Loyalty Signaling, Bureaucratic Compliance, and Variation in State Repression in Authoritarian Regimes

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Keywords: authoritarian regime, repression, China, Mao Zedong, Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Students of comparative politics have long recognized that coercive capacity is critical to the resilience and survival of authoritarian regimes.[1] Yet, in many authoritarian states, scholars have observed remarkable spatial variations in the intensity and selectiveness of repression carried out by the regime: in some localities the state implements heavy-handed repressive campaigns, while other localities might experience relatively more lenient, less arbitrary use of state power. The question arises: why are some subnational bureaucrats more inclined to use coercion and violence than others?

The existing literature has insufficiently addressed this phenomenon, and prior studies often attribute such disparities to structural or institutional factors affecting the perception of threats,[2] or to varying local state capacity.[3] For instance, Lisa Blaydes' recent work on Iraq shows that due to sectarian conflicts and geographical challenges, the Ba'athist regime faced difficulties in effectively extending its reach to certain regions where Shia Muslims constituted the majority. Consequently, the Saddam Hussein regime had to resort to particularly violent and indiscriminate repression strategies to rein in these areas.[4] Scholars have also identified other factors that contribute to subnational variations in the intensity of repression, including differences in local government capacities and resources,[5] uneven distribution of perceived threats,[6] or a regime's varying needs to garner support from its constituents.[7]

However, spatial differences in local state capacity or perceived threat do not offer a complete explanation for the observed variation in the intensity of state repression. The insufficiency of the existing framework is particularly evident in the historical context of China. During the "Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries" (*Zhenfan Yundong*) in the early 1950s, although Chairman Mao Zedong dictated a fixed quota for "counter-revolutionaries" for all localities, broad variation still persisted in the number

doi: 10.5129/001041524X17069685289697

of prosecutions across the nation. Notably, officials in western provinces such as Sichuan arrested and prosecuted a significantly larger number of individuals compared to their counterparts in other areas.[8] Similarly, during the Cultural Revolution, adjacent regions with similar geographic conditions, demographics, and political history often experienced vastly different outcomes and degrees of violence.[9]

This article attempts to understand the unevenness of repression intensity in autocracies by focusing on the individual agendas and incentives of repressive agents, namely, authoritarian bureaucrats whose duties involve the use of arbitrary force on the behalf of the state. In reality, local bureaucrats have remarkable sway over the implementation of coercive policies and campaigns on the local level.[10] Some bureaucrats are significantly more heavy-handed in exercising their coercive power, while others are relatively constrained in their use of arbitrary force. Therefore, to better answer our research question, we need to understand factors that affect the bureaucratic compliance of autocratic agents who carry out repressive tasks on the ground.

Existing literature tends to suggest that bureaucrats with greater affinity to the regime, such as those who are co-ethnics of the ruler or share similar factional backgrounds with the ruling elite, tend to display greater compliance and engage in higher levels of repression.[11] In this article, we challenge this conventional wisdom and propose a novel, trust-based theory to explain the uneven pattern of bureaucratic compliance in authoritarian repression. We argue that, in autocracies where the political authority is firmly established and unchallenged, bureaucrats whose background is not trusted or verified by the ruler are inclined to carry out repressive tasks more enthusiastically in order to credibly signal their loyalty and trustworthiness. In contrast, if the ruler possesses strong prior trust towards a subordinate agent due to shared past experience or common backgrounds, the agent's motivation to signal loyalty through fervent compliance diminishes. Their presumed security and trustworthiness within the regime allow them to wield greater flexibility and latitude in implementing repressive measures.

Therefore, we hypothesize that bureaucrats with more obscure or untrustworthy backgrounds will display greater fervency in executing coercive tasks to convincingly showcase their loyalty. We illustrate our theory by studying the Anti-Rightist Campaign (ARC), an important yet understudied political event in China that lasted from 1957 to 1959. Concerned that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could face attacks from within, Chairman Mao Zedong ordered provincial leaders and ministers to identify and prosecute the "rightists" in their jurisdictions who allegedly committed "anti-Party wrongdoings." The targets of this campaign were intellectuals, state officials, and ordinary citizens who purportedly opposed the CCP's leadership or policies in either speech or action. Among all the violent political campaigns in Mao's China, the ARC was unprecedented for both its excessive scale and regional unevenness. By the end of the campaign, over 550,000 individuals were denounced as "rightists" and received varying penalties ranging from job demotion to years of forced labor.

The severely uneven pattern of repression intensity during the ARC provides us with a unique opportunity to test the theory we propose. In 1950s China, a major cleavage among the political elite was one's revolutionary history before 1949. At the founding of

the PRC, political power was shared between two groups: former Red Army combatants, who enjoyed closer relations with Mao and were considered by the ruler as more loyal, and former undercover partisans based in Nationalist-controlled areas, who were viewed by Mao as untrustworthy due to their obscure personal history and weaker affiliation with Mao. By the mid-1950s, Mao had successfully consolidated his power, subjugated potential challengers to his rule, and established himself as the indisputable supreme leader of the Party and the state.

From various primary sources, we find ample evidence that subnational officials who were former undercover partisans displayed greater fervor in carrying out prosecutions than those who were ex-Red Army officials during ARC. As we will show later with archival evidence, the two factions' different propensity to repress was driven by two factors. First, most "rightists" targeted by the campaign were urban-based intellectuals, professionals, and bureaucrats who had similar backgrounds and stronger ties with former undercover partisans. Thus, fervent repression could be more effective in genuinely signaling loyalty and strengthening the leaders' trust among undercover agents, given the high social costs of prosecuting their "own type." Second, the potential penalty for inadequate compliance was lower for former Red Army combatants. Those officials, who benefited from more secure status and stronger regime ties, had greater discretion and bargaining power and were less concerned about the repercussion of insufficient implementation during the campaign.

To validate our theory, we compile a multi-level dataset on the ARC from archival sources. We find a systematic pattern that provinces and prefecture-level cities governed by former undercover agents were more likely to prosecute a larger number of individuals as "rightists." Furthermore, based on a declassified database of high-profile "rightists," we also find that those individuals who were prosecuted in jurisdictions governed by former undercover cadres were more likely to receive harsher penalties such as forced labor and imprisonment. We then test various mechanisms that could explain this correlation and find that the cross-regional variation in prosecution severity is unlikely to be driven by any other factor than Mao's differential trust of local leaders based on their revolutionary history.

Trust Deficit, State Repression, and Loyalty Signaling

Local bureaucrats play an important role in determining the extent and selectivity of state repression as they bear direct responsibility for identifying and prosecuting targets of repression.[12] What affects the compliance of local agents when they are assigned repressive tasks? A widely accepted answer posits that bureaucrats who share greater affinity in their backgrounds or past experience with the ruler are more likely to be loyal and more inclined to enforce repression on behalf of the regime. For instance, bureaucrats in Kenya who share ethnic ties with the president tend to display higher levels of compliance in suppressing dissidents in their region, whereas those without the same ethnic background display more leniency toward anti-regime activities.[13] In Ba'athist

Iraq and Syria under Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad, bureaucrats belonging to the ruler's own clan, tribe, or religious community were primarily responsible for carrying out mass atrocities against dissidents or ethnic minorities.[14]

However, does stronger affinity with the regime always result in greater bureaucratic compliance within the context of repression? Qualitative and anecdotal evidence from autocracies seems to paint a more complex and nuanced picture. Throughout various repressive campaigns under Mao Zedong, officials who were not part of Mao's inner circle often displayed a higher level of political violence and ideological fervency. Similarly, in the Soviet Union, some of the most violent purges were engineered by high-ranking political elites who were ethnic minorities or peripheral members of the Bolshevik regime concerned for their survival.[15] Hence, the effect of group status on compliance warrants further investigation.

In this study, we propose a trust-based theory to explore how an agent's affinity with the ruler can impact their enthusiasm for engaging in repression. In any regime, leaders use observable personal traits to make judgments about the trustworthiness of their subordinates. Previous research has shown that rulers tend to place greater trust in bureaucrats whose personal characteristics (such as ethnic group, religious affiliation, or past career history) imply greater loyalty to the regime.[16] In a consolidated autocracy where an official's career prospects primarily depend on the leader's personal whim, bureaucrats deemed as untrustworthy by the autocrat due to unclear or undesirable personal backgrounds could find themselves in a precarious position: not only could they face greater obstacles in promotion, they are also more likely to be prosecuted in future purges. In such a scenario, officials possessing less favorable attributes or unfamiliar backgrounds are forced to credibly prove their loyalty and verify their trustworthiness to improve their career prospects.

One way for less trusted bureaucrats to credibly signal their loyalty, we argue, is by engaging in unpopular, costly tasks on behalf of the ruler. In this sense, repressive campaigns provide a window of opportunity for officials with untrustworthy traits to update the ruler's belief on their loyalty. For one reason, repression could incur remarkable social and political costs for the agent and make them subject to retaliation by victims and rival elites. By displaying their willingness to suffer the cost of losing former allies and creating enemies for themselves, an agent could credibly signal their exclusive allegiance and devotion to the ruler. For another reason, repressive tasks are highly visible to their superiors. The outcomes of repressive campaigns, such as the number of prosecutions, are quantifiable rubrics that can be easily observed by the principal. Hence, our framework predicts that in consolidated autocracies, agents who were deemed less trustworthy by the ruler due to certain untrustworthy traits would show greater fervency in performing coercive tasks to affirm their loyalty.

As we will elaborate in our empirical case of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China, within an authoritarian bureaucracy divided by distinct factions based on their allegiance and trustworthiness to the autocrat, different groups of bureaucrats responded to the ruler's repressive tasks in distinctive ways. The more trusted group, who was already

closely aligned with the leader, saw fervent repression as having a limited benefit in further bolstering its perceived loyalty. Meanwhile, a lukewarm response to the ruler's directives posed less risk due to its more secure status and strong ties within the regime. Conversely, the less trusted elites, burdened by their unfavorable backgrounds, found fervent repression to be an effective tool in altering the leader's perception of their loyalty. However, any perceived defiance in carrying out their assignments could bring severe consequences for their careers, given their lack of political resources and absence of patronage support from other political elites.

It should be noted that our trust-based theory differs from previous explanations of bureaucratic compliance in several ways. First, we challenge conventional wisdom by arguing that closer affinity to the ruler does not necessarily translate into greater adherence to the regime's repressive tasks. In contrast, we show that perceived lack of loyalty could prompt those agents on the outskirts of the ruler's power networks to find costly and extreme ways to affirm their loyalty. In other words, in contexts where the autocrat's political dominance remains unchallenged, fervent engagement in repression might not come from those more closely aligned with the ruler, but from individuals aiming to overcompensate for perceived "stains" in their background. Second, our study also differs from conventional explanations of radicalism during Maoist political campaigns. Previous studies, exemplified by Kung and Chen,[17] attribute the fervency of certain local officials to their stronger career incentives to show their competence to fulfill the leader's policy objectives. In line with recent literature on Mao's China,[18] we contend that loyalty, rather than competence, was the most decisive factor guiding bureaucratic appointments and purges in the Mao era. Hence, the radical behavior of subordinate officials played the role of signaling and transmitting costly messages of loyalty and trustworthiness.

Empirical Case: The Anti-Rightist Campaign, 1957–1959

Historical Background of the ARC The main case we use to illustrate this mechanism is the Anti-Rightist Campaign (ARC), a repressive campaign launched by Chairman Mao Zedong to crack down on alleged dissidents in the cadre rank and among ordinary citizens. In 1956, in an attempt to promote limited pluralism within society, Mao openly encouraged cadres and citizens to offer "constructive suggestions" for the Party.[19] Mao's posture to liberalize society, however, unleashed a wave of sharp criticism against the Party and the leader himself. A large number of intellectuals, Party cadres, and ordinary citizens seized the momentum to challenge Mao's radical economic policies, criticize the arbitrary governing style of officials, and even demand greater political freedom. Facing the mounting critique of his leadership and his policy agenda, Mao decided to launch a crackdown on his detractors. In June 1957, Mao declared a nationwide campaign against "rightists" and vowed to "expel their rampant attack."[20] At central level, Mao instructed his General Secretary, Deng Xiaoping, to coordinate the

overall campaign implementation.[21] At the local level, Mao summoned provincial First Party Secretaries (FPSs) to the northern city of Qingdao and ordered them to identify and purge the "hidden rightists" in their respective provinces. The scale of the ARC was immense. Official statistics show that 552,877 individuals were denounced as "rightists" during the ARC and received varying degrees of punishment ranging from job demotion to imprisonment.[22] Following Mao's death, the new leadership dismissed the campaign largely as a witch hunt that went far beyond its intended scope and wrongfully treated the citizens' good-faith criticism as a political crime.[23] Among the half million "rightists" prosecuted during the campaign, all but ninety-six individuals were absolved from all wrongdoings in the 1980s.

A puzzling feature of the ARC was the large variation of local officials in their response to Mao's demand, as shown in Figure B1 of the Appendix.[24] Adjacent regions that shared similar geographic conditions, cultural roots, and economic structures displayed remarkable difference in campaign intensity. For example, while Shanghai prosecuted the largest per capita number of rightists in the country, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, two neighboring provinces that had close cultural ties with Shanghai, showed much greater leniency toward Mao's critics during the campaign. In northwest China, although Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Gansu provinces had similar geographical conditions and levels of economic development, Shaanxi notably prosecuted much fewer rightists than the two neighboring provinces during the ARC.

Divergent Career Paths and Perceived Trustworthiness of Early PRC Officials To understand the variation in local officials' responsiveness during the ARC, we examine an official's revolutionary experience before 1949 as a potential explanatory variable. In 1927, the ruling Kuomintang regime outlawed the CCP and launched a nationwide crackdown on the Communists. Facing the brutal crackdown, the CCP leadership decided that its members needed to "fight on two fronts." [25] On the "open" front, the Party formed the Red Army and launched a military rebellion against the Kuomintang in several Southern provinces starting in May 1928. As one of the cofounders of the Red Army, Mao gradually gained prominence for his command skills, rose in the Party ranks with his battlefield record, and finally seized the leadership of the Party in the late 1930s. On the "underground" front, the CCP installed secret branches in Kuomintang-controlled regions (especially large cities) to infiltrate the enemy from within. Those undercover operatives—known as "white-area partisans" (*baiqu dang*)—disguised their true identities and engaged in various clandestine activities, such as collecting intelligence, disseminating propaganda, and coordinating anti-regime protests.[26] Those urban-based undercover saboteurs were commanded by Liu Shaoqi, a veteran labor activist who would become the Party's vice-chairman after 1949.

Historical accounts suggest that Mao's level of trust in subordinate officials was associated with their divergent revolutionary paths during the Communist Revolution. As the co-founder and highest commander of the CCP's military wing, Mao often viewed

Red Army officers as more trustworthy and maintained long-term personal friendships with many high-ranking generals.[27] In his own writings, Mao praised Red Army cadres for "having endured the hardship" of the battlefield and having their loyalty "tested by the torment of revolution."[28] Red Army experience was also a major privilege for political selection in the Mao era. In August 1955, during a politburo meeting in preparation for the upcoming 8th Party Congress, Mao even insisted that "old cadres from the Red Army era" be given priority for candidacy in the next Central Committee.[29]

In contrast, Mao expressed strong suspicion towards former undercover agents who operated in Kuomintang-controlled areas. Historical accounts show that Mao's distrust of those clandestine workers was driven by two factors. First, Mao never directly commanded the undercover corps and had little personal connection with those cadres before 1949. The Chairman reportedly admitted in 1944 that "I have always worked as a military combatant in the Red area, so I know nothing about clandestine work in the White area."[30] More importantly, due to the secretive nature of their work, the records of former undercover cadres during the revolution were often obscure and incomplete, and they had difficulty proving their loyalty and performance. Under the highly repressive environment, undercover agents were commanded on a one-on-one basis (*danxian lianxi*). Thus, if one's direct superior was dead or missing, no one would be able to confirm their Party membership and work history. Still worse, many undercover agents were arrested by the Kuomintang authorities and later rescued by their comrades or freed in prisoner swaps. Later in their careers, those agents often had great difficulty proving that they did not betray the Party while in custody.[31]

Mao's distrust of undercover partisans became publicly known in 1943, when he launched a "cadre screening" (*shen gan*) campaign that specifically targeted Party officials who previously served as undercover agents. A Central Committee guidance in June 1943 accused groundlessly that "our party organizations in Kuomintang-ruled areas were filled with traitors, and in some regions they even became a branch of Kuomintang."[32] As a result, former undercover partisans faced extensive background checks and interrogations under the presumption of guilt after they arrived in Communist-controlled areas. Many cadres, including high-ranking ones, were tortured and beaten by the interrogators in order to force them to confess their alleged collusion with the Kuomintang. In Group F of the Appendix, we include excerpts from memoirs of former undercover cadres to highlight the suspicion and hostility they faced under Mao.

After the founding of the PRC, Mao managed to consolidate his personal power and largely subjugated the undercover faction at the central level through a series of purges and political maneuvers. In Milan Svolik's words, in the 1950s Mao had obtained an "immense amount of power" that "exemplifies the upper limits on the power that a single individual can acquire."[33] However, Mao's suspicion of former undercover cadres never faded, and Party officials from undercover backgrounds faced clear disadvantage in their careers compared to former Red Army officers due to their suspected disloyalty. As early as May 1949, Mao sent a secret cable on the job assignment and promotion of former undercover agents in the new government, instructing that "[undercover cadres]

should be assigned to lower-ranked jobs, their roles should be restricted, they should be constrained to serve in local regions, and should be gradually replaced."[34] In the 1950s, a large number of local undercover cadres who could not credibly prove their personal history before 1949 were purged.[35] For example, Shanghai's vice mayor Pan Hannian, a prominent spymaster who co-founded the CCP's earliest intelligence agency in the 1930s, was groundlessly accused of being a "turncoat" and was sentenced to fifteen years in 1955 without substantial evidence.[36]

To validate our argument that an official's revolutionary history indeed affected the leader's trust and their subsequent political fates, we analyze the biographical data of all officials who had served in either of the two main leadership positions (First Party Secretary (FPS) or governor) in all twenty-seven Chinese provinces between 1950 and 1966, shown in Table C3 of the Appendix.[37] We find strong evidence for Mao's differential treatment of cadres based on their backgrounds: Red Army veterans were more likely to be appointed as the First Party Secretary, the *de facto* highest office in a province, while undercover agents were more likely to fill the provincial governor role, a position subordinate to the FPS. We also find clear divergence in the fates of Red Army veterans and undercover agents after 1949. Red Army veterans had a greater chance of being promoted to the cadre rank during Mao's twenty-six-year rule and a lower risk of death by torture during the Culture Revolution (1966–1976).[38]

Trust and Agent Radicalism during the ARC: A Tale of Two Provinces

During the ARC, anecdotal evidence suggests that officials from undercover partisan backgrounds engaged in more intensive repression in their jurisdictions driven by a stronger incentive to display their loyalty to Mao. To illustrate this dynamic, we present a comparative case study focusing on the behaviors of the Party Secretaries of Jiangsu and Shanghai, two neighboring and culturally similar provinces in eastern China. The Party chief of Jiangsu, a long-term Red Army subordinate of Mao, showed a lukewarm attitude and tacitly resisted Mao's push to carry out prosecutions; meanwhile, the leader of Shanghai, a former undercover agent with an obscure history, engaged in radical repression to overtly display his compliance with Mao's directives.

Through this study, we aim to illustrate the underlying mechanism that drives the undercover cadres' greater motivation to engage in repression during the campaign. On one hand, fervent engagement in repression was more effective in bolstering Mao's trust in undercover cadres compared to Red Army combatants. This is because undercover cadres tended to have stronger ties with the targets of repression and prosecuting them could carry a greater social cost and thus serve as a more credible signal of their loyalty. On the other hand, insufficient compliance from Red Army cadres could be tolerated by Mao due to their stronger bargaining power and protection from peers within the regime. In contrast, non-compliance could have serious repercussions for the careers of undercover agents, given their lack of comparable credentials and resources. Simply put,

fervent compliance may bring greater benefits to undercover cadres, while failure to do so could lead to higher costs for them compared to their Red Army peers.

Jiangsu: Impunity for Non-Compliance in Campaign Implementation One provincial leader that notably resisted Mao's directions during the ARC was Jiang Weiqing, the Party Secretary of Jiangsu. Jiang was an old friend and long-time subordinate of Mao whose connection with the Chairman started in the 1920s. He joined Mao's Autumn Harvest Uprising in September 1927 and spent the following decade serving as a military commander in the First Group Army led by Mao.[39] Throughout his military career, Jiang also cultivated enduring and robust relationships with peer high-ranking officials, firmly solidifying his position within the party. When the witch hunt for "rightists" started in 1957, Jiang was reluctant to follow Mao's order because he did not believe that good-faith critique of the Party should be considered a punishable offense. When Mao visited Jiangsu in July 1957, Jiang confronted Mao directly when the leader pointed out his lack of enthusiasm. Jiang recalled later:

> Mao Zedong asked: "why didn't you do anything about the rightists in Jiangsu's Provincial Party Committee?" I replied: "Alas, Chairman! Is there anyone who never said wrong things in the past? Like you said, if someone said nine correct sentences out of ten, he should still get 90 points…" Mao did not expect I talked back and became upset. He slammed the table next to his sofa and asked: "will you punish the rightists or not?!" I said, "it is fine to punish the rightists in Jiangsu, but you should fire me first and appoint someone else, because I am the First Secretary—the boss of Jiangsu's rightists." After hearing this, Mao's anger vanished. He replied: "Okay! You don't have to do it too hard if you really don't want to!" Then he said to me humorously: "Weiqing! Are you not afraid of death by a thousand cuts for obstructing me?" I answered: "No, Chairman, I am not afraid of death for trying to save you!"[40]

Later in his memoir, Jiang suggested that he had the leverage to tacitly resist Mao's command during the ARC for several reasons. First, he was confident that Mao would interpret his lack of enthusiasm simply as a difference over specific policy views, rather than an explicit gesture of defiance. Due to his long-term acquaintance with Mao in wartime, Jiang was reassured that the leader would not easily question his loyalty and reliability even when he responded to Mao's demands passively. Second, Jiang held great bargaining power in determining the extent of campaign implementation due to his strong connections and deep integration into the CCP's power networks. Viewed by Mao as "pillars" of his regime, former Red Army officers like Jiang formed the power base on which Mao heavily leaned to maintain his rule. In addition, Jiang's passive approach to the campaign received protection from other high-ranking officials close to Mao, who persuaded the Chairman to refrain from penalizing him despite his refusal to prosecute certain rightists.[41] As a result, Jiangsu only labeled 13,349 individuals as "rightists" throughout the campaign, the lowest percentage among all provinces.[42] Jiang's political

career was not affected by his lukewarm attitude. He continued to serve as the First Secretary of several provinces until Mao's death in 1976.

In contrast to Jiang's example, former undercover officials on the outskirts of the regime's power networks could face severe consequences for failing to respond to Mao's repressive tasks sufficiently. In Appendix F2, we present the case of Pan Fusheng, the Party Secretary of Henan Province during the ARC. Unlike Jiang, Pan's reluctance to engage in extensive repression in Henan reinforced Mao's preexisting suspicions of his disloyalty due to his obscure personal history. Consequently, Pan was promptly expelled from the Party for disobedience, and his lack of strong ties with other political elites made him particularly susceptible to Mao's punishment. From this comparison, it is clear that the potential risks and penalties for alleged inadequate compliance were higher for former undercover agents compared to Red Army combatants.

Shanghai: Cannibalism as Loyalty Signaling for Untrusted Officials According to historical accounts, one reason the prosecution of "rightists" was particularly costly for local leaders from undercover backgrounds was their personal affinity with the targets of repression. During the campaign, Beijing considered bureaucrats with undercover experience to be potential rightists and demanded local leaders to carefully scrutinize their "past speech and behaviors" to find grounds for prosecution.[43] Additionally, a major group targeted in the campaign were urban-based professionals sympathetic to the CCP before 1949, many of whom were allies and collaborators of undercover partisans in the cities.[44] From the perspective of former undercover agents, since the potential victims of repression belonged to their "own type," their willingness to antagonize their power base would credibly demonstrate their loyalty.

The behaviors of Ke Qingshi, Party Secretary of Shanghai, were illustrative of the undercover officials' anxiety to pass the loyalty test during the campaign. Ke was an undercover operative based in Shanghai with a controversial personal history. In the 1940s, Ke was accused of serving as a double agent and secretly spying for the Kuomintang. Although Ke was later absolved of all wrongdoings, his tainted record cast a long shadow on his career path.[45] According to the memoirs of his former colleagues, Ke's private attitudes towards the campaign contrasted starkly with his dramatic behavior in public. In private conversations, he was well aware of the personal costs of prosecuting his old acquaintances and alienating his popular base. He reportedly complained to a close colleague that "it does no good to prosecute too many rightists ... those people could be used [by us] in the future."[46] Ke's posture in public, however, was completely the opposite. Not only did he earnestly flatter Mao and call for "unconditional submission" to his decisions, he also publicly denounced a large number of high-profile writers and artists in Shanghai as "rightists" in a humiliating way, including several of his old acquaintances.[47] During the campaign, Shanghai prosecuted a larger fraction of citizens (22.36 per 1,000 individuals) than any other province in China. In Appendix F3, we present more evidence that former undercover cadres were prompted to prosecute their "own type" during the ARC to affirm their loyalty.

Empirical Strategies

Main Hypotheses Historical narratives strongly suggest that a local official's enthusiasm during the ARC was shaped by their perceived trustworthiness within the Party, which was then shaped by their personal history during the Communist Revolution. In particular, former undercover agents, knowing that they faced strong distrust from the leader due to their outgroup status and obscure background, would have a stronger incentive to comply enthusiastically with Mao's directions to signal their loyalty and preserve their careers. We test our theory using a two-tiered approach. On the aggregate level, we will explore whether the intensity of anti-rightist repression in a locality is linked to the revolutionary background of the local leader. Specifically, we will analyze the variation of prosecution frequency at provincial and prefecture-city levels to understand how much the variation can be explained by the Party chiefs' backgrounds. On the individual level, we examine whether subnational leaders who were former undercover agents tended to assign harsher penalties on victims during the ARC. Accordingly, we derive the following two hypotheses:

> H1 *(Regional Variation of the ARC)*: Compared to localities governed by ex-military officers, localities governed by former undercover agents tended to have a larger fraction of population labelled and prosecuted as "rightists" during the ARC.
>
> H2 *(Individual Variation of Repression Severity)*: "Rightists" who were prosecuted in the jurisdictions of former undercover agents were more likely to receive more severe punishments compared to those prosecuted under ex-military officers.

Controls for Confounding Variables Aside from one's need to signal loyalty, various other factors could affect an official's motivation and/or ability to implement the campaign. On the personal level, we control for an official's age, ethnic minority status, level of education, local status, and length of their CCP membership.[48] In addition, as Kung and Chen have suggested, an official's preexisting political rank in the Party might impact their career incentives and ultimately their enthusiasm in policy implementation.[49] Thus, we also include a set of dummies indicating whether an official had been a full or alternate member of the CCP Central Committee by the beginning of the campaign.

Inherent geographical and political conditions in a locality could also impact a local regime's capacity and resources to carry out repression. Previous research shows that the density of rank-and-file CCP members largely determines the strength of local regime capacity in China.[50] Accordingly, we control for *the number of CCP members per 1,000 citizens* in a given locality. Canonical literature also suggests that regime control over a locality can be inversely associated with its *distance to the administrative center*.[51] Hence, for provincial-level analysis, we control for the linear distance from a province's capital to Beijing. For city-level analysis, we further include the city's linear distance to the provincial capital, as well as a dummy variable indicating whether the city was the provincial capital at the time of the campaign.

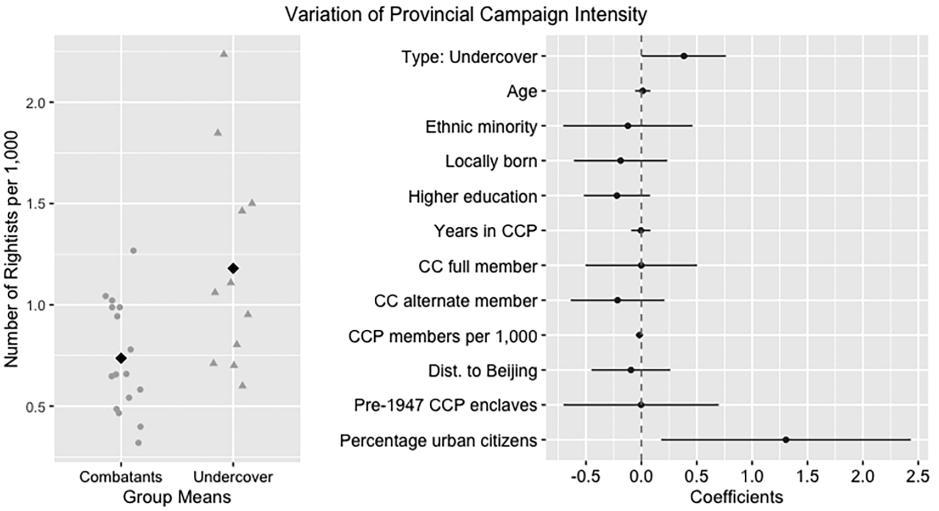
Another regional variation that is difficult to measure was the level of latent anti-regime dissent among citizens in a given locality. Apparently, a greater number of citizens would be denounced as "rightists" in regions where anti-regime sentiments were high. Although citizens' political attitudes were not directly observable, strong qualitative evidence in 1950s China suggests that anti-regime sentiment was highly correlated with the presence of local CCP regimes before the founding of the PRC. The Party enjoyed strong popular support in so-called "revolutionary bases" (*geming laoqu*) where Communist rule had been established for a long time but faced resistance in newly conquered territories from the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949). Therefore, we use the *percentage of counties in a province that had been controlled by the CCP anytime between 1927 and 1947* as an imperfect measure to control for latent popular sentiment toward the regime in a given province. Table A1 of the Appendix offers a detailed explanation of all control variables that will be used in subsequent analyses.

Aggregate-Level Variations

Provincial-Level Variation We start with a small-n analysis based on the twenty-seven provinces in China. The outcome variable is the total number of "rightists" denounced by the authorities per 1,000 citizens throughout the campaign, using official data from provincial-level gazetteers. The key independent variable is the revolutionary experience of provincial First Party Secretaries (FPSs) between 1927 and 1949, coded as a binary variable as either "combatant" or "underground agent." An official was classified as a "combatant" if they served primarily as military personnel during the Communist Revolution, and as an "undercover agent" if they spent at least one year performing clandestine tasks for the Party in Kuomintang-controlled areas.[52] During the ARC, a total of fifteen provinces were governed by Red Army combatants, while twelve provinces were ruled by former undercover agents.

We first perform a series of difference-of-means tests to explore whether the revolutionary background of a provincial leader is correlated with the prosecution intensity of their assigned province during the ARC. We present the results graphically on the left-side panel of Figure 1. On average, provinces governed by former undercover cadres prosecuted more rightists (1.180 per 1,000 citizens) compared to provinces governed by Red Army veterans (0.737 per 1,000 citizens). In Table B6 of the Appendix, we also explore whether former Red Army officers and undercover cadres had significant differences in their personal backgrounds and whether provinces governed by the two groups displayed any divergent patterns. As the results have shown, FPSs from combatant and undercover backgrounds were similar in most personal characteristics (age, ethnicity, education, length of Party membership, and political rank) other than their revolutionary backgrounds. Likewise, provinces governed by Red Army and undercover cadres displayed no substantive difference in the number of CCP members, the density of preexisting CCP political establishment, or their locations relative to Beijing.

Figure 1 Variation and Determinants of ARC Campaign Intensity across Provinces



Left: group-mean difference between Red Army and undercover provinces.
Right: OLS estimates of all variables in the model.
Full regression results: see Appendix D1. Confidence interval: 95% level.

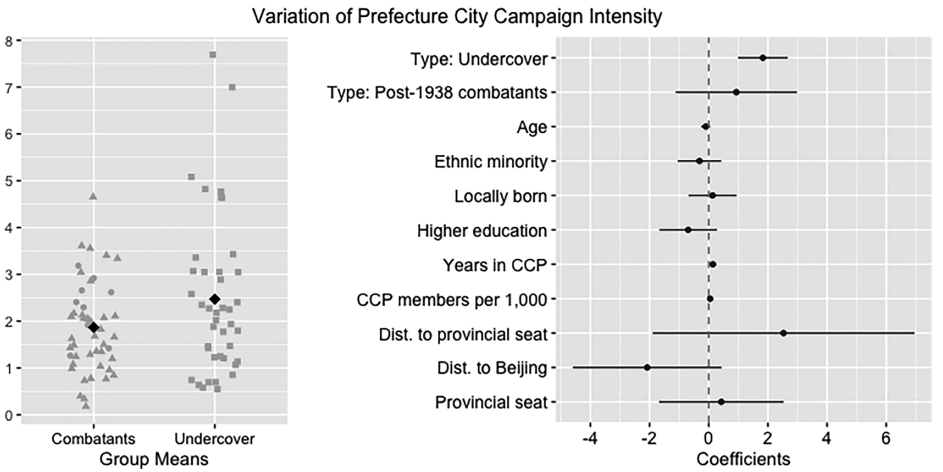
We then perform an OLS regression to explore the effect of local leaders' revolutionary background on the frequency of anti-rightist repression at the provincial level. We present the coefficients of all covariates on the right-side panel of Figure 1 and include full regression results in Table D1 of the Appendix. Despite the small number of provincial units (n=27), the effect of an official's revolutionary history on the intensity of repression is strong. When an official's personal characteristics (age, ethnicity, education, local embeddedness, seniority in the Party, and political rank) and provincial-level covariates (density of CCP members, geographical remoteness, and preexisting political establishment) are controlled for, provinces governed by undercover agents still prosecuted 40 percent more rightists compared to provinces run by Red Army veterans. This result shows preliminary evidence that a leader's revolutionary path explains a large fraction of variation in campaign intensity across provinces.

Prefecture City-Level Variation Historical accounts show that the ARC was primarily carried out in China's urban areas, and an overwhelming majority of denounced "rightists" were city-dwelling professionals, such as civil servants, school officials, and employees of state-owned enterprises. Although we have controlled for the fraction of urban residents in our provincial-level analysis, the effect of varying urbanization levels on the density of rightists across provinces can still confound our results. Hence, we

perform an additional layer of analyses specifically focusing on China's large cities. In 1957, there were a total of ninety-two prefecture-level cities (*sheng xia shi*) in China's administrative hierarchy.[53] According to the nomenklatura system in the 1950s, Party chiefs of prefecture-level cities were appointed by the Central Organization Department in Beijing, rather than the upper-level Party bosses at the provincial level.[54] Hence, the career prospects of city leaders were more dependent on the preferences of the central regime than their immediate provincial superiors. The variation of campaign intensity in those cities, to some extent, can reflect the city leaders' compliance and responsiveness to the Center's policy agenda.

We compile additional data on the Party chiefs of all prefecture-level cities in 1957 to explore how their revolutionary history would impact the campaign intensity in their assigned cities. Unlike provincial-level FPSs who all joined the Communist rebellion against Kuomintang before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, some city leaders joined the CCP after 1938 as anti-Japanese fighters under Communist-led guerrilla forces.[55] In contrast to the more senior Red Army veterans, those combatants were referred to as "post-1938 cadres (*sanbashi ganbu*)" to highlight their more junior standing in the revolution. On several occasions, Mao argued that post-1938 cadres who started their careers as anti-Japanese fighters should be treated less favorably in personnel appointment compared to Red Army veterans who joined the revolution before the Sino-Japanese War.[56] Mao believed that the former's contribution to the revolution was

Figure 2 Variation of ARC Campaign Intensity across 91 Prefecture-Level Cities



Left: the group-mean difference between combatant and undercover-ruled provinces (Round: Red Army combatants; triangle: post-1938 combatants; square: undercover).
Right: Multivariate OLS estimates with province fixed effects.
Standard errors clustered at city level. Confidence interval at 95% level. For a series of pairwise *t*-tests, see Appendix B7; for full regression outputs, see Appendix D3.

minor, and they joined the Party primarily for a patriotic rather than an ideological cause at the beginning of their careers.

Based on this distinction, we code our key explanatory variable in two ways. First, we still treat a city leader's revolutionary background as a dichotomy, either as a *combatant* or an *undercover agent*. Alternatively, we classify one's pre-1949 service into three categories: undercover agents, veteran combatants who joined the Red Army before 1938, and junior combatants who joined an anti-Japanese force commanded by the CCP after 1938. We hope to check whether our result remains robust when different methods are used to categorize our independent variable.

The two graphs in Figure 2 visualize the main findings of the prefecture-level analysis, which is highly consistent with the provincial-level results. It shows that, when a series of individual controls, city-level covariates, and province fixed effects are controlled for, former undercover agents tended to denounce a greater number of "rightists" in their jurisdictions compared to former undercover agents. As shown in Table D3 of the Appendix, the result remains robust when we recode our key independent variable as a dichotomy (combatant versus undercover) or change our model specification in various ways.

Individual-Level Variations

Data Source and Collection In previous sections, we find preliminary evidence that localities ruled by former undercover agents tended to prosecute a larger number of rightists. However, did the revolutionary history of leaders also impact the severity of punishment received by prosecuted individuals? Although an analysis of all individual profiles of over 550,000 rightists during the ARC is unrealistic, current archival evidence allows us to perform an in-depth analysis based on a well-structured subsample of high-profile rightists registered by the authorities. From October 1957 to December 1959, the CCP Central Committee published eleven volumes of individual decision letters (*chuli jielun*) on over 500 influential rightists for internal circulation. This collection includes high-level rightists who were (1) officials above a certain rank or held key leadership positions in a county-level Party committee or above; (2) non-CCP politicians from one of the nine subordinate "democratic parties" who held membership in those parties' central committees; and (3) intellectuals, artists, writers, or student activists who purportedly "caused harmful public influence" due to their critique of the Party. A recent database, the China Anti-Rightist Campaign Database (ARCD), contains the full text of those decision letters.[57] ARCD is by far the most comprehensive source that contains the individual rightists' biographical details, the allegations against them, and the specific penalties they received.

We build an individual-level dataset of 542 high-profile rightists based on the decision letters collected in ARCD. We classify those individuals into three categories based on who approved the decision to prosecute them. The first category (n=316) includes individuals residing in a province who were declared as "rightists" by their respective provincial Party leadership; the second category (n=141) were officials and bureaucrats

of Central Government ministries declared as "rightists" by their ministry's leadership; the third category (n=85) includes intellectuals, artists, and celebrities affiliated with non-government institutions (such as the China Writers Association) who were designated as "rightists" by Mao and other central leaders rather than their bureaucratic supervisors. Because our objective is to understand bureaucratic compliance with coercive tasks, we mainly focus on the first two categories of rightists in our subsequent analysis.

Furthermore, we code the specific penalties received by those rightists as a binary outcome variable, based on whether the penalty is coercive. We consider a penalty as non-coercive if it did not jeopardize one's personal freedom or cause physical harm, such as demotion to a lower rank or position, removal from the previous job position, or expulsion from the cadre rank. In contrast, we categorize three types of punishment as coercive: "labor under supervision" (*jiandu laodong*), "reeducation through labor" (*laojiao*), and imprisonment. Historical records show that "rightists" who received those penalties were often relocated to remote labor camps or state-owned farms and could suffer enormous physical pain when in custody. Thus, whether a "rightist" received coercive punishment was a good indicator of the severity of prosecution.

Baseline Analysis We first employ a series of OLS regression models to evaluate whether the revolutionary history of officials is correlated with the severity of punishment received by "rightists" under their jurisdictions. Table 1 presents the main regression results. Models 1–4 focus only on the rightists prosecuted by provincial authorities, with various sets of controls (leadership background, provincial state capacity, and individual-level variations) included in the specifications. Models 5–7 estimate a pooled dataset which includes both local rightists denounced by their provincial authorities and central government employees prosecuted by their ministry's leadership. The key explanatory variable is the binary revolutionary background of provincial or ministry leaders who dictated a rightist's punishment, and the outcome variable is whether a rightist received coercive penalties. To mitigate within-group error correlation, we cluster standard errors based on a rightist's affiliated province or ministry.

Across different model specifications shown in the table, we find strong evidence that the "rightists" prosecuted under former undercover agents were more likely to receive coercive punishment. When the personal covariates of the leader, indicators for local state capacity, and the victims' personal backgrounds are controlled for, the undercover experience of the leaders still increases a victim's likelihood of receiving severe punishment by over 10 percent. This finding supports our hypothesis that former undercover agents tended to assign harsher penalties to rightists within their jurisdictions during the ARC.

Alternative Measures of Trustworthiness We offer more evidence for our theoretical mechanism by replacing and supplementing the key independent variable (an official's revolutionary history) with two alternative indicators of political trust. Historical

Table 1 Baseline OLS Estimates

	Dependent Variable: Coercive Penalty Dummy						
	Provincial Leaders Only				**Provincial & Ministry Leaders**		
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**	**(7)**
Undercover	0.147**	0.186***	0.207***	0.178***	0.184***	0.175***	0.134***
	(0.063)	(0.059)	(0.072)	(0.062)	(0.043)	(0.040)	(0.035)
Affiliation type: ministry					0.068	0.129***	0.078**
					(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.039)
Controls:							
Leader background		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Provincial state capacity			✓	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rightist background				✓			✓
Clustered SE by prosecutor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	308	308	304	300	441	441	437
R^2	0.040	0.085	0.088	0.150	0.067	0.090	0.162
Adjusted R^2	0.037	0.061	0.053	0.108	0.063	0.074	0.141
Residual Std. Error	0.356	0.352	0.355	0.347	0.381	0.378	0.366

Note: See Table E1 of the Appendix for full results. Standard errors are clustered by one's affiliated province or ministry at the time of prosecution. Significance level: $^{*}P<0.1$; $^{**}P<0.05$; $^{***}P<0.01$.

accounts suggest that an official would face greater suspicion and distrust (1) if their family belonged to a "reactionary" social class deemed hostile to the Communist regime, such as landlords, kulaks, or the bourgeoisie, or (2) if they had been arrested or trapped by the enemy in their previous work. If the variation in repression intensity was indeed driven by loyalty signaling, then officials who possessed those untrustworthy traits should also engage in harsher repression in a similar manner. Moreover, we should expect those variables to play a moderating role in the correlation between one's revolutionary history and repression fervency—that is, former undercover cadres who simultaneously possessed those untrustworthy personal traits would engage in particularly severe prosecution compared to those who did not.

Table 2 presents the main results of our mechanism analysis. *Bad Social Class* is a dummy variable indicating whether one's family belonged to so-called "reactionary" social categories considered disloyal by the regime,[58] and *Arrested* is a binary variable showing whether the official had ever been arrested by the Kuomintang or Japanese forces before 1949. In Models 2 and 3, we estimate their independent effects on repression severity. The result shows that, when we replace our key independent variable

Table 2 OLS Estimates with Interaction Terms

	Dependent Variable: Coercive Penalty Dummy					
	All Models: Include Both Provincial and Ministry Leaders					
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
	Alternative indicators of trust			***Interaction between indicators***		
Leader's revolutionary backgrounds:						
Undercover	0.134***			−0.003	0.092*	−0.009
	(0.035)			(0.052)	(0.047)	(0.054)
Arrested		0.165***		0.031		0.004
		(0.037)		(0.042)		(0.037)
"Bad" Social Class			0.095*		0.047	0.059
			(0.050)		(0.047)	(0.040)
Interaction of two attributes:						
Undercover × Arrested				0.191***		0.188***
				(0.071)		(0.069)
Undercover × Bad Social Class					0.124	0.064
					(0.077)	(0.069)
Affiliation type: ministry	0.078**	0.092**	0.072	0.067*	0.039	0.038
	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.043)
Leader background	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rightist background	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clustered s.e. by prosecutor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	437	437	437	437	437	437
Clustered s.e. by affiliation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
R^2	0.162	0.170	0.148	0.185	0.178	0.194
Adjusted R^2	0.141	0.148	0.126	0.160	0.153	0.165
Residual Std. Error	0.366	0.364	0.369	0.362	0.363	0.360

Note: See Table E2 of the Appendix for full results. Standard errors are clustered by one's affiliated province or ministry at time of prosecution. Significance level: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$.

(*Undercover* dummy) with these two alternative indicators of trust, the effect on a rightist's linear probability of receiving coercive punishment remains strong and statistically significant. Those results provide more evidence for our proposed mechanism that undercover cadres repress harder to display their loyalty and compensate for their trust deficits. For if there existed certain omitted variables which made an official more likely to both become an undercover agent and persecute rightists, it is unlikely that the same confounder would also correlate with the two alternative indicators of (un)trustworthiness simultaneously.

In Models 4, 5, and 6, we interact these two alternative indicators of trust respectively with the *Undercover* dummy to test whether they have a moderating effect on the

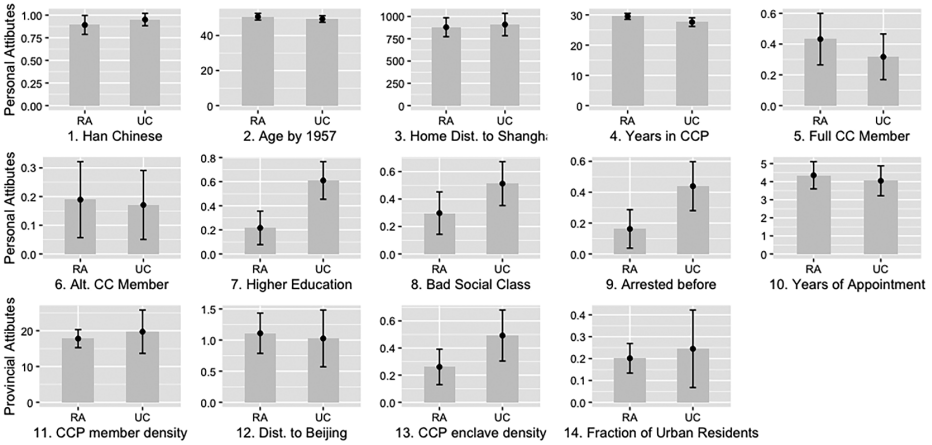
relationship between undercover experience and repression intensity. In other words, would undercover officials who simultaneously had other traits of disloyalty behave even more harshly during the ARC? As shown in the results, the coefficients of both interaction terms (*Undercover* × *Bad Social Class* and *Undercover* × *Arrested*) are large and positive, suggesting that officials who possessed two untrustworthy traits tended to impose particularly severe penalties on rightists. While the interaction term between *Undercover* and *Bad Class* is on the borderline of statistical significance ($p = 0.110$), the interaction effect between *Undercover* and *Arrested* shows a strong statistical significance ($p = 0.007$). Overall, this finding supports our theory that one's incentive to signal loyalty indeed drove their fervency in repression: officials who suffered from two "stains" of disloyalty tended to display greater radicalism than those who had one.

Alternative Explanations Another potential alternative explanation for our observed correlation is that individuals who had served as undercover agents may be inherently different in a way that makes them more willing to persecute rightists. Did former undercover agents tend to repress more because they desired to display their loyalty and overcompensate for their tainted history, or because they belonged to a different type that led to greater cruelty and radicalism in the campaign? Below, we show evidence that the variation in ARC campaign intensity is unlikely to be driven by other confounders that could impact an official's motivation or capacity to carry out the campaign.

Figure 3 shows a pairwise comparison of all potential factors that could correlate with both an official's revolutionary history and their responsiveness in the repressive campaign. As shown in the figure, Red Army veterans and undercover agents were similar in their ethnic composition, age, and the linear distance between their hometown and Shanghai.[59] The two groups were also roughly equivalent in their political seniority and status, implied by their similar length of Party membership and political rank. The three personal attributes that showed significant differences between the two factions (social class, previous record of arrest, and higher education[60]) were all correlated to their perceived loyalty to Mao's regime. Apparently, undercover cadres were more likely to come from non-proletarian social classes, were more likely to have been arrested during their work, and were usually better educated compared to their Red Army peers. This pattern further suggests that an official's revolutionary path is closely associated with political trust, while unlikely to correlate with character traits that would impact their enthusiasm in repression.

The last four bar charts in the graph focus specifically on provincial Party chiefs and explore whether there is a difference in the local conditions of provinces governed by the two factions of officials. It is possible that former undercover agents, due to their toughness and cruelty developed from past clandestine work, were strategically assigned to politically unstable provinces with a greater number of regime critics. In contrast to this alternative explanation, provinces governed by Red Army and undercover cadres showed little difference in various measures of state capacity and control. Although undercover cadres mainly operated in cities before 1949, they were no more likely to

Figure 3 Comparison of Potential Covariates between Red Army and Undercover Cadres



Graphs 1–9: Comparison of personal attributes for all provincial and ministry Party chiefs.
Graph 10: Comparison of the two types of leaders' length of appointment to their current jurisdiction.
Graphs 11–14: Comparison of geopolitical conditions of assigned provinces for two types of Party chiefs.

be appointed to more urbanized provinces with a potentially larger fraction of rightists. In fact, as shown in Bar Chart 13, undercover cadres were more frequently assigned to provinces where the CCP had gained a stronger foothold before 1947, which runs contrary to the alternative explanation that undercover cadres were assigned to govern provinces with higher political dissent.

Robustness Checks We perform a series of additional robustness checks and mechanism analyses in Group D and E of the Appendix. As shown in the results, our main findings remain salient regardless of how we change the model specification, truncate outliers in the data, or remove certain subsets of data that could drive a disproportionate fraction of variation.

Another potential issue that could undermine our results is the selection effect, in which an official's personal background could impact their likelihood of being appointed to a certain type of locality. To address this issue, we present a pairwise correlation matrix between local officials' personal backgrounds and the geopolitical conditions of their assigned provinces in Appendix C1. Consistent with the bar charts in Figure 3, we find no evidence that suggests that one's personal background was associated with one's appointment to a certain type of locality.

Lastly, an alternative mechanism that could invalidate our theory is that Mao could have placed his loyalists in local leadership positions shortly before the ARC to better achieve his objectives. To rule out this possibility, we present two histograms in Appendix C2 that show the distribution of the local officials' starting years in their assigned

locality. Apparently, a majority of officials had started working in their assigned province years before the 1957 campaign, and we see no sharp increase in the number of officials who were dispatched to their current positions in 1956 and 1957. Hence, we find no evidence that Mao strategically maneuvered his trusted officials to local leadership positions to facilitate his campaign objectives.

Conclusion

Our research offers a trust-based theory to explain how a bureaucrat's perceived affinity to the ruler shapes their compliance to coercive or costly tasks. As shown in the case of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, when the ruler infers their subordinates' trustworthiness based on certain personal attributes, officials who possess unfavorable character traits are motivated to use excessive compliance to overcompensate for the leader's lack of trust. In contrast, bureaucrats who enjoy a greater existing affinity to the ruler, knowing that their level of compliance would be less likely to impact the ruler's existing trust in them, have less incentive to behave radically in repressive campaigns. Paradoxically, we show that overcompliance can be driven by an official's perceived disloyalty, rather than their actual degrees of loyalty.

A necessary condition that motivated less trusted officials to signal their loyalty and bolster their survival through fervent compliance was that the ruler's political power must be sufficiently and credibly consolidated in the hands of the autocrat. Using the words of Milan Svolik, we argue that this behavior tended to occur in uncontested personalist autocracies where the ruler "managed to consolidate absolute power among a sea of strongmen" who could "simply override interests within the system."[61] In such settings, since the officials' career prospects and personal survival are largely determined by the ruler's favor, the need for credible loyalty signaling becomes particularly crucial for disadvantaged officials suffering from unfavorable backgrounds. In contrast, in regimes where the leader's power is contested or unstable, bureaucrats who are outside the leader's inner circle may pursue other means to maximize their survival. As existing research has shown, when the autocrat's ability to sustain long-term rule is in question, bureaucrats might refrain from implementing coercive policies to avoid potential reprisals in the event of a future regime change.[62] Studies have also shown that, when the central authority in Beijing was weakened during the Cultural Revolution, marginalized local officials lacking political connections tended to appeal to citizens and protect local economic interests in order to enhance their chances of political survival.[63]

In fact, using coercive or self-harming ways to signal loyalty is not a unique phenomenon during Mao-era repressive campaigns, but can be commonly observed in contemporary Chinese politics as well. For example, Victor Shih's research shows that local officials often engage in "nauseating" praise of the central leader to credibly display their commitment to the leader's faction. By suffering the cost of being despised by their peers, those "sycophants" could credibly affirm their exclusive allegiance to the particular leader.[64] Similarly, research on China's ethnic minority regions also provide

anecdotal evidence that non-Han police officers displayed even greater brutality and less hesitancy to use deadly force when ordered to repress their co-ethnics during ethnic protests.[65] The underlying logic for this ironic behavior was similar: by performing costly, self-harming tasks, they hoped to overcome the mistrust and suspicion arising from their ethnic background and prove their loyalty to the regime.

Beyond the context of China, it is not uncommon for marginalized or disadvantaged bureaucrats to convey their loyalty to leaders through fervent compliance with coercive and costly tasks. Take Stalin's USSR as an example. Nikolai Yezhov and Lavrentiy Beria, the two infamous security chiefs responsible for the mass violence under Stalin, were both outgroup members of the Bolshevik regime who were concerned about their tainted personal history and were eager to demonstrate their loyalty in front of the leader. Yezhov was a former White Army officer who defected to the Bolsheviks just six months before the October Revolution. When explaining Yezhov's cruelty during the Great Terror, Stalin's biographer Edvard Radzinsky remarked that "[Yezhov's] dubious past made him particularly eager to shine."[66] Beria, the successor to Yezhov, similarly had a "murky revolutionary credential," which would call his political career into question.[67] As an ethnic Georgian, Beria had joined several anti-Bolshevik groups in the Caucasus before the October Revolution, and he was almost executed by the Soviets for espionage when the Red Army occupied Azerbaijan. As Soviet Historian Donald Rayfield remarks, "the suspicion [around Beria's past] never faded," which drove him to "fawn on Stalin" and satisfy the leader's every demand to the extreme to affirm his loyalty.[68] Overall, our theory is not limited to the Chinese context. It also sheds light on a general pattern of bureaucratic compliance in authoritarian settings.

NOTES

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3. Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Heather Sullivan, "Subnational State Capacity and the Repression of Protest: Evidence from Mexico," *Political Research Quarterly*, 74 (September 2021), 587–98.

4. Blaydes.

5. Sullivan.

6. Davenport, 1995 and 2007.

7. Jane Esberg, *The Audience of Repression: Killings and Disappearances in Pinochet's Chile*, SSRN Working Paper (September 2018), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3246120, accessed May 20, 2023.

8. Kuisong Yang, "Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries," *The China Quarterly*, 193 (March 2008), 102–21.

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10. Mai Hassan, *Regime Threats and State Solutions: Bureaucratic Loyalty and Embeddedness in Kenya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

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12. Walder; Yang; Hassan.

13. Hassan.

14. e.g., Sassoon; Mazur.

15. Later, we will discuss the examples of Nikolai Yezhov and Lavrentiy Beria, who were responsible for implementing Stalin's mass purges. We will examine how their outgroup background motivated greater enthusiasm and cruelty in carrying out Stalin's repression.

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17. James Kai-Sing Kung and Shuo Chen, "The Tragedy of the *Nomenklatura*: Career Incentives and Political Radicalism during China's Great Leap Famine," *American Political Science Review*, 105 (February 2011), 27–45.

18. Dali L. Yang, Huayu Xu, and Ran Tao, "A Tragedy of the Nomenklatura? Career Incentives, Political Loyalty, and Political Radicalism during China's Great Leap Forward," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23 (March 2014), 864–83; Hua Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930–1945* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2018).

19. Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, Third Edition (New York: Free Press, 1999), 155–88.

20. Ibid.

21. Yen-lin Chung, "The Witch-Hunting Vanguard: The Central Secretariat's Roles and Activities in the Anti-Rightist Campaign," *The China Quarterly*, 206 (June 2011), 391–411.

22. Henry He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 115.

23. *The Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC*, passed by the 8th CCP Central Committee in 1981, states that "the scope of this campaign was made far too broad ... and many intellectuals, patriotic citizens, and Party cadres were unjustifiably labelled 'rightists' with unfortunate consequences," https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/resolution-certain-questions-history-our-party-founding-peoples-republic-china.

24. Due to space constraints, the Appendix is not in the print version of this article. It can be viewed in the online version, at https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/cuny/cp.

25. Mao Zedong, "zai jinian 'sanyiba' bing weilao baowei gongzuo renyuan wanhui de jianghua [Speech on the Evening Banquet Commemorating the 'March 18th' Day]," *Xin Zhonghua Bao*, March 18, 1939.

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29. Zhihua Shen, *History of the People's Republic of China, Vol. 3: Reflections and Choices: Consciousness of Chinese Intellectuals and the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1956–1957)* (The Chinese University Press, 2008), 315.

30. Ping Fu, "Shengan yundong he Zhou Enlai [The Cadre Inspection Campaign and Zhou Enlai]," *Hongyan Chunqiu*, 4 (April 2000), 27–31.

31. Yiran Pei, "Qianhou "Shiliuzi Fangzhen": baiqu dixiadang de suming [Two "Sixteen-word Guidances": the Fates of White-Area Underground Partisans]," *Ershiyi Shiji Shuangyuekan (The Twenty-First Century Bimonthly)*, 144 (August 2014), 103–12.

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33. Milan Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30.

34. Pei.

35. Jun Huang, "Jiangsu Sheng wushi niandai zhongqi de "ganbu shencha" ["Cadre Inspection" in Jiangsu in the mid-1950s]," *Ershiyi Shiji Shuangyuekan [The Twenty-First Century]*, 99 (February 2007), 72–80.

36. Xiaohong Xiao-Planes, "The Pan Hannian Affair and Power Struggles at the Top of the CCP (1953–1955)," *China Perspectives*, 4 (December 2010), 116–27.

37. We use 1966 as the endpoint of our analysis because it was the first year of the Cultural Revolution in which most Party and government agencies were paralyzed by Red Guard violence.

38. Following Kung and Chen (2011), we measure promotion in terms of one's political status in the CCP Central Committee. We consider an official received a promotion if their role changed (1) from non-member to alternate member; (2) from alternate to full member, or (3) from full member to politburo member at least once from 1949 to 1966.

39. Hua Gao, "Beijing zhengzheng yu difang: shidu "Jiang Weiqing huiyilu" [Beijing's Political Struggle and the regions: On Jiang Weiqing's Memoir]," *Ershiyi Shiji Shuangyuekan [The Twenty-First Century]*, 46 (April 1998), 70–83.

40. Weiqing Jiang, *Qishinian zhengcheng: Jiang Weiqing huiyilu [A 70-Year Odyssey: Jiang Weiqing's Memoir]* (Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), 415–16.

41. Gao, 1998.

42. Jiang, 413–14.

43. Hua Gao, "Xin Zhongguo wushi niandai ruhe shehui tonghe: shiwu ge xiaorenwu de huiyilu yanjiu [How the New China Achieved Social Integration in the 1950s: A Research on the Memoirs of 15 Ordinary People]," *Lingdaozhe [The Leadership]*, 17 (2007).

44. Gao, 2007; Pei.

45. Xunzhong Gu, "Mao Zedong weihe xuanze zai shanghai fadong wenge [Why Mao Zedong chose to start the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai]," *Lingdaozhe [The Leadership]*, 58 (2014).

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47. Gu, 2014; Yuqian Guan, "Wang Ruowang tan wenyi zhengce ji gaige [Wang Ruowang on Art Policy and Reform]," *Jiushi Niandai Yuekan [The Nineties Monthly]*, 199 (August 1986), 76–83.

48. During the ARC, all provincial and prefecture-level leaders were invariably male, so we do not control for gender.

49. Kung and Chen.

50. Daniel Koss, *Where the Party Rules: Rank and File of China's Communist State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

51. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, 97 (February 2003), 75–90.

52. For officials with both Red Army and undercover experience during different times of the Revolution, we classify them as undercover agents if they spent more than one year performing undercover work. Evidence from the Yan'an Rectification Campaign shows that any undercover experience would be subject to suspicion and scrutiny and would not be offset by one's Red Army experience.

53. Chao Chen and Hongling Chen, eds., *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo xingzheng quhua dituji [Maps of the Administrative Evolution of the People's Republic of China]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Ditu Chubanshe, 1999), 154. For a detailed explanation of China's administrative divisions in the 1950s and a justification of our choice of measurement units, see Section A4 in the Appendix.

54. John Burns, "China's *Nomenklatura* System," *Problems of Communism*, 36 (1987), 36–51.

55. After the CCP and Kuomintang reached a truce in 1938 to jointly fight against Japan, the Red Army was reorganized into the 8th Route Army and the New 4th Army of the Chinese National Army, while still under CCP's control.

56. Shen, 2008, 312–13.

57. See Appendix A3 for a detailed explanation of our data generation and coding rules.

58. The "reactionary" classes include the landlord (*dizhu*), the kulak (*funong*), the bourgeoisie (*zichan jieji*), ex-bureaucrats of the old regime (*fandong guanliao*), and convicts of felony (*huai fenzi*). See Appendix A3 for coding details.

59. Shanghai is the east-most city in China, so it is often used as a reference point to measure a locality's relative geographical distance.

60. Across different model specifications in this study, higher education's effect on repression intensity is largely negative and statistically insignificant, making it less likely to confound our results.

61. Svolik, 7, 54.

62. Scott A. Tyson, "The Agency Problem Underlying Repression," *The Journal of Politics*, 80 (October 2018), 1297–310.

63. Qi Zhang, Dong Zhang, Mingxing Liu, and Victor Shih, "Elite Cleavage and the Rise of Capitalism under Authoritarianism," *The Journal of Politics*, 83 (July 2021), 1010–23.

64. Victor Shih, "Nauseating Displays of Loyalty: Monitoring the Factional Bargain through Ideological Campaigns in China," *The Journal of Politics*, 70 (October 2008), 1177–92.

65. Lixiong Wang, *Tianzang: Xizang de mingyun [Sky Burial: The Fate of Tibet]* (Hong Kong: Mirror Books Ltd., 1998), 341–42; Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, "Securitizing Xinjiang: Police Recruitment, Informal Policing, and Ethnic Minority Co-Optation," *The China Quarterly*, 242 (June 2020), 324–48.

66. Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin: The First In-Depth Biography Based on Explosive New Documents from Russia's Secret Archives* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 325.

67. Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him* (Random House, 2007), 345.

68. Ibid, 346–47.