

# Revolutionaries for Railways

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## Abstract

This study explores the sources of regional favoritism in government-invested infrastructure projects. We built an original county-level dataset that matches the biographies of 1614 retired communist revolutionaries with information on the expansion of China's state-directed high-speed railway program. Our findings indicate that a surviving revolutionary makes his birth county significantly more likely to receive the central government's approval for railway investment. This pattern is robust after accounting for a wide range of alternative explanations and a natural experiment design that exploits variations in the timings of revolutionaries' natural deaths. Additional evidence suggests that the empowering effect of the retired revolutionaries stems most likely from their assistance in their birth counties' bottom-up lobbying of the central government. Their moral authority as the founders of the regime helps boost local requests for investment in the eyes of central policymakers. Our findings highlight a bottom-up intergovernmental dynamic that translates personal influence into policy benefits.