science and Engineering, as well as further references on the formation and

Scholars of *guanxi* have also emphasized the role of college ties as a source of connections. The relationship does not require that two individuals overlap in their time in college (see, for example, Yang (2001)), much as research using college ties in the U.S. as a proxy for social ties does not emphasize concurrent enrollment for a connection to exist (see, in particular, Cohen et al. (2010) and Cohen and Malloy (2014)).

Finally, we follow prior research in using workplace ties as a proxy for the social connections that may facilitate *guanxi*. In this case, we do require that two individuals overlap in their period of employment in order to qualify as connected. In part, this reflects the fact that there are some very common career trajectories for those selected as Central Committee members (and hence eligible for Politburo selection) - even with our requirement that Politburo candidates overlap in their employment histories, well over half of candidates are coded as connected.

Broadly speaking, there exist two perspectives on *guanxi*. One strand focuses on its positive elements, such as maintaining social order, serving as a substitute enforcement mechanism where the legal system is weak or ineffectual, and lowering transaction costs in exchange (Nee (1992)). The darker view of *guanxi* emphasizes its role in perpetuating a culture of corruption (Gold (1985)). Both perspectives are well represented in earlier work - both qualitative and quantitative - on the role of *guanxi* in Chinese business and politics. Bian (1994) and Bian and Soon (1997), for example, document the value of workplace and college ties respectively in the job search process. By contrast, Fisman et al., (forthcoming) highlight hometown ties as leading to the election of lower-quality scientists to China's scientific academies, while Li (2011) argues that college ties facilitate corruption in China.

The widely acknowledged exploitation of *guanxi* ties led China's central government to outlaw hometown associations in 2016, but concerns over *guanxi*-based favor-trading date back much further. The government has had rules in place since at least the early 1990s that aim to prevent local officials from favoring those from their home regions.⁸ No such strictures are placed on high-level officials - which is precisely what has opened the door to speculation on whether candidates are able to exploit connections (including those based on regional ties) to secure seats in the Politburo. At the same time, there may be a need to set an emphatic example in the selection of political elites. Thus, the relationship between markers for *guanxi* ties and selection to the Politburo is, we argue, an open question, one which we investigate below.

function of hometown ties.

⁸See <http://baike.baidu.com/view/7955385.htm> for the 1996 interim measure (in Chinese), and <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=4123> for the English text of a 2005 law that explicitly forbids regional favoritism at the county level. The law was amended in 2011 to apply to city-level officials as well.

2.3 Data

Our primary interest is in relating the social ties of Politburo candidates to Politburo members, which requires background information on the full set of Central Committee members (including the small subset that are Politburo members). Our starting point for developing this database is the website maintained by the Communist Party of China, which includes Central Committee lists going back to 1952.⁹ Background information on these individuals - including place of birth, year of birth, and detailed education and work history - may be looked up via the *Political Elites of the Communist Part of China* database maintained by the National Chengchi University in Taiwan.¹⁰ Only a few candidates from the ninth and tenth term election cycles (1969-1973 and 1973-1977) are not contained in the database, since they are not minister-level officials. They are instead lower-level officials elected to the Central Committee during the Cultural Revolution who, by virtue of their celebrity as “working class heroes,” are easily tracked down via Baidu Baike, the Chinese equivalent of Google.

We use these data to generate measures of connectedness of Politburo candidates to incumbent Politburo members. Consider first our measure of connectedness, based on hometown ties. The set of candidates for term t of the Politburo include members of the Central Committee during term $t - 1$. We define candidate i for Politburo term t to be hometown-connected ($HometownTie = 1$) if there exists at least one Politburo member at term $t - 1$ (and hence in the Politburo at the time that selection of the term t Politburo takes place) who is from the same hometown as i . While Politburo members at term $t - 1$ are eligible for membership also at term $t - 1$, we omit them from our analysis, as their reelection is governed, by and large, by other considerations: unless they are of retirement age, Politburo members are essentially always reelected.¹¹

We similarly construct a school tie measure, *CollegeTie*, based on Central Committee and Politburo members’ undergraduate institutions.

For workplace ties, we require that Politburo candidates and Politburo incumbents have a period of overlap in their work histories, more specifically a period of time in which both worked in the same department in the same prefecture.

While no single position within the Central Committee guarantees Politburo membership, some positions tend to be elected at much higher (or lower) rates than others. We therefore include in some specifications controls for whether a Central Committee member is a military officer

⁹See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/139962/> last accessed March 28, 2017.

¹⁰See <http://cped.nccu.edu.tw/> last accessed March 28, 2017.

¹¹If we do include them in our analysis, it amplifies the point estimates we report on hometown ties. The reason is as follows: one corollary effect of the negative impact of hometown ties on selection is that there tend to be relatively few Politburo members from the same hometown. If Politburo members are nonetheless reelected with near certainty, it will mechanically amplify the negative effect of hometown ties among new members.

(*Military*); an indicator denoting that an individual is the party secretary of one of the directly-controlled municipalities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin as well as the party secretary of Guangdong (*4_Leaders*) since these are positions that have most commonly (but by no means always) seen representation in the Politburo; an indicator variable for provincial leaders (*Province*); and to account for political dynasties we include the variable *Princeling*, which captures whether any of the candidate’s parents or parents-in-law ever served as a Politburo member. We will also include hometown, workplace, and school fixed effects in some specifications to capture average differences in the rate of Politburo selection as a function of these background characteristics.

Recall that our analysis is at the level of the candidate-term, where candidates include all Central Committee members eligible for election to the Politburo, excluding incumbent Politburo members (who are almost always reelected). The data include 1160 distinct candidates, 564 of whom appear only once in our data. A substantial number also appear as candidates twice (393 individuals) and three times (151 individuals). We define *PriorCandidacies* to be the number of previous terms an individual appeared as a Politburo-eligible member of the Central Committee. We will control for prior candidacies throughout, given the much higher likelihood of success that is associated with longer tenure in the Central Committee.

Table 1 provides summary statistics on the main variables we employ in our analysis. Observe that workplace ties are by far the most common form of connection, despite our requirement that individuals overlap both in department and prefecture. This statistic emphasizes the fact that political elites often come up through similar career channels, with many spending time at the Secretariat of the Central Committee (68 candidates) and the Organization Department of the Central Committee (47 candidates), both located in Beijing. It is this type of concern that leads us to analyze the effect of connections after accounting for city-, college-, and workplace connection fixed effects, since we need to account for the fact that some regions, schools, and workplaces tend to produce more high-level officials than others. College ties are the least prevalent form of social connection. This arises, at least in part, because nearly a third of candidates (concentrated in the earlier part of our sample) did not complete a college degree and hence have no college tie.

3 Results

Before turning to regression analyses, we present a series of figures to explore the patterns in the raw data. In Figure 1, we show the fraction of eligible Central Committee members that are elected to the Politburo as a function of their hometown connections. The left histogram in the figure compares the election rates of candidates with and without hometown ties to the current Politburo. In this initial cross-sectional difference, we find that hometown ties are associated with

only slightly lower selection probability: 7.0 percent versus 7.7 percent for hometown connected versus unconnected candidates respectively. However, this naive comparison fails to account for the different rates at which hometowns produce Politburo members (conditional on representation in the Central Committee). In the right histogram of Figure 1, we omit candidates from hometowns that have zero hometown ties throughout the entire sample period. Unsurprisingly, this increases the election rate, but does so to such a degree for $HometownTie = 0$ candidates that hometown connections are now associated with a much lower chance of Politburo selection: 7.0 percent versus 12.5 percent for hometown connected versus unconnected candidates. This difference emphasizes the importance, in our regression analyses below, to account for the fact that some hometowns simply produce many more high-level politicians than others, so that we identify the effects of ties - hometown and other - from the rotation of individuals on and off the Politburo.

Figure 2 shows the analogous patterns for college ties. We include only college graduates in this figure, so that it does not merely pick up the effects of obtaining a college degree. The full sample, presented in the left part of the figure, shows a slightly higher rate of Politburo election among college-connected candidates. However, a large fraction of the sample - nearly two-thirds of candidates - graduated from schools with no connections throughout the entire period. When we limit the sample to candidates from schools with at least one Politburo tie, we again find a *negative* relationship between connections and election. (Note, however, that this pattern is based on a relatively small fraction of our sample overall - under a quarter of candidates remain after we screen out non-graduates and graduates of never-connected colleges.)

Finally, in Figure 3 we repeat this exercise for election rates by $WorkTie$. In the left histogram we observe - consistent with prior research - that workplace ties are positively correlated with election: Politburo election rates are 8.8 percent versus 5.8 percent for those with and without workplace ties respectively. However, when we omit workplaces with no variation in workplace ties (i.e., $WorkTie = 0$ for all candidates or $WorkTie = 1$ for all candidates from a given organization), the gap narrows to 6.9 versus 5.8 percent. This narrowing indicates that some workplaces may simply produce individuals destined for high-level leadership positions, rather than serving as a source of favoritism between current and prospective Politburo members. Again, we will take advantage of the rotation of individuals with different workplace experiences on and off the Politburo to more clearly identify the role of connections when we proceed to our regression results.

In Table 2 we present results that explore the relationship between connections and Politburo selection, controlling for a range of additional explanatory variables. Our specifications all take the following form:

$$Elected_{it} = \beta * Connection_{it}^c + \gamma_c + \omega_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where *Elected* is an indicator variable denoting that Central Committee member i was elected to the Politburo for term t . $Connection_{it}^c$ denotes that candidate i was connected to at least one incumbent Politburo member via connection type $c \in \{HometownTie, CollegeTie, WorkTie\}$. For each type of connection, we include a full set of fixed effects for the source of the tie. That is, when we measure connections by hometown ties we include 265 hometown fixed effects; similarly, we have 220 workplace fixed effects for the workplace tie specification, and 395 college fixed effects for the college tie specification. It is because of the large number of fixed effects in each case that we consider each type of connection separately (the correlation among connection types is surprisingly low, so that examining each connection type separately is less of a concern: the correlation between *HometownTie* and *WorkTie* is 0.041, while $\rho(HometownTie, CollegeTie) = 0.074$ and $\rho(HometownTie, CollegeTie) = 0.137$). Finally, ω_t is a term fixed effect, and ϵ_{it} is an error term clustered at the level of the candidate i .

In column (1), we use *HometownTie* as our measure of connections; we generate results that are roughly in line with those shown in the right half of Figure 1: hometown-connected candidates are approximately 8 percentage points less likely to be selected as Politburo members (p-value < 0.001). In column (2) we use *CollegeTie* as our measure of connections and again find an impact on Politburo election, of approximately 9 percentage points. In column (3), with *WorkTie* as the measure of connections, we find a near-zero effect, precisely estimated, and can reject at a 95 percent confidence level a positive effect from work ties of greater than 2 percentage points.

In columns (4) - (6) we include a set of controls, including $\log(Age)$, *PriorCandidacies*, *4_Leader*, *Provincial*, *Military*, and *Princeling*, as well as a set of education dummies indicating completion of a college, master's, and doctoral degree. *PriorCandidacies* is highly predictive of Politburo selection, indicating that longer tenure on the Central Committee is associated with a higher promotion probability. Once we account for prior candidacies, age is uncorrelated with selection. *4_Leader*, essentially by construction, is also highly predictive of Politburo selection, since it is defined based on positions that commonly lead to Politburo inclusion (about 80 percent of the time in our data).¹² The inclusion of these covariates do not, however, have much effect on our estimates on the negative effect of hometown and college connections in election to the Politburo. The coefficient on *HometownTie* in column (4) is 0.069, implying a 6.9 percentage point reduction in the probability of Politburo selection. Relative to the selection base rate of 12.5 percent for *HometownTie* = 0 candidates, our estimate implies that hometown ties reduce a candidate's election chances by 55

¹²The negative coefficient on *College* in the specification with college fixed effects is, at face value, puzzling. However, observe that our selection model is conditional on already having been chosen as a Central Committee member. If those without college degrees face an especially high hurdle to obtain election to the Central Committee, then those who clear this threshold may be particularly well-positioned to then be selected for the Politburo. Relatedly, in the earlier part of our sample, most leaders were revolutionary heroes who, for the most part, had little formal education.

percent. The coefficient on *CollegeTie* in column (5) implies a 9.1 percentage point reduction in the probability of Politburo selection, a very large impact given the base rate of election of 15 percent for *CollegeTie* = 0 candidates (more specifically, *CollegeTie* = 0 candidates from colleges with some variation in *CollegeTie*).¹³

One alternative interpretation of the negative impact of connections on election - at least for hometown ties - derives from geographic quotas: in an attempt to ensure that no single area benefits from disproportionate influence, the government's top leadership may avoid selecting candidates from regions already represented in Politburo. To examine whether this is a likely explanation for the negative hometown tie result, we examine in Table 3 the relationship between home province ties and Politburo selection. Our reason for doing so is that the central government has direct control over provincial leadership positions, while provincial leaders in turn control municipal appointments. Given this hierarchy, if there were reason for the central government to demonstrate equitable treatment regionally, it would most plausibly operate at the provincial level (see Chung (1995) for a comprehensive literature review on the relationships among various levels of government in China). In Table 3, we present variants on specification (1), using *HomeprovinceTie* as our measure of connections. The point estimate on *HomeprovinceTie*, while negative, is small in magnitude (-0.015) and not statistically significant. Further, in columns (3) and (4) we present augmented versions of our *HometownTie* specifications, including also *HomeprovinceTie* as a covariate. It is clear from these results that the negative relationship between birthplace ties and Politburo selection operates entirely through the hometown channel - once we account for city of birth, the coefficient on *HomeprovinceTie* is very slightly positive. We see these results as casting doubt on the "geographic quotas" explanation for our findings, because historically such quotas - formal or otherwise - within the Chinese central government bureaucracy have tended to operate at the province-level: since provincial appointments are directly controlled by the central government there is an imperative to display fairness; there is no such need to demonstrate impartiality across municipalities within a province, from the perspective of the central government.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we document that, among candidates for China's Politburo, those with connections to incumbent Politburo members are less likely to be elected. Our results are of note in part because

¹³We also looked at whether the effect of social ties varied over time or as a function of a connection's seniority in the Politburo. We do not observe any consistent patterns along either dimension. For both hometown and college ties, the negative coefficient we document is present both pre-Deng (i.e., prior to 1980) as well as later. The interaction of time and social ties never approaches significance. When we look separately at connections to Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) members versus PSC non-members, we similarly observe no consistent pattern - in general, connections to Politburo members are negatively associated with selection.

we provide, to our knowledge, a first attempt at systematically linking social connections to election at the very highest levels of the Chinese government. Our analysis is also noteworthy because of the way it enriches the body of evidence on connections and promotion in ways that stand in sharp contrast to much conventional wisdom, as well as extant work on the determinants of promotion at the lower echelons of China's government.

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