

Networks of Coercion: Military Ties and Civilian Leadership Challenges in China

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Outline

- 1 Motivation
- 2 Theoretical Analysis
- 3 Institution Background in China
- 4 Empirical Design
- 5 Results
- 6 Discussion
- 7 Conclusion

- Academic Appointments
 - Assistant Professor, Brown University, *2019-present*.
 - Postdoctoral, Harvard University, *2018-2019*.
- Education
 - Ph.D. in Political Science, Harvard University, *2014-2018*.
 - M.A. in Chinese Studies, SOAS, University of London, *2008-2009*.
 - B.A. in International Relation, United States Military Academy, *2004-2008*.



Tyler Jost

- Academic Appointments

- Associate Professor, Yale University, *2024-present.*
- Assistant Professor, Yale University, *2017-2024.*
- Postdoctoral, Stanford University, *2016-2017.*

- Education

- Ph.D. in Political Science, UC Berkeley, *2010-2016.*
- M.A. in Political Science, UC Berkeley, *2008-2010.*
- M.A. in East Asian Studies, Yale University, *2007-2008.*
- B.A. in English, Yale University, *2000-2004.*



Daniel C. Mattingly

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Khrushchev's Removal

- On 14 October 1964, the Presidium and the Central Committee voted to accept Khrushchev's "voluntary" request to retire for reasons of "advanced age and ill health." Brezhnev was elected First Secretary.



Leadership Challenges

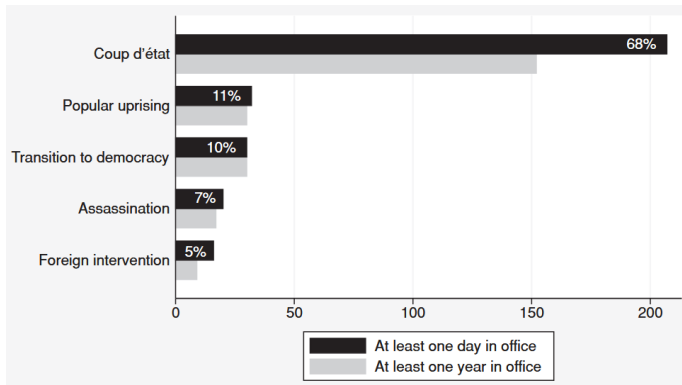


Figure: Nonconstitutional exits from office of authoritarian leaders, 1946–2008¹.

¹Svolik, Milan W. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Coups

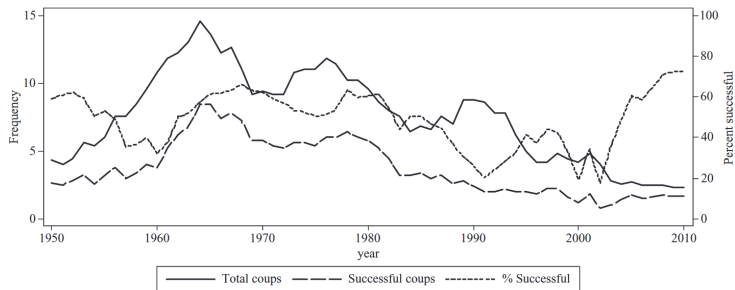


Figure: Coup trends over time, 1950-2010².

²Powell, Jonathan M., and Clayton L. Thyne. "Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 48.2 (2011): 249-259.

- From 1950 to 2010, a total of 393 coup attempts were led by current or former members of the military, 132 were led by civilians, while only 12 were insider coups within royal families. The success rate of military and royal coups is almost exactly 50% while civilian coups are substantially less likely to succeed at 35%.
- The leaders of any authoritarian regime should fear a military-backed leadership challenge. Nearly all successful elite-led overthrows have the backing of the armed forces.

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For civilian elites who aspire to unseat ruling leaders:

- *Civil–military coordination problem*: In order to launch a leadership challenge, civilians need to coordinate with military actors, ensuring that they will back the challenge.
- *Intra-civilian coordination problem*: They need to coordinate among themselves to ensure they can govern once the leadership challenge succeeds.

A civilian's social ties to the military decrease the costs of solving this coordination problem.

- Social ties provide information about the personalities and preferences of potential backers of the leadership challenge within the military.
- Social ties can facilitate interpersonal communication.
- Ties to the military may directly elevate an individual's status and prestige within the regime.

For leaders responding to the elites' threats that pose to their rule:

- “Motive” : Sharing power with strong elites may help to neutralize the constituency most threatening to the leader's survival.
- “Opportunity” : Sharing power with strong elites could also increase the probability a leadership challenge will succeed.

Leaders resolve this dilemma by appointing strong elites to some types of power-sharing institutions, while denying them appointment to others.

- To address the challenge of strong elites, leaders can appoint them to power-sharing institutions with significant spoils but low leverage, which approves the political agenda but does not play a meaningful role in leadership selection.
- To guard appointment to high-level power-sharing institutions that confer leverage, leaders should aim to keep strong elites from joining such bodies—and only allow them to do so when strong elites are already a part of the leader's personal network.

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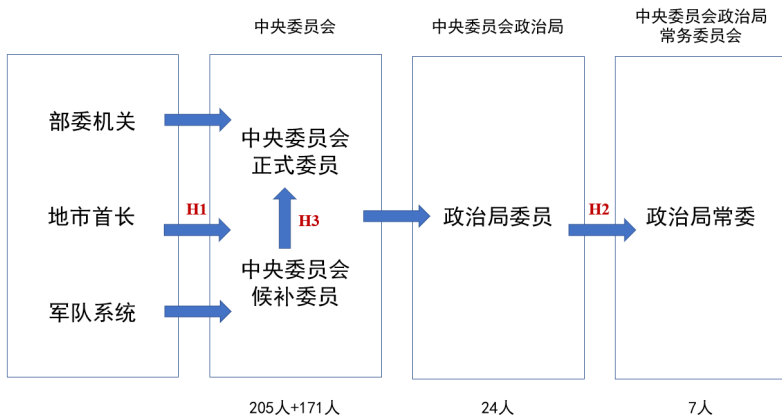
- The Chinese military (PLA) has played an important role in these calculations surrounding potential power struggles between civilians (though sometimes underappreciated).
- DIRECTLY: Civilians in China often depend on the military to remain in office and to consolidate their power.
 - eg. launching the Cultural Revolution by Zedong Mao, arresting the “Gang of Four” by Guofeng Hua.
- INDIRECTLY: The latent power of the military to adjudicate in the event of a civilian power struggle has also shaped political behavior in China.
 - eg. retaining the position on the Central Military Commission, and appointing loyalists to key military posts like Xiaoping Deng or Zemin Jiang.

- Many top leaders had previously served as military officers in the revolution that brought the CCP to power.
 - eg. Enlai Zhou and De Zhu, Dehuai Peng, Biao Lin, Jianying Ye, in the period of WWII.
- Civilian officials can also form ties with military officers through shared service on party committees.
 - eg. Jinping Xi and Qiliang Xu, during Xi's tenure in Fujian Province.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** Civilian elites who have strong ties to the military are **more** likely to promote to **low-level** agenda-setting bodies, such as a central committee. Strong civilian elites without ties to the sitting leader will be especially likely to promote.
- **H2:** Civilian elites who have strong ties to the military and lack strong ties to the sitting leader are **less** likely to promote to **high-level** bodies that provide political leverage, such as a politburo standing committee.
- **H3:** Civilian elites who have strong ties to the military are **neither** more nor less likely to promote to **intermediate** bodies, such as a full politburo³.

³This hypothesis is not proposed in previous version.



注：人数按二十大公布结果统计。

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- Our study period is from 1949 to 2012—inclusive of 11 party congresses (from the eighth to the eighteenth).
- The data on the careers of over 34000 Chinese military officers between 1927 and 2014.
 - ① 《中国共产党中国人民解放军组织史资料》，published by the PLA General Political Department.
 - ② *The Directory of PRC Military Personalities*, maintained by the U.S. government.
- In previous version, the authors said “A core contribution of our paper is to conceptualize and measure the importance of military-civilian ties.”

一、东北军区及其党委领导人名录

(一)东北军区领导人名录

中华人民共和国成立后,东北军区的主要领导人继续留任。1954年5月,中共中央、中央军委决定,撤销高岗的东北军区司令员兼政治委员职务。早在同年2月,中央军委任命邓华为东北军区第一副司令员、代理司令员。1955年3月,中共全国代表大会作出《关于高岗、饶漱石反党联盟的决议》,开除高岗的党籍,撤销其党内外一切职务。

司令员 高岗(1949.10—1954.5)
 代司令员 邓华(1954.2—1955.3)
 政治委员 高岗(兼,1949.10—1954.5)
 第一副司令员 邓华(1954.2—1955.3)
 副司令员 贺晋年(1950.5—1954.8)
 副政治委员 李富春(1949.10—1955.3)
 周桓(1950.6—1955.3)
 张秀山(1950.9—1954.5)
 林权(1954.5—1955.4)

(二)东北军区党委领导人名录

1950年11月,经总政治部批准,成立由15人组成的东北军区党委,未设常务委员会。

书记 高岗(1950.11—1952.10)
 副书记 贺晋年(1950.11—1952.10)

1952年10月,经总政治部批准,东北军区党委作了调整,党委委员21人,常务委员会由7人组成。此后,根据军区领导人的变动,军区党委成员相应作了增补。

书记 高岗(1952.10—1954.4)
 副书记 周桓(1952.10—1954.4)
 常委 (书记、副书记均为常委,从略)
 贺晋年(1952.10—1954.4)
 张秀山(1952.10—1954.4)
 莫文群(1952.10—1954.4)

GENERAL POLITICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE
PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY

Position	Rank	Name (Pin Yin)	Name STC	Name Chinese	Date Identified
DIR	GEN	LI JINGJIAI	212519495082	李德彪	20040910
DIR	GEN	LIU YONGZHE	060510731112	刘永治	20041217
DIR	GEN	SHEN ZHENGTONG	110716130601	孙志同	20040711
DIR	GEN, AF	LIU ZHENGBU	060510702006	刘振超	20051128
DIR	LTEN	BAI TONGJIAN	412015140144	白廷安	20081114
ASST TO DIR	MGJEN	SHI JINGCAI	212604051008	杜金才	20070610
ASST TO DIR	MGJEN	SHI YAOJIAN	060910600617	许耀元	20071120
SG		CHU BIAOXIANG	200510051028	崔佰良	20080607
DDG		LI BINGTU	2121110103	李斌	20080620
POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT HEAD					
DIR	MGJEN	CHAI SHIHA	110110405076	蔡清华	20081010
DIR, IN THE ARMY		YIN DEU	141811128	尹铁	20081013
POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT HEAD, GENERAL OFFICE					
DIR	MGJEN	BAOING ZHONGJIAO	1903107070	...	20090906
POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT HEAD, GENERAL OFFICE					
DIR	MGJEN	LIU ZHONGJING	040110071002	刘志成	20011012
GENERAL POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT HEAD, GENERAL OFFICE					
DIR	MGJEN	CHANG SHENGSHANG	100710112617	常生堂	20010910
GENERAL POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT HEAD, GENERAL OFFICE					
DIR		JIANG FULIN	261103051166	姜福林	20080618
DIR		YU DONGFENG	060511121017	于大诗	20071118
DIR		ZHANG CHANGJIAN	172010306611	张恒金	20071214
DIR		LIU XIANJIAN	261110111140	林祥建	20080627
DIR, GENERAL TROOP BUREAU		LI JIANGJIN	262110306611	李陆金	20081214
DIR, GENERAL TROOP BUREAU	SGJEN	SHANG CHANGJING	070210161066	商春明	20081218
DIR, GENERAL TROOP BUREAU	SGJEN	ZHOU GUOFENG	071006061447	周国平	20011119
DIR, GENERAL TROOP BUREAU	SGJEN	SHENG BING	112210101	盛冰	20080617
POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT HEAD, GENERAL OFFICE, GENERAL OFFICE					
DIR		WANG SHENJIA	170610710141	王森志	20070629
PC	MGJEN	DONG JIEJIAN	111606071111	董国建	20070616
DIR		KANG QINGJIN	110106101066	孔庆新	20011119

- **H1:** Prefecture-level party secretaries and mayors from 1949 to 2016, published by CSMAR.
- **H2:** The CCP Leadership Database which lists all members of the Central Committee, from Shih et al. (2012)⁴.
- **H3:** 《中国共产党组织史资料》, original data on CCP Politburo membership from 1927 to present, released by the CCP.

⁴Shih, Victor, Christopher Adolph, and Mingxing Liu. "Getting ahead in the communist party: explaining the advancement of central committee members in China." *American Political Science Review* 106.1 (2012): 166-187.

Measuring: Promotion

- For prefecture-level leaders:

$$y_1 = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{Is a full or alternate member of the Central Committee;} \\ 0, & \text{Otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

- For each member of the Poliburo:

$$y_2 = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{Is a member of the Poliburo Standing Committee;} \\ 0, & \text{Otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

- For each member of the Central Committee:

$$y_3 = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{Is a full member;} \\ 0, & \text{Is a alternate member.} \end{cases}$$

Measuring: Military Network Centrality

- We coded a social tie (*TieMilitary*) to any of the military officers in our data if one of two conditions are met:
 - ① When the two individuals served in the same active military unit at the same time. (wartime)
 - ② When the two individuals served in the same body at the provincial, district, or prefecture level. (peacetime)
- The main analysis employs a (normalized) degree centrality measure of connectedness within military networks:

$$D = \frac{\ln TieMilitary - \mu}{\sigma}$$

where $\mu = 20.7$ and $\sigma = 37.8$ in the sample.

Measuring: Civilian Network Centrality

- Individuals who served in a senior-level position within the same central organ (e.g., the Ministry of Commerce), province, or district organ at the same time were coded as possessing a tie.

$$C = \frac{\ln TieCivilian - \mu}{\sigma}$$

- Similarly to leader's social network centrality score (L). Specifically, we code the leader as Mao, Hua, Deng, Jiang, Hu, and Xi.

Model Specification

- Main specification⁵:

$$y_{it} = \beta_1 D_{it} + \mu_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

- With control variables:

$$y_{it} = \beta_1 D_{it} + \beta_2 C_{it} + \mu_i + \delta_t \times \lambda_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where λ_i includes prior provincial party secretary / governor service, minority status, princeling status and college education.

- In the analysis of prefecture-level leaders, we include controls for education, sex, age, and service as a prefecture party secretary.

⁵The key assumption of this research design is that time-varying changes do not drive both network centrality and promotion.

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Promotion in Low-Level Bodies

- Civilian elites with military ties are more likely to be promoted to the Central Committee.

TABLE 2 Promotion to the Central Committee among prefecture leaders and network ties to military officers.

	Promoted to Central Committee: All		Promoted to Central Committee: Civilians		Promoted to Central Committee: Civilians post-1989	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Military network degree centrality	.009** (.003)	.009** (.003)	.008* (.003)	.008* (.004)	.010** (.004)	.009* (.004)
Individual fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time period fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls		✓		✓		✓
Clusters	3,795	3,018	3,364	2,672	2,564	2,262
Observations	7,347	5,969	6,505	5,280	4,770	4,309
R ²	.069	.108	.063	.107	.065	.108

Note: Each observation in the panel is an individual and Party Congress. The outcome variable is a binary indicator for membership in the Central Committee. The main explanatory variable is network degree centrality, normalized. The results show that prefecture leaders are more likely to be promoted to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee if they have stronger ties to the military. Robust standard errors are clustered by individual.

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

- The limitations of the CSMAR data:
 - Not include complete professional backgrounds, meaning that we cannot account for the individual's civilian network centrality or their position within the leader's network.
 - Officials who are promoted from prefecture level leadership to positions as party, central government, or prefecture government are censored in database.
- An alternative measurement: using the CCP Leadership database.

Promotion in Low-Level Bodies

- Similar to the previous result.
- Leaders will especially wish to promote strong civilian elites outside of their personal network.

TABLE 3 Promotion to full member of the Central Committee and network ties to military officers.

	Promoted to Central Committee: Civilians		Promoted to Central Committee: Civilians post-1989		Promoted to Central Committee: Civilians	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Military network degree centrality	.147** (.021)	.148** (.024)	.207** (.029)	.210** (.030)	.107** (.024)	.108** (.026)
Civilian network degree centrality		.024 (.016)		-.013 (.026)		-.006 (.017)
Outside leader network					-.080** (.027)	-.079** (.029)
Military degree × Outside leader network					.098** (.028)	.091** (.029)

Promotion in High-Level Bodies

- For cadre's outside the leader's network, there is a strong negative relationship between stronger military ties and promotion to the Standing Committee.
- Conditional on being outside the leader's network, dense military ties are as much of a hindrance to advancement within the CCP as dense civilian ties are an asset to it.

TABLE 4 Promotion to member of the Politburo Standing Committee and network ties to military officers.

	Promoted to Standing Committee: Civilians		Promoted to Standing Committee: Civilians post-1989	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Military network degree centrality	.011 (.012)	.011 (.012)	-.015 (.016)	-.012 (.016)
Outside leader's network	-.032+ (.017)	-.008 (.016)	.015 (.026)	.031 (.024)
Civilian network degree centrality		.047** (.011)		.050*** (.017)
Military degree × Outside leader network	.063** (.019)	-.071** (.019)	-.051* (.023)	-.058* (.024)

Promotion in the Intermediate Bodies

- The relationship between military ties, leader ties, and promotion to the Politburo is ambiguous, with the results sensitive to the addition of control variables and time period.

TABLE 5 Promotion to member of the Politburo and network ties to military officers.

	Promoted to Politburo: Civilians		Promoted to Politburo: Civilians post-1989	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Military network degree centrality	.038 ⁺ (.022)	-.011 (.020)	.053* (.026)	.010 (.025)
Outside leader's network	-.041* (.021)	-.004 (.019)	-.024 (.036)	.003 (.032)
Civilian network degree centrality		.047** (.014)		.037 ⁺ (.021)
Military degree × Outside leader network	-.057* (.023)	-.038 ⁺ (.021)	-.078* (.039)	-.034 (.036)
Individual fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time period fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls		✓		✓

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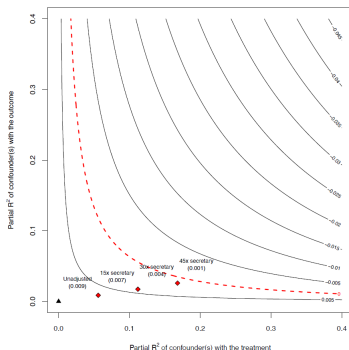
The Measurement of Tie

- Do the assignment of ties correlate with other demographic or professional assignments, such as age or experience as a provincial governor / secretary?
- Following procedure outline by Cinelli and Hazlett (2020)⁶, we perform a sensitivity analysis.
- The result shows that these confounders are unlikely to be so strongly correlated with both the explanatory and outcome variables as to overturn the results.

⁶Cinelli, Carlos, and Chad Hazlett. "Making sense of sensitivity: Extending omitted variable bias." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series B: Statistical Methodology* 82.1 (2020): 39-67.

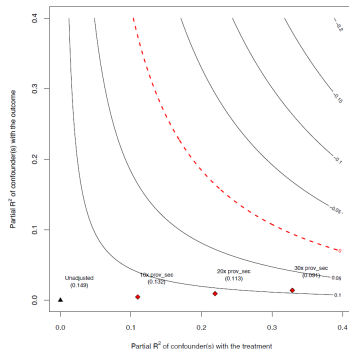
Sensitivity Analysis

- To change the estimate to zero, an unmeasured confounder would need to have around 45 times more powerful than being a party secretary in explaining treatment and outcome variation.



Sensitivity Analysis

- To change the estimate from 0.15 to 0.1, an unmeasured confounder would need to have around 30 times more powerful than being a party secretary in explaining treatment and outcome variation.



Alternative Explanation

- More professionally ambitious cadres may be more likely to seek out assignments that connect them to the military leadership.
- Even if this were the case, it would suggest that cadres can capitalize on a leader's survival concerns in order to secure promotions—a conclusion consistent with our theory.

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Conclusion

- This paper developed a theory of civilian leadership challenges: when civilian elites attempt to displace a leader, they must secure the support of the military—or else risk that the coercive arm of the state will put down their challenge.
- The empirical results showed that:
 - Civilians with strong military ties are more likely to be appointed to the Central Committee, a large agenda-setting body.
 - Promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee—a small decision-making body at CCP's apex—was not helped by network connections.
 - Military connections can hinder promotion to the Standing Committee, particularly when the elite is not personally connected to the leader.
- Our results also imply a condition of authoritarian breakdown. When civilian elites must share power with elites with strong military ties, it can be destabilizing to the system as a whole.

- The results this paper finds are most likely to apply to well institutionalized one party regimes, where the threat of a civilian leadership challenge may be larger than that of a military coup.
- But in other regimes, the threat of military defection may overwhelm the risk of civilian leadership challenge to which we draw attention. So how do leaders resolve these competing incentives?

- How do these networks shift in the aftermath of a successful civilian coup⁷?
 - Since 1949 there has arguably only been one successful leadership challenge that caused a leader to stand aside: Deng's unseating of Guofeng Hua.
- What happens after the elevation of a leader with strong military ties to an apex body?
 - The rise of Xiaoping Deng or Biao Lin.
- Coercive organizations, such as the PLA, continue to play a latent but important role in authoritarian politics even when civilians have established institutions to subordinate the military.
- Political power in China has and will likely continue to grow from the barrel of a gun.

⁷Both two questions are from the previous version.

Questions are welcome.