Responsive to Whom? A Survey Experiment of the Influence of Superiors, Businesses, and Residents on China's Subnational Officials*

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Abstract

There growing interest in examining politics at the subnational level, not only because focusing downward increases the number of observations and analytical leverage, but because politics at the subnational level is meaningful in its own right. This is the case for China, where subnational units are a locus of decision-making for a wide range of policies. However, we know little about the relative influence of different stakeholders—superiors from upper-levels of government, societal actors—on subnational policymaking. Through direct questioning, a list experiment, and an endorsement experiment among over 2,000 subnational officials in China, we measure the compliance of prefectural-level officials to central demands as well as the responsiveness of these officials to local businesses and local residents. By minimizing social desirability bias through survey experiments, we find that the proportion of subnational officials who comply with the demands of upper-levels of government is similar to the proportion who are responsive to local businesses and local residents. Only half of prefecture-level officials consider the demands of higher-level government to be an important factor when making economic and social policy decisions, and slightly less than half of officials believe suggestions of local actors should be a primary consideration in these decisions.

1 Introduction

There is increasing interest in the subnational unit as the object of research. For some scholars, this downward focus stems from the analytical leverage that increasing the number of observations provides (Snyder, 2001), but for others, politics at the subnational level is meaningful in its own right, revealing phenomenon important to our understanding of politics that cannot be observed at the national level.[1]

Subnational units in China are a locus of decision making on a wide range of policies (Chǒng, 2000; Goodman, 1997; Naughton, 2002).[2] As such, the decisions made by China's subnational governments have implication for the country's political, economic, and social outcomes. For example, subnational autonomy and the ability of local officials to tailor policies to meet local priorities is one explanation for China's impressive economic development trajectory (Montinola, Qian and Weingast, 1995; Oi, 1992; Qian and Xu, 1993).

However, we know little about the relative influence of different stakeholders on decision-making at the subnational level in China. To what extent are local officials compliant with central demands? To what extend are local officials responsive to the input of local actors? While some argue that Chinese localities have a large degree of autonomy from upper-level government control (Bernstein and Lu, 2003; Jin and Lin, 1993; Landry, 2000; Mertha, 2005; O'Brien and Li, 1999; Wang, 1995), especially in policymaking, others suggest that changes in fiscal policy in the 1990s have increased central control and authority (Huang, 1996). Indeed, a great of Chinese politics research focuses on how upper-levels officials exert control over lower-level officials by influencing their career advancement prospects, through both the cadre evaluation system as well as through personalistic ties (Cai, 2014; Cai and Zhu, 2013; Edin, 2003; Guo, 2009; Shih, Adolph and Liu, 2012; Nathan, 1973; Pye, 1980). However, at the same time, others have revealed the

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[1]For example, only by examining politics at the subnational level, can we observe and study subnational authoritarianism among democracies (Cornelius, Eisenstadt and Hindley, 1999; Gibson, 2005; Hagopian, 2007; McMann, 2006; O'Donnell, 1993).

[2]Below the central government, subnational units (in hierarchical order from upper to lower levels) include provinces, prefecture, counties, township, and villages. The village is not considered a formal administrative unit of government, but all units are under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

importance of businesses to local political success (Bai, Hsieh and Song, 2014; Dickson, 2003; Robison, 1988; Tsai, 2007) and there is increasing evidence of local government responsiveness to ordinary citizens (Chen, Pan and Xu, 2015; Distelhorst and Hou, 2014; Meng, Pan and Yang, 2014; Reilly, 2013; Stockmann, 2013; Truex, 2014; Wang, 2004; Weeks, 2008; Weller, 2008).

In this paper, we examine *who* influences policymaking at the subnational level in China and provide, to our knowledge, the first measure of the relative influence of different stakeholders on prefecture-level decision-making in China. Through direct questioning, a list experiment, and an endorsement experiment among over 2,000 prefecture-level officials in China, we measure the compliance of subnational officials to central demands as well as the responsiveness of subnational officials to suggestions from local businesses and local residents.

We find that the proportion of subnational officials who comply with the demands of upper-levels of government is similar to the proportion who are responsive to local businesses and local residents. Through list experiment, we find that approximately 45% of prefecture-level officials believe the requirements of upper-level government should be a primary consideration for the local government when making important decision pertaining to social and economic policies. Through the endorsement experiment, we find that a similar proportion of prefecture-level officials are more likely to agree with policy suggestions if the suggestions have been endorsed by upper-level government. In terms of responsiveness to societal actors, the list experiment shows that roughly 40% of prefecture-level officials believe suggestions from local businesses and suggestions from local residents should be a primary consideration for the local government when making important decision pertaining to social and economic policies. The endorsement experiment shows that similar proportion of prefecture-level officials are more likely to agree with policy suggestions if the suggestions have been endorsed by local residents, and slightly fewer prefecture-level officials (30%) are more likely to agree if suggestions have been endorsed by local businesses.

There are no statistically significant differences in the proportion of prefecture-level

officials responsive to upper-level government and responsive to local residents and local businesses through list and endorsement experiments. However, we find evidence of social desirability bias among local officials to appear responsive to the suggestions of societal actors, especially local residents and to a lesser extent local businesses, but no indication that it is socially desirable to appear compliant with the demands of upper-level government.

Section 2 describes the survey experiment and methods. The results from direct questioning, the list experiment, and the endorsement experiment are presented in Section 3. Section 4 concludes.

2   Data and Methods

We conduct a survey experiment among prefecture-level officials that focuses on one facet of responsiveness: *receptivity*, whether leaders are willing to incorporate the opinions of external groups when making policy decisions (Meng, Pan and Yang, 2014). While the willingness of leaders to incorporate suggestions is some distance from the actual incorporation of demands into policy, it likely sets a ceiling on overall responsiveness. In other words, an official who expresses willingness to incorporate external demands into policy may or may not follow through on these assertion, but an official who expresses a lack of willingness to incorporate demands into policy decision is very unlikely to incorporate these demands into policy.

The survey experiment was conducted as part of the *Creating Human Resource Systems and Enhancing Government Performance Survey*, which took place in the spring of 2014. The survey was conducted by Beijing University's Institute for Quantitative Methods in collaboration with local party schools, personnel departments, and party/government offices.[3] Survey respondents were prefecture-level officials from government offices, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) units, and other types of state organizations who participate in policy and expenditure decisions[4] The prefecture level of government is below the

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[3]The survey questions analyzed in this paper were designed by the paper's authors. At the time of the survey, Tianguang Meng was a member of the Institute for Quantitative Methods.

[4]China's administrative hierarchy, in order from top to bottom, includes central, provincial, prefectural, county, and township officials. Below the township level are villages in the rural areas and neighborhoods

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province and above the county. Prefectures are sometimes colloquially referred to as cities, but most prefecture include both urban and rural areas.

A quota sampling method aimed at reaching a certain number of respondents by the type of state unit and the rank of the respondent was used. To take into account large regional difference among prefectures in China, all Chinese prefectures were stratified into three groups: 1) districts in municipalities; 2) provincial capitals and sub-provincial level cities, and 3) other prefecture-level cities.[5] We sampled seven districts, seven provincial capitals and sub-provincial cities, and 11 prefecture-level cities. In all, these 25 prefectures were distributed among 12 coastal and inland provinces.

Every effort was made to ensure that respondents across prefecture units belonged to a similar mix of state entities and represented a similar mix of seniority rankings. In each selected prefecture, we provided local research collaborators with the following list of state units by category:

1. Government units: office of the prefecture government (政府办公室), development and reform commission (发改委), finance (财政), education (教育), human resources and social security (人力资源和社会保障), public security (公安), health (卫生), taxation (税务), state-owned asset supervision and administration (国资委)

2. CCP units: office of the party committee (党委办公室), organization department (组织部), propaganda department (宣传部)

3. Other units: people's congress (人民代表大会), people's political consultative conference (人民政治协商会议), court (法院), procuratorate (检察院), Communist Youth League (共青团), Federation of Trade Unions (工会), Women's Federation (妇女联合会), Federation of Industry and Commerce (工商业联合会)

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in the urban areas, neither of which are considered a formal administrative level.

[5]Municipalities include Beijing, Tianjin, Chongqing, and Shanghai, which are units at the same level as provinces and directly under the central government. The districts within these municipalities at at the same level as provincial prefectures. Sub-provincial level cities are large prefecture-level cities such as Qinghao and Hangzhou, which are half a level below the province. Their mayors have the same rank as the vice governor of a province, and the policy and legal administration of these sub-provincial level cities is relatively independent from provincial control. Finally prefecture level cities are a full level below provinces.

The local implementation partner then enrolled officials from the listed organizations in each of the three categories based on a ratio of 6:2:2.

In addition to the category of the work unit, respondents were also enrolled to ensure a similar distribution in the government rank of the respondents across subnational units. Respondents included vice section chiefs and below (副科长级以下), section chiefs (科长级), vice department chiefs (副处长级), and department chiefs and above (处长级以上).

Local partners assisted with the implementation of the survey by sampling respondents and determining the exact timing and location of when and where the survey would be given. We brought questionnaires to the prefecture where the survey was taking place and distributed surveys to the respondents. Randomization was achieved through the randomized ordering of the surveys. Finally, we remained on hand to answer any questions that arose. During this process, the local survey implementation partners and respondents did not have information about differing treatment assignments. The surveys were completed by the respondents in private, and no personal identifiers were collected. The human subjects aspects of our experimental protocol were pre-approved by Harvard's Institutional Review Board.[6]

In order to measure and compare the receptivity of prefecture-level officials to higher levels of government, local businesses, and local residents, respondents were divided into three treatment groups and one control group. Seven hundred surveys were distributed in each group. Each group responded to two list experiments and six endorsement experiments, and the control group also completed two direct questions related to responsiveness. In each group, the treatment in both types of survey experiments was the same. In other words, if the treatment item in the list experiment pertained to local businesses, the endorser in the endorsement experiment was local business. The list experiments were placed first in the survey, with the first list experiment occurring after about a dozen background questions and questions about perceptions of the local government, and the second list experiment occurring a dozen questions after the first. For the control group, five questions after the second list experiment, the two direct questions about responsive-

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[6]Currently, university IRBs in China do not review social science research.

ness occur sequentially. In the control group, shortly after the two direct questions about responsiveness are the six endorsement questions asking about support for specific types of policies (see Appendix A for English translations of the relevant survey questions). For the treatment groups, the endorsement questions are placed seven questions after the list experiment.

The overall placement of questions by type does not change between surveys, but the ordering within each type of question is randomized. For example, the two list experiments are always first in the survey, but whether the list experiment pertaining to economic policies is the first or second list experiment is randomized across surveys. Survey experiment questions and components were pre-tested with government and party officials prior to survey implementation.

2.1 Direct Questioning

The direct question asks:

> "`When making important decisions pertaining to _____ policies,`
> `which of these factors should be primary considerations for your`
> `local government?`"

The blank space is filled in with either `people-oriented` policies or `economic` policies. People-oriented policies (民生福利政策), encompass policies relevant to the quality of life such as education, public health, social welfare, employment, housing, and environmental protection. Economic policies (经济投资政策) are policies which affect GDP and GDP growth. Since capital construction and investment projects can make direct and large impacts on economic indicators, economic policies are often dominated by infrastructure construction such as road and rail, telecommunication, as well as oil and gas. However, economic policies can also include policies to boost returns to business such as funding for technological innovation and for improving market access. The only types of policies missing from these two categories are those related to public security and government administration (e.g., wages and salaries of government employees).

In response to the direct question, respondents can choose one or more of the following:

```
Requirements of upper-level government (上级政府的要求)
Suggestions from local businesses (本地公众的意见)
Suggestions from local residents (本地企业的意见)
```

We translate the first response as "requirements" of upper-level government, but the term 要求 (*yaoqiu*) represents what upper-level government wants the locality to do and thinks the locality should do, essentially the "demands" of upper-level government.

2.2 List Experiment

One list experiment asks respondents how many factors are of primary importance for local governments when making policy decisions related to people-oriented policies, and the other list experiment asks respondents how many factors are of primary importance when making policy decisions related to the economic policies. The following question is given to the control group:

```
Several factors are listed below.  How many of these factors should
be primary considerations of your local government when making
important decisions pertaining to _____ policies?  (You do
not need to say which factors; only HOW MANY factors you think
should be primary considerations.)

(1) Local administrative expenditures (本地行政管理支出)
(2) Influence on attracting foreign investment (吸引外资的需要)
(3) Scope of the migrant population (流动人口规模)
```

Again, the blank space is filled in with either `people-oriented` policies or `economic` policies for the two list experiments. The items included in the control list has been used in prior research, and is described in Meng, Pan and Yang (2014). For the three treatment groups, we asked an identical question except that a treatment item is appended to the list

```
(1) Local administrative expenditures
(2) [treatment item]
(3) Influence on attracting foreign investment
(4) Scope of the migrant population
```

We test three treatment items, one for each treatment group, which correspond exactly to the three responses found in direct questioning: `Requirements of upper-level government`, `Suggestions from local businesses`, and `Suggestions from local residents`.

Note that in the list experiment, the question does not ask respondents whether they would take the listed items as primary considerations when making important policy decisions, but whether they think the local government should take those factors as primary considerations. Since individuals within a locality may differ in their approach to policy-making, this question is designed to capture the orientation of the local government overall; however, we believe based on pretesting that responses are based on respondents' actual experiences rather than respondents' desired outcomes.

2.3 Endorsement Experiment

There are six endorsement experiment questions in total, three pertaining to people-oriented social welfare policies, and three related to economic policies. The control condition pertaining to social policies asks:

```
Below are some policy suggestions related to social welfare policies
that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.  These proposals
will increase local government spending on social welfare, but
will reduce the burden on local residents.  Subsidies from upper-level
government will remain unchanged.  What do you think of the following
suggestions?
```

The three social policy suggestions are:

```
Increase local financial allocations for the Minimum Livelihood
Guarantee (提高本地低保支付水平)
Increase local financial allocations for old-age pensions (提高
本地养老保险支付水平)
Increase local financial allocations for medical insurance and
medical assistance (提高本地医疗保险/医疗救助支付水平)
```

Respondents choose from a five point scale, including "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "somewhat disagree," and "strongly disagree." The Minimum Livelihood Guarantee (*Dibao*) is a non-conditional cash transfer program, that provides cash transfers and other subsidies to households who are below a certain income floor, which is determined by the prefecture government (Solinger, 2008, 2010, 2012,

2014, 2015; Tang, 2003). *Dibao* is fully subsidized by the government, with contributions made at the central, provincial, and prefectural levels. Old-age pensions refer to China's basic pension insurance enacted in 2010 by China's Social Insurance Law.[7] Primarily funded by beneficiaries and their employers, local governments also make contributions under certain circumstances to support pensions for non-state-owned enterprise workers, to subsidize some portion of pension premiums for some state-owned enterprises workers, and to make up the difference if pension funds are insufficient to cover pension payouts. Government medical insurance programs include the Urban Residents Basic Medical Insurance and the New Cooperative Medical Scheme for rural residents. In both medical insurance programs, contributions come from individuals, central government, provincial government, and prefectural government (Brown, de Brauw and Yang, 2009; Lin, Liu and Chen, 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2009). Medical assistance refers to cash subsidies funded by various levels of government.

The control condition pertaining to economic policies asks:

```
Below are some policy suggestions related to economic policies
that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.  These proposals
will increase local government spending on economic investment,
but will promote economic development.  Subsidies from upper-level
government will remain unchanged.  What do you think of the following
suggestions?

Increase local financial allocations for highway construction (提
高本地修建高速公路的财政拨款)
Increase local financial allocations for the expansion of pillar
industries (提高本地支柱性产业扩建的财政投资)
Reduce or eliminate the tax burden on local private enterprises
(减免本地民营企业的税费)
```

Since the 1990s, China has spent hundreds of billions of dollars each year on infrastructure development (Baum-Snow et al., 2015). For prefectural governments, infrastructure projects such as highway development are seen as a way to boost GDP in the short run through construction efforts, as well as the long run through increased access to inputs and to markets. Pillar industries are industries that represent a large share of local GDP, and are identified by local governments based on local short-term and long-term economic devel-

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[7]Full text at http://www.gov.cn/zxft/ft209/content_1748773.htm (Accessed Aug 18, 2015).

opment plans. For example, Beijing's industry development plan for 2011-2015 included as pillar industries information technology, bio-industry, environmental protection, and alternative energy.[8] One of the most important tools local governments have to support the development of pillar industries is to reduce the corporate tax burden by eliminating or reducing local enterprise tax and administrative fees (Cai and Liu, 2009; Tung and Cho, 2001).[9]

For the treatment groups, the prompt is changed slightly:

```
Below are some policy _____ related to social welfare policies
that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.  These proposals
will increase local government spending on social welfare, but
will reduce the burden on local residents.  Subsidies from upper-level
government will remain unchanged.  What do you think of the following
suggestions?
```

The blank space is filled with `requirements of upper-level government`, `suggestions from local businesses`, and `suggestions from local residents`. The above example focuses on people-oriented social policies, but the prompt is similar for economic policies. The treatment for higher level government reads: "Below are some policy requirements of upper-level government related to economic polices that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process. These proposal will increase local government spending on economic investment, but will promote economic development..." The treatment for suggestions from local businesses begins with: "Below are some policy suggestions from local businesses related to economic polices that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process," and the treatment for local residents begins: "Below are some policy suggestions from local businesses related to economic polices that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process."

Based on pretesting with officials, that the effect of group endorsement on officials' support for these six policies were more likely due to support for the group and not due to differing interpretations of the question by the official.[10] These are policies under active

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[8]See plan at http://zhengwu.beijing.gov.cn/ghxx/sewgh/t1221393.htm (Accessed Aug. 17, 2015).

[9]Other methods local governments can use to support pillar industries include providing resources to local firms for research and development, providing human resource support, and developing essential infrastructure.

[10]For discussion of endorsement experiment design, see Bullock, Imai and Shapiro (2011).

discussion among Chinese officials. They are well known to all officials, even officials who do not work in the particular issue domain. Finally, these are policies about which opinions are not rigid, and which have been endorsed by upper-level government, local residents, and local businesses. There are upper-level government policy opinions and suggestions on all six of the topics. Even though one may suppose that local residents have more of an interest in social welfare policies and local businesses have more of an interest in economic policies, each set of policies is also relevant for the other group. Highway construction and development of pillar industries have physical, geographical impacts on local residents, and taxation affects residents who are or who are considering becoming business owners. Since the local government faces a relatively hard budget constraint (Montinola, Qian and Weingast, 1995; Qian and Roland, 1998), economic policies indirectly affect government budget allocation on other areas such as social welfare. These economic social welfare issues are often raised by residents on posts made to local government web forums.[11] Likewise, the social welfare policies used in our endorsement experiment have direct effects on local businesses. They directly influence employer contribution to various social welfare programs and indirectly effect firms' access to human capital. For example, the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee directly affects businesses because expenditures in this program is related to unemployment insurance and minimum wage, and changes to the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee could change the burden of business contributions to welfare funds. Local officials have said through interviews that businesses express their preferences on social as well as economic policies through informal channels as well as institutions such as the local political consultative conferences.[12]

Let us emphasize that unlike the list experiment, which asks officials to respond on behalf of their local prefectural government, the endorsement experiment is focused solely on the personal opinion of the respondent. Furthermore, whereas it is possible that the list experiment captures what officials think ought to happen, the endorsement experiment assess the effect of each endorser on the respondents level of agreement with each policy suggestion.

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[11]For additional information on resident complaints to government web forums, see Chen, Pan and Xu (2015).

[12]Interviews with authors conducted in 2014.

2.4 Balance

We find the pre-intervention characteristics of respondents in the treatment and control conditions to be generally well balanced in the survey. Table 1 shows the mean values for the control and treatment groups, as well as the overall survey response rate. In Table 1,

Table 1: Pre-Intervention Characteristics of Respondents by Treatment Group

	Control	T1: Higher Government	T2: Local Residents	T3: Local Businesses	p-value
Male (%)	55.6	57.7	58.3	58.9	0.68
Age (yrs)	36.1	36.3	36.0	37.0	0.30
Education level	1.95	1.98	1.97	1.96	0.89
CCP unit (%)	13.8	14.3	16.5	13.2	0.42
Administrative rank	1.6	1.58	1.62	1.58	0.88
Years in government	11.0	10.7	10.6	11.9	0.13
Business interaction	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.9	0.08
Respondents	555	561	565	584	
Response rate	0.79	0.80	0.81	0.83	

Male refers to the proportion of respondents who are male. *Age* is the average age of the respondent in years. *Education level* is a categorical variable where 1 refers to completion of secondary education, 2 refers to completion of college, and 3 refers to completion of graduate school. *CCP unit* is the proportion of respondents who are employed in a Communist Party unit, as opposed to a governmental work unit. *Administrative rank* is a categorical variable where 1 refers to vice section chief and below, 2 to section chief, 3 to vice department chief, and 4 to department chief and above. The number of years the respondent has been employed in the public sector, including employment in both government and Party work units, is denoted by *Years in government*. Finally, the frequency the respondent or the respondents' work unit interacts with businesses in their daily work is denoted by *Business interaction* where 1 is never, 2 is rarely, 3 is sometimes, and 4 is frequently.

For most of the variables, there are no significant differences in pre-intervention characteristics across the control and treatment groups. A slight majority of respondents are male across all groups. The average age is just past 35 for the treatment and control

groups. On average, respondents are college graduates. About one seventh of respondents belong to CCP units, as opposed to government or other work units. The average rank is between vice section chief and below and section chief. For the number of years respondents have worked in government, respondents in the local business treatment group has slightly longer tenure than respondents in the other groups. For the frequency of business interaction, respondents in the higher government and local residents treatment groups have slightly less interaction with businesses than respondents in the control group and local business treatment group. We analyze results with and without covariates. When covairates are included, they include all of the variables presented in Table 1 as well as tax reliance (see Section **??**) and local per capita GDP (see Section 2.5). The inclusion of respondent covariates does not substantively change any of our results.

Table 1 also show the number of respondents and and response rate (out of 700 surveys distributed) for each group. The control group had 555 (79%) responses, the treatment group focused measuring the effect of upper-level government demands had 561 (80%) responses, the treatment group focused on measuring the effect of suggestions from local residents had 565 (81%) responses, and the treatment group focused on local businesses had 584 (83%) responses. The overall response rates are quite similar, and we have no reason to believe that the respondents refused to complete the survey because of the inclusion of treatments.

Non-response to the various types of questions is shown in Table 2. The highest non-response rates in the survey are to the list experiment questions. Based on post-survey feedback, we found that a small number of respondents were confused by the list experiment questions. They were looking for ways to select each item, and since they were unable to do so, skipped the question. We have no reason to believe that higher non-responses to the list experiment is due to the heightened perceptions of the sensitivity of the questions asked. This is also supported by the higher non-response rate for the control rather than treatment groups.

Overall, there is more non-response under the control condition than in any of the treatment groups, this could be related to the fact that the control questionnaire contained

Table 2: Non-Responses by Survey Question and Treatment Group

Missing responses	Control		Higher Government		Treatment Local Residents		Local Businesses	
Direct: people policies	32	(6%)						
Direct: economic policies	37	(7%)						
List: people policies	69	(12%)	42	(7%)	55	(10%)	54	(9%)
List: economic policies	86	(15%)	50	(9%)	44	(8%)	55	(9%)
Endorsement: *Dibao*	16	(3%)	22	(4%)	12	(2%)	31	(5%)
Endorsement: pension	23	(4%)	15	(3%)	12	(2%)	31	(5%)
Endorsement: medical	16	(3%)	15	(3%)	12	(2%)	31	(5%)
Endorsement: highway	23	(4%)	15	(3%)	12	(2%)	24	(4%)
Endorsement: pillar industry	23	(4%)	22	(4%)	12	(2%)	31	(5%)
Endorsement: tax relief	23	(4%)	15	(3%)	12	(2%)	24	(4%)

more questions, increasing the time commitment required of the respondent. Endorsement questions have the fewest non-responses overall. Among endorsement questions, non-response is slightly higher for those in the local businesses treatment group.

2.5 Method of Analysis

Our quantity of interest is the proportion of subnational officials who believe the requirements of upper-level officials are a primary consideration in policymaking, the proportion who believe the same of suggestions of local residents, and the proportion of who believe that suggestions of local business are a primary consideration.

To alleviate potential concerns with balance, we estimate the proportion of officials given the respondents' individual-level and prefecture-level characteristics (V_i). For direct questioning, we estimate the proportion using logistic regression. For the list experiment, the probability of any respondent supporting the opinions of a particular group is given by:

$$Pr(Z_i = 1 | V_i) \tag{1}$$

where Z_i is the latent binary response of respondent i to the treatment item that in combination with the potential response under the control condition yields the aggregate response for the respondent. The model is estimated with a maximum likelihood estimator described by Blair and Imai (2012) and Imai (2011).

Similarly, for the endorsement experiment, the probability respondent i is more likely to support a policy that has been endorsed by a particular group is given by:

$$Pr(s_{ij} > 0|V_i) \tag{2}$$

where s_{ij} is the latent level of support for respondent i on policy j, such that when $s_{ij} > 0$, the respondent is more likely to voice support for the policy when it has been endorsed by a particular group. This model is estimated using a Bayesian Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) algorithm described in Bullock, Imai and Shapiro (2011) and Blair, Imai and Lyall (2014). To estimate the probability of support in the endorsement experiment, we pool responses to the three social welfare question and separately pool responses to the three economics questions so that each pooled set of questions comes from the same policy domain.

3 Results

We begin by presenting the results from direct questioning and then move to results from the list experiment and then endorsement experiment. At the end of the section, we compare results from direct and indirect questioning.

3.1 Direct Questioning

Based on direct questioning, Figure 1 shows that approximately 40% to 50% of respondents believe the requirements of upper-level government is a primary consideration for important decisions related to people-oriented policies and to economic policies. With direct questioning, a much higher proportion of respondents believe that suggestions of local residents should be primary consideration in decision related to people-oriented policies (90% to 95%) as well as to economic policies (over 85%). Finally, responsiveness to suggestions from local businesses is similar to requirements from upper-level government—approximately 50% to 60% of respondents would be receptive to local business suggestions for people-oriented policies and economic policies.

In each figure, the solid line is the estimated proportion of affirmative responses for each treatment item based on a logistic regression model taking into account the respon-

Figure 1: Estimated proportion of affirmative responses based on direct questioning for people-oriented policies (left) and for economic policies (right)
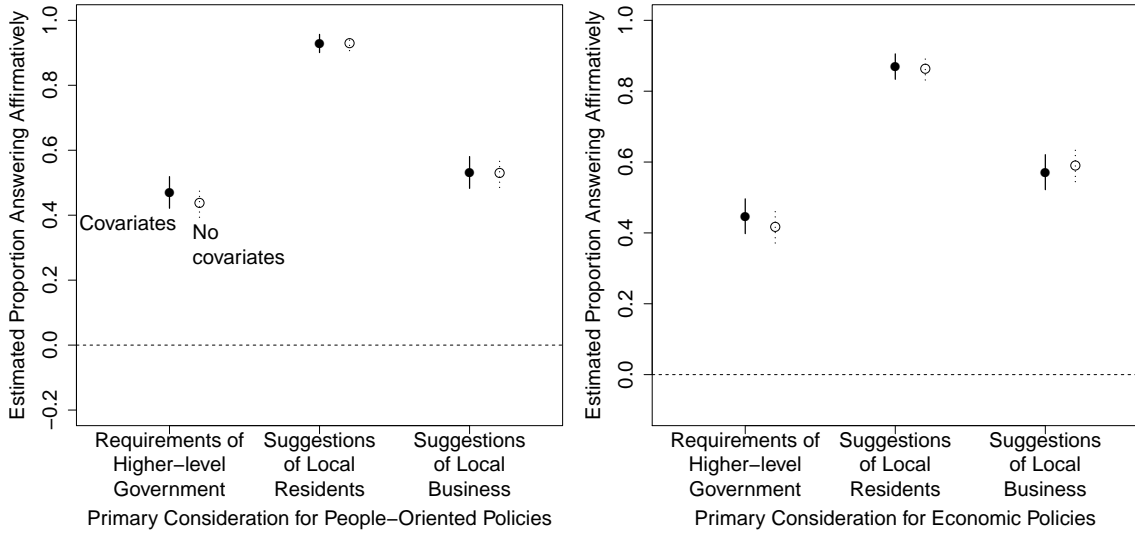
dent's gender, age, level of education, whether he/she belongs to a CCP unit, the administrative rank, the number of years in government, as well as the 2011 log per capita GDP of the prefecture. The dashed line is the estimated proportion, without the inclusion of any covariates. The inclusion of respondents characteristics does not change the overall results.

From direct questioning, it would appear that nearly all prefecture-level officials believe the suggestions of local residents should be a primary consideration for the prefecture-level government when making important decisions related to both people-oriented policies and economic policies. Responsiveness to local residents is much higher than responsiveness to higher levels of government as well as local businesses.

3.2 List Experiment

Table 3 shows the observed data from the list experiment on people-oriented policies and Table 4 the observed data from the list experiment on economic policies.

Less than 1% of respondents select zero items under the control condition, which suggests that floor effects are unlikely to be a concern. Over 40% of respondents select all three items under the control condition. In most list experiments, this proportion raises the real possibility of ceiling effects, where out of concern for privacy, a respondent want-

Table 3: Observed Data From the List Experiment on People-oriented Policies

Response value	Control		T1: Higher Government		T2: Local Public Opinion		T3: Local Business Opinion	
0	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	2	0.4%	4	0.8%
1	73	14.8%	70	13.5%	62	12.2%	68	12.8%
2	216	43.9%	181	34.9%	171	33.5%	197	37.2%
3	202	41.1%	155	29.9%	156	30.6%	143	27.0%
4			112	21.6%	119	23.3%	118	22.3%
Total	492		519		510		530	

Table 4: Observed Data From the List Experiment on Economic Policies

| Response value	Control		T1: Higher Government		T2: Local Public Opinion		T3: Local Business Opinion	
0	5	1.1%	2	0.4%	2	0.4%	3	0.6%
1	62	13.2%	48	9.4%	55	10.6%	60	11.3%
2	178	38.0%	175	34.2%	171	32.8%	167	31.6%
3	224	47.8%	154	30.1%	161	30.9%	167	31.6%
4			132	25.8%	132	25.3%	132	25.0%
total	469		511		521		529	

ing to select all three control items plus the one treatment item will not do so, and will instead only select three item as the response to the list experiment. The presence of ceiling effects would lead to underestimation of the proportion of officials who would answer affirmatively for the treatment item (Blair and Imai, 2012). A respondent would be concerned about selecting all four items under the treatment condition if the treatment item is not socially desirable. For example, in studies of drug use or racism, this would be the case. However, as we will show in Section 3.4, social desirability bias in this context goes in the opposite direction—respondents want to appear more responsive. As a result, the privacy concern relates more to floor effects than ceiling effects. In other words, if none of the three items in the control list are relevant to the respondent (when there is a danger of floor effects), then positive social desirability bias would have respondents choosing one item when the treatment is included even if they do not actually believe the treatment item is important because their privacy is not protected and they do not want to appear to be unresponsive. In contrast, if all three items in the control list are relevant to the

respondent, when the additional treatment item is added, there is no incentive preventing the respondents from choosing four items since it is socially desirable to appear receptive. Otherwise stated, among respondents who would choose all three items in the control condition, when an additional item is added in the treatment conditions, respondents are unlikely to lie.[13]

We also show that the assumption of no design effect holds for this data. This is the assumption that the addition of the treatment item does not change the aggregate response to the control items (see Appendix B). Together the assumptions of no design effect and no floor or ceiling effects allow us to estimate the affirmative responses to each treatment group using a multivariate statistical model (Imai, 2011).

Figure 2 shows the results of our statistical analysis. It show the estimated proportion of respondents that answer each treatment item in the affirmative for people-oriented policies (left panel) and economic polices (right panel). The solid line is the estimated

Figure 2: Estimated proportion of affirmative responses based on list experiment for people-oriented policies (left) and for economic policies (right)
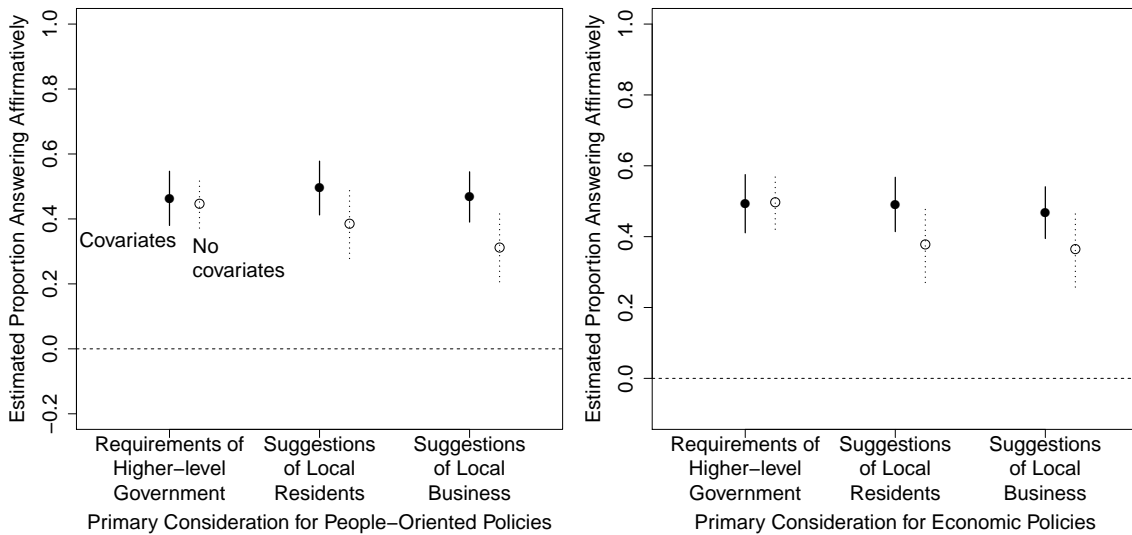
proportion of affirmative responses for each treatment item when taking into account the respondent's gender, age, level of education, whether he/she belongs to a CCP unit, the administrative rank, the number of years in government, as well as the 2011 log per capita GDP of the precture. The dashed line is the estimate proportion without the inclusion of

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[13]In Appendix B.2, we show that when ceiling effects are modeled, substantive results do not change.

any covariates.

Similar to the results of direct questioning, approximately 45% to 50% of respondents believe the requirements of upper-level government are a primary consideration for important decision related to people-oriented policies and to economic policies. However, in contrast to results from direct questioning, the proportion of respondents who would be receptive to suggestions from local residents is much lower, around 40% to 50%, and the proportion of respondents receptive to suggestions from local businesses is also lower at 30% to 45%. As with direct questioning, the results with and without covariates are not substantially different.

The estimates of the list experiment differ from that of direct questioning. With the list experiment, receptivity to different groups is very similar. It is no longer the case that officials are much more responsive to local residents than to upper-levels of government and local businesses.

3.3 Endorsement Experiment

Figure 3 shows the overall distribution of responses to the endorsement experiment. There

Figure 3: Distribution of Responses from Endorsement Experiment by Policy
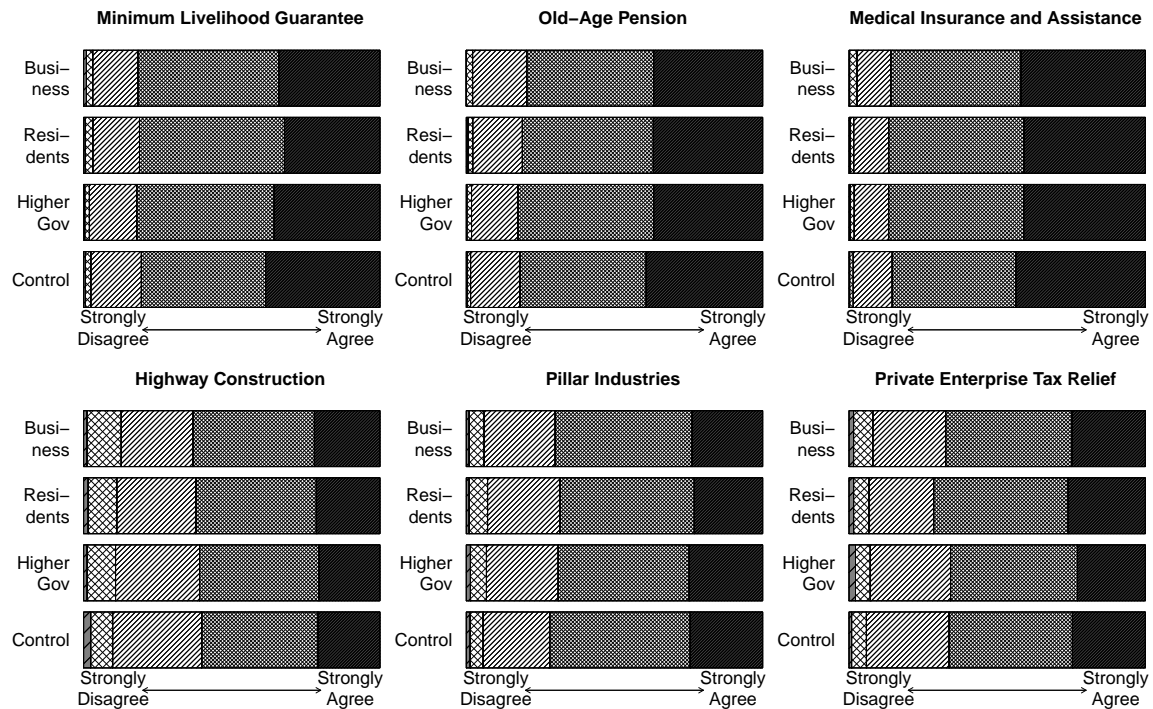
is greater internal resemblance in the distribution of responses within the social welfare policies and within the economic policies than between social welfare and economic policies. The proportion of respondent who choose "strongly disagree" or "disagree" is very low, generally less than 2 percent across the three social welfare policies and less than 10 percent across the economic policies. The proportion of respondents who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the social welfare policies is 80%, and lower at 60% to 70% for the economic policies.

To estimate the proportion of respondents who support each endorser, we pool responses to the three social welfare questions together, and we pool responses to the three economic questions together. We do not pool all six questions together. The similarity of responses within pooled groups further support our belief that responses within pooled groups fall into the same policy domain and provide an opportunity to measure the responsiveness of subnational officials.

Figure 2 shows the results of our Bayesian model. It shows the estimated proportion of respondents that endorse each treatment group for social policies (left panel) and economic polices (right panel). Because of the similarity of results with and without co-

Figure 4: Estimated proportion of affirmative responses based on endorsement experiment for people-oriented policies (left) and for economic policies (right)
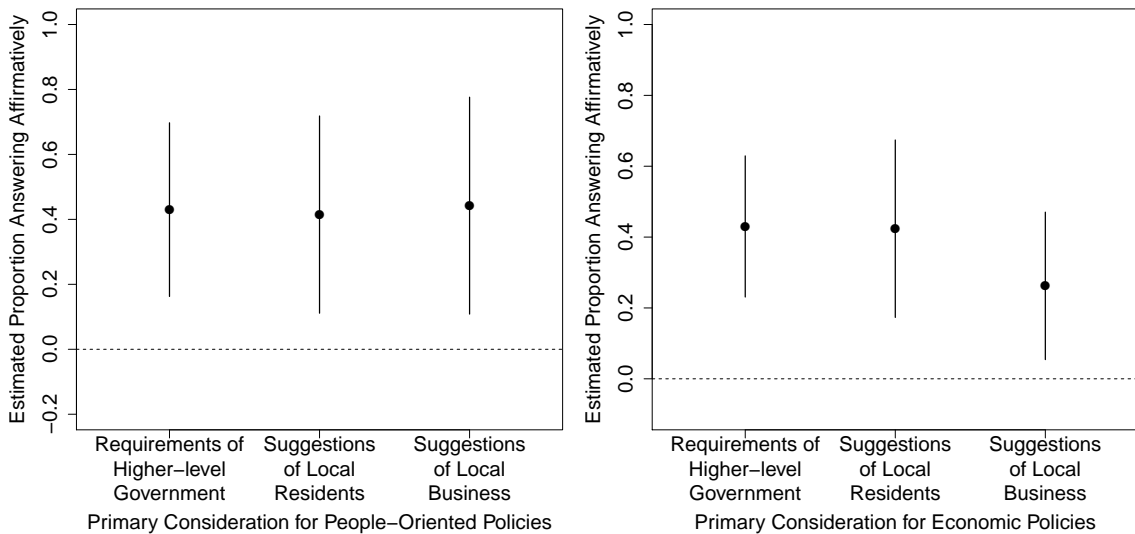
variates for our analysis of direct questioning and the list experiment, the only Bayesian model we estimate is one that includes individual and prefecture-level covariates (the

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same variables as in the above analyses) because of the long time duration required to achieve a relatively high degree of convergence.[14]

Like the results of the list experiment, a very similar proportion (around 45%) of prefecture-level officials would consider the opinions of the three groups. The only exception to this pattern is support for considering the suggestions of local businesses on economic polices, which is lower at around 25%. Note that the estimated proportion of respondents who would consider suggestions from local businesses on economic policies from the list experiment is also the lowest among all policies and stakeholders at around 40%. The uncertainty around all of the endorsement experiment results is larger than the uncertainty of the other two methods of questioning. This is due to the fact that we are limited to a small number of policy questions in each domain for feasibility of survey implementation.

It is important to note that the similarity of results between the list and endorsement experiments even though the framing of the two questions differs. Whereas the list experiment measures which stakeholders respondents believe their local government should pay attention to when making social and economic policy decisions, the endorsement experiment measures the effect of each stakeholder on the respondents' attitudes toward social and economic policies. The similarity of results suggests that our different methods of questioning is able to capture the level of attentiveness prefecture level officials exhibit to upper-level superiors, local businesses, and local residents.
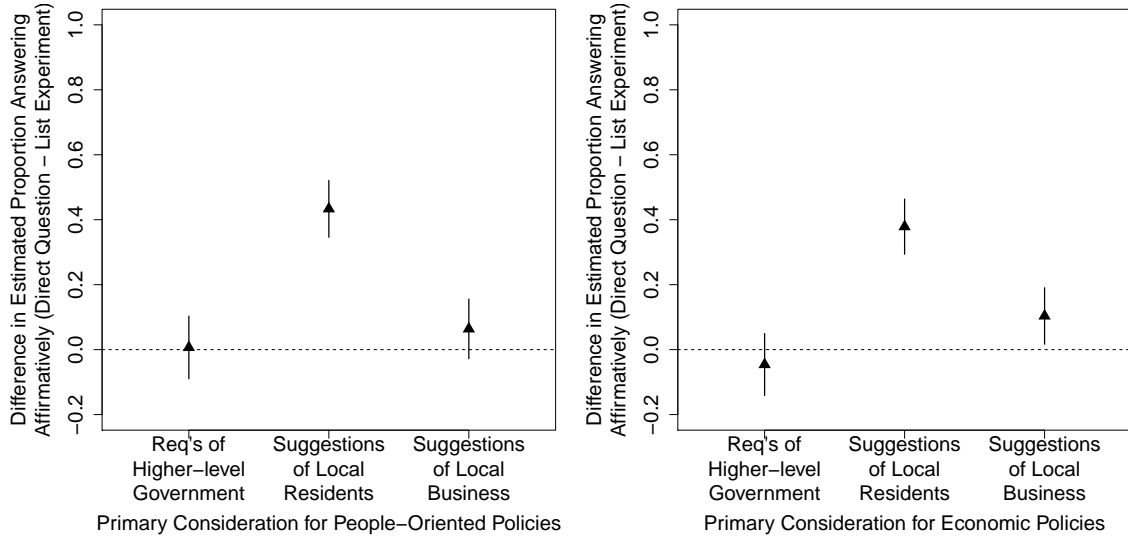
3.4   Social Desirability Bias

Social desirability bias is clear to see when comparing the results of direct questioning with that of indirect questioning. Given the similarity of results from the list experiment and endorsement experiment, we compare the results of direct questioning against the results of the list experiment. Figure 5 shows that for both people-oriented and economic policies, responsiveness is higher to residents in direct questioning than in the list experiment by nearly 45% and 50%, respectively. This suggests that prefecture-level officials

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[14]Three chains with over-dispersed starting values are run to monitor convergence (Gelman and Rubin, 1992). Convergence on the models estimated for this analysis required 10 to 50 days.

Figure 5: Difference in proportion of respondents answering in the affirmative between direct questioning and the list experiment for people-oriented policies (left) and for economic policies (right)

want to appear more receptive to local residents. For local businesses, prefecture-level officials have social desirability bias to appear responsive on economic policies; however, the difference in the proportion of affirmative responses to local businesses suggestions between direct questioning and the list experiment is smaller (10%) than the difference for local resident suggestions. We also see a slightly higher proportion of affirmative responses to business suggestions in direct questioning on people-oriented policies than the list experiment (7%), but the difference is not statistically significant. Finally, results from direct and indirect questioning are very similar when prefecture-level officials are asked about their receptivity to the requirements of upper-level government. This similarity in direct and indirect questioning suggests that prefecture-level officials do not feel any social pressure to appear compliant with the demands of upper-levels.

4   Discussion

By using survey experiments to gauge the compliance of prefecture-level officials to their superiors as well as their responsiveness to local residents and local business, we discover that roughly equal proportions of officials are attentive to each of these groups. We find that prefecture-level officials want to appear more responsive to local residents and local

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businesses, but there is no such social desirability bias toward upper-level government.

These results suggest that subnational governments in China retain a great deal of discretion in the realm of governance and policy-making. This (relatively) low level of compliance with upper-level demands goes beyond local experimentation (Heilmann, Perry and Chung, 2011). Subnational officials are not simply experimenting with policy design and implementation within the bounds delineated by upper-level authorities, but actively de-emphasizing the requirements of upper-levels on social and economic policies.

One potential explanation for the relatively low level of compliance to upper-level governments is that prefecture-level officials *are* attentive to their provincial and central superiors, but only as it relates to outcomes and not to specific demands regarding policy inputs and implementation. This explanation relates to research on China's nomenklatura system of political advancement emphasizing the achievements of economic and social outcomes as key criteria for promotion (Edin, 2003; Liu and Tao, 2007; Whiting, 2004). Based on this argument, lower-level officials are ultimately accountable to upper-level superiors for outcomes such as achieving GDP growth, identifying social discontent, and managing collective action.[15] To achieve these outcomes, lower-level officials can pursue a variety of policy options. This explanation implies that specific upper-level government policy decrees may not be implemented uniformly.

Another potential explanation for why only half of prefecture official comply with upper-level government demands is that prefecture-level officials are primarily attentive to top prefectural leaders—the party secretary and mayor—and not to superiors at the province or central level because it is top prefectural leaders who exert the most influence on the advancement prospects of prefecture-level officials. This argument aligns with research emphasizing local autonomy and the power of subnational governments vis-a-vis the central government (Landry, 2008; Lieberthal and Lampton, 1992; Saich, 2010). This explanation implies that policymaking authority resides along the geographic administrative region. This means, for example, that the head of the prefectural department of en-

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[15]Lower-level officials may focus on outcomes most relevant to their functional areas. For example, GDP targets are likely more relevant to officials in economic functions, identifying social discontent is likely more relevant for officials in propaganda and information management roles, and managing collective action is likely more relevant for officials in public security.

vironmental protection is attentive to the demands of prefectural mayor on environmental issues not to the provincial or central government environmental protection bureau.

Determining which explanation can explain why half of subnational officials ignore the demands of upper-level superiors require further research. However, regardless of the reason for this relatively low level of compliance with central authority, the outcome is that local autonomy increases the difficulty of upper-level governments in pursuing a wide range of policy priorities. Although central and provincial governments may be able to pressure subnational officials to implement a few policy priorities, outside of these priorities, the policy initiatives of upper-levels of government may not be implemented smoothly or uniformly.

The result that the proportion of subnational officials responsive to local actors is similar to the proportion who are compliant with upper-level demands suggests that to the extent officials are responsive to anyone, they are relatively responsive to local stakeholders. While a great deal of research on China has identified the existence of government responsiveness, this result helps put the findings in context. In other words, our results suggest that the responsiveness of local actors to local businesses and local residents is *relatively* high. Additional research is needed to determine whether officials compliant with upper levels of government are the same officials who are responsive to local stakeholders, or whether officials complaint with central authority differ from officials responsive to societal voices. As well, we do not know whether responsiveness to societal actors from below is related to a desire for political advancement, or whether there are concern unrelated to political advancement that cause subnational officials to respond to local stakeholders.

Finally, these results remind us that China is far from a monolithic entity of centralized authority. Subnational units in China retain substantial autonomy in making political choices, and societal voices play a role in subnational politics. Even in an authoritarian context, the forces that influence politics at the subnational levels can vary, and subnational politics are important to our understanding of authoritarian regimes.

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A   Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Questionnaire: Creating Human Resource Systems And Enhancing Government Performance

English Translation

Beijing University "Creating Human Resource Systems And Enhancing Government Performance" Task Force

July 2013

The Beijing University "Creating Human Resource Systems And Enhancing Government Performance" Task Force is currently conducting research on how to improve the creation of human resource systems and enhance government performance. Thank you very much for participating in our research. Your views and opinions are important not only for this study but to help promote local development. Our sincere thanks! This survey is in strict accordance with relevant laws and regulations. We rigorously adopt the principle of confidentially. We guarantee that we will keep your answers and your personal information confidential at all time and under all conditions. Thank you again for your participation and support!

PART A. Background

A1. What's your gender?

1. Male	2. Female

A2. When were you born?   _____(year)

A3. What's your highest level of education?

1. Senior high school or lower	2.Technical school	3.Vocational school	4. Bachelor's degree	5.Master's degree

6. PhD

A4. Which category does your work unit belong to?

1. Administrative Department	2. Communist Party unit	3.NPC / CPPCC	4. Communist Youth League	5. Courts / protectorates	5.Mass organization

A5. Which hierarchical level are you in?

1.Deputy section chief or lower	2.Section chief	3.Deputy director at division level	4.Director at department level	5. Director at department level or higher

A6.When did you become an official?   _____(year)

PART B

Questions B1, B2a, B2b, B2c relate to respondent perceptions of and satisfaction with various facets of local governance. None of these questions are used in this paper.

B3. Several factors are listed below. How many of these factors should be primary considerations of your local government when making important decisions pertaining to people-oriented/economic policies? (You do not need to say which factors; only HOW MANY factors you think should be primary considerations.)

For the control questionnaire.
(1) Local administrative expenditures
(2) Influence on attracting foreign investment
(3) Scope of the migrant population

For treatment questionnaire, the treatment is the 2nd item:
(2) Requirements of upper-level government
(2) Suggestions from local businesses
(2) Suggestions from local residents

PART C

Questions in Part C relate to attitudes about being in government and government functions. None of these questions are used in this paper.

PART D

Question D1 asks respondents to evaluate the relative importance of various priories, including economic development, people's welfare, social stability, and environmental protection. This question is not used in this paper.

D2. Several factors are listed below. How many of these factors should be primary considerations of your local government when making important decisions pertaining to people-oriented/economic policies? (You do not need to say which factors; only HOW MANY factors you think should be primary considerations.)

For the control questionnaire.
(1) Local administrative expenditures
(2) Influence on attracting foreign investment
(3) Scope of the migrant population

For treatment questionnaire, the treatment is the 2nd item:
(2) Requirements of upper-level government
(2) Suggestions from local businesses
(2) Suggestions from local residents

D6a. When making important decisions pertaining to people-oriented/economic policies, which of these factors should be primary considerations for your local government? (Can select multiple)
a. Requirements of upper-level government
b. Suggestions from local businesses
c. Suggestions from local residents

D6b. When making important decisions pertaining to people-oriented/economic policies, which of these factors should be primary considerations for your local government? (Can select multiple)
a. Requirements of upper-level government
b. Suggestions from local businesses
c. Suggestions from local residents

D6a and D6b do not appear in the treatment condition questionnaires.

D7a and D7b ask for opinions about various types of organizations.

D8. Below are some policy suggestions related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process. These proposals will increase local government spending on social welfare/economic investment, but will reduce the burden on local residents. Subsidies from upper-level government will remain unchanged. What do you think of the following suggestions?

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Increase local financial allocations for the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee	1	2	3	4	5
b. Increase local financial allocations for old-age pensions	1	2	3	4	5
c. Increase local financial allocations for medical insurance and medical assistance	1	2	3	4	5

For treatment questionnaire, the first sentence of the prompt is:
- Below are some policy requirements of upper-level government related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.

- Below are some policy suggestions from local residents related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.

- Below are some policy suggestions from local businesses related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.

D9. Below are some policy suggestions related to economic policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process. These proposals will increase local government spending on social welfare/economic investment, but will promote economic development. Subsidies from upper-level government will remain unchanged. What do you think of the following suggestions?

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Increase local financial allocations for highway construction	1	2	3	4	5
b. Increase local financial allocations for the expansion of pillar industries	1	2	3	4	5
c. Reduce or eliminate the tax burden on local private enterprises	1	2	3	4	5

For treatment questionnaire, the first sentence of the prompt is:
- Below are some policy requirements of upper-level government related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.

- Below are some policy suggestions from local residents related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.

- Below are some policy suggestions from local businesses related to social welfare policies that were raised during the fiscal budgeting process.

PART E

Questions Part E deal with economic policymaking and government business relations. These questions are not used in this paper.

# B Appendix B: Additional Analyses

B.1 List Experiment: Design Effect

We estimate the population proportion ($\hat{\pi}$) for each respondent type in Table 5 and Table 6 under the assumption of no design effect for people-oriented and economic policies, respectively. In other words, we assume that the inclusion of the treatment items does not affect respondents' answers to control items. We do this with a null hypothesis that the population proportions of each type of respondent is non-negative. Intuitively this means the addition of the treatment item to the control list makes the response of the treatment group larger than that of the control group. The results are all non-negative with one exception–the estimated proportion for response type 0 is negative for local residents and local business in people-oriented policies with standard error of 0.003, and 0.004, respective

   We conduct a statistical test to see how likely it is to observe a negative estimate in the experiment under the assumption of no design effect.[16] Using $\alpha = 0.05$ as the significance level of the test, we find, for people-oriented policies, the minimum p value to be 1.0 for demands from upper-level government, 0.58 for suggestions from local residents, and 0.20 for suggestions from local businesses. These p values are all above the α threshold; thus, for both treatment items, we fail to reject the null hypothesis of no design effect, and can analyze the list experiment under the assumption of no design effect.

B.2 List Experiment: Ceiling Effects

Figure 6 shows the estimated proportion of respondents that answer each treatment item in the affirmative for people-oriented policies (left panel) and economic polices (right panel) while modeling for ceiling effects.

Figure 6: Estimated proportion of respondents answering treatment items in the affirmative for people-oriented policies (left) and for economic policies (right)

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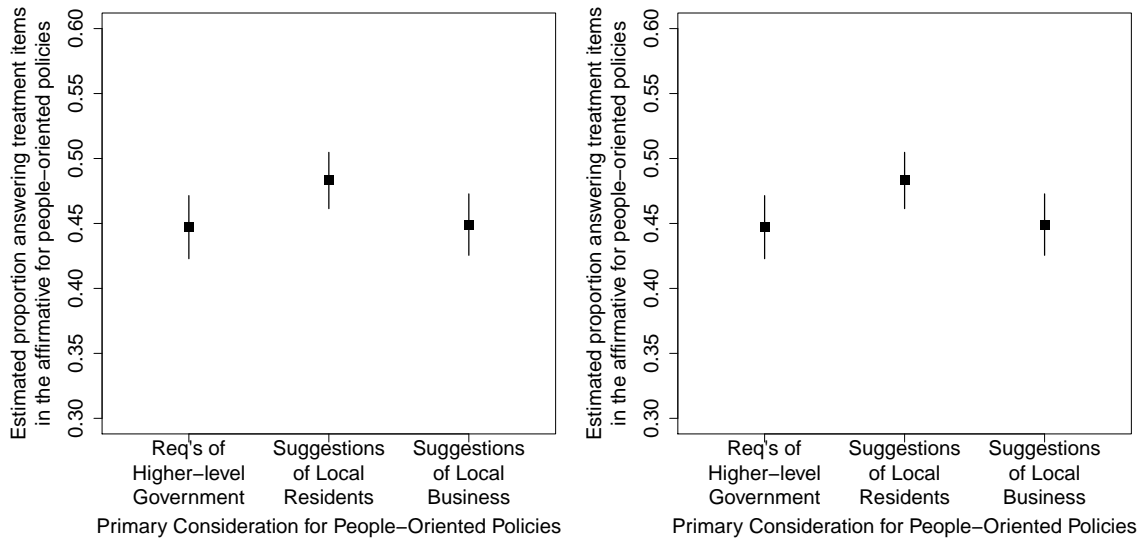
[16]For details, see Blair and Imai (2012).

Table 5: Test for List Experiment Design Effects: Estimated population proportion for each respondent type (people-oriented policies)

Response type	Higher Government				Local Residents				Business			
	$\hat{\pi}_{y0}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y1}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y0}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y1}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y0}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y1}$	SE
0	0.2%	0.00	0.0%	0.00	0.4%	0.00	-0.2%	0.00	0.8%	0.00	-0.6%	0.00
1	13.5%	0.02	1.4%	0.02	12.4%	0.01	2.5%	0.02	13.4%	0.02	1.5%	0.02
2	33.5%	0.03	10.4%	0.03	31.0%	0.03	12.9%	0.03	35.7%	0.03	8.2%	0.03
3	19.5%	0.03	21.6%	0.02	17.7%	0.03	23.3%	0.02	18.8%	0.03	22.3%	0.02
Total	66.7%		33.3%		61.5%		38.5%		68.6%		31.4%	

Table 6: Test for List Experiment Design Effects: Estimated population proportion for each respondent type (economic policies)

Response type	Higher Government				Local Residents				Business			
	$\hat{\pi}_{y0}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y1}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y0}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y1}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y0}$	SE	$\hat{\pi}_{y1}$	SE
0	0.4%	0.00	0.7%	0.01	0.4%	0.00	0.7%	0.01	0.6%	0.00	0.5%	0.01
1	8.7%	0.01	4.5%	0.02	9.9%	0.01	3.4%	0.02	10.8%	0.01	2.4%	0.02
2	29.8%	0.03	8.2%	0.03	29.5%	0.03	8.5%	0.03	29.2%	0.03	8.8%	0.03
3	21.9%	0.03	25.8%	0.02	22.4%	0.03	25.3%	0.02	22.8%	0.03	25.0%	0.02
Total	60.8%		39.2%		62.2%		37.9%		63.4%		36.6%	