

**EATING, DRINKING, AND POWER SIGNALLING IN
INSTITUTIONALIZED AUTHORITARIANISM**

The Antiwaste Campaign of Xi Jinping

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Immediately after Xi Jinping assumed the position of party secretary general (PSG), he launched a large-scale top-down antiwaste campaign amongst the Chinese cadre corps. Compared with similar policies announced by Xi's predecessors, this campaign has distinct features that entail substantial political costs for the PSG. Why did Xi choose this risky strategy? Drawing on recent literature on authoritarian regimes, we argue that, amongst all possible objectives, an authoritarian leader such as Xi can use this type of policy campaign to demonstrate his power. In particular, the inherent importance of informal politics, the recent developments in Chinese politics, and Xi's personal background have increased his incentive and capacity to signal power by implementing this seemingly risky campaign. A comparison with Xi's two predecessors, interviews, and statistical analyses support this argument. Our theoretical framework also sheds light on the literature on the power sharing of authoritarian political elites.

“Implementation of the Eight Requirements seems to be a trifle; but it embodies a spirit.... It shows that we can get things done... It is a way to win the trust of people and the whole party.” Xi Jinping, speech given to the Democratic Meeting of the Hebei Party Committee, 23 September 2013.

Immediately after the power transition of the 18th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi Jinping, the new party secretary general (PSG) and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), launched a campaign against unhealthy tendencies in the work and personal lives of members in party and governmental organizations. He made “Eight Requirements” (*baxiang guiding*) in the pledge to combat the extravagance and bureaucratism of officials, primarily targeting the common problems of waste during lavish receptions for government officials, or the problem of eating and drinking (*dachi dahe wenti*). The regulations were first implemented to discipline the seven members of the new Standing Committee of the Politburo (PSC) and were soon enforced amongst the entire cadre corps of the party and state hierarchy, as well as amongst the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Antiwaste campaigns are not new types of policies for the CCP. Xi’s two predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, also called for the frugality of CCP members during their tenures. However, Xi's campaign has several distinctive characteristics not observed in those of previous administrations. His campaign is of a larger scale, has lasted for a longer duration, makes specific requirements, emphasizes strict implementation more strongly, and calls for increasing public awareness by using

intensive propaganda. Implementing this type of campaign can present a substantial political cost for its leader. Therefore, why did Xi launch his antiwaste campaign, and more importantly, with such a risky approach?

Enlightened by the recent literature on elite power sharing and authoritarian survival, we contend that, amongst all objectives, the large-scale antiwaste drive is primarily a technique for Xi to effectively signal his informal power base within the party. This strategy helps him consolidate his position as the party leader, maintain a peaceful power-sharing arrangement within his ruling coalition, and deter potential challenges in his decision-making process.

We first outline the major features of Xi's antiwaste campaign and elaborate on its theoretical puzzles. After discussing the validity of major current explanations, we present our analytical framework based on the recent literature on the political logic of institutionalized authoritarian regimes. We then apply this theoretical framework to the case of Xi Jinping and show that the inherent importance of informal politics, the recent developments in Chinese politics, and Xi's personal background have provided him with increased incentive and capacity to signal power through a risky campaign. We also rely on comparisons with Xi's two predecessors, interviews, and statistical analyses to support our explanation. The final section concludes the article and discusses the implications of our theoretical findings.

Xi Jinping's Antiwaste Campaign and the Theoretical Puzzles

The CCP has continually emphasized the dangers of indulging its cadres in a working style and lifestyle of extravagance and waste. The official struggle to combat this

vicious tendency can be dated back to the rectification campaigns in the 1920s and the large mass movements of the “three-antis” and “five-antis” in the 1950s.¹ In the era of economic reform, contemporary Chinese leaders still periodically spoke of the importance of party members maintaining a thrifty working style. For example, during Jiang Zemin's leadership, he delivered two talks on frugality, which appeared as editorials in the *People's Daily* in January and February 1997. Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping's immediate predecessor, also emphasized during his second term as the PSG in 2007 that cadres should serve as exemplary role models of hard work and thrift and spearhead the fight against extravagance, waste, money worship, and hedonism.² However, Jiang

¹ Ting Gong and Hanyu Xiao, 'The organizational field of official extravagance in China: Pull and push Factors', Working paper, City University of Hong Kong, 2015; Shunsheng Wang and Li Jun, “*Sanfan yundong yanjiu*” [‘An Analysis of ‘Three-Antis’] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2006); Yonghong He, “*Wufan yundong yanjiu*” [‘An analysis of ‘Five-Antis’] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2006).

² Jiang wrote 'Strive to continue the spirit of frugality' (*dali fayang jianku fendou de jingshen*) on 29 January 1997, published by the *People's Daily*, posted on Xinhua News, available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2002-03/03/content_2644994.htm (accessed 1 March 2014). Hu Jintao raised 'Eight Healthy Tendencies' (*baxiang zuofeng*). For details see Xinhua News Agency, ‘*Hu Jintao: jiangqiang ganbu zuofeng jianshe ba dangfeng lianzheng jianshe he fanfubai douzheng yinxiang shenru*’ (Hu Jintao: Enhance Leaders' Work Style Building, Further the Party's Anticorruption Combat), available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/64094/5263940.html> (accessed 5 March 2014).

and Hu appeared as moderates in the fight against waste by cadres and did not change the status quo. By contrast, Xi's campaign has been more prominent.

First, although previous leaders tended to address general principles, the Eight Requirements focus explicitly and comprehensively on several specific criteria, such as no welcome banners, no red carpets, no floral arrangements or grand receptions for officials' visits, less traffic control during leaders' inspection tours, fewer travelling expenses for officials' trips, and fewer and shorter conferences.³

Second, beyond rhetorical persuasion for officials to comply, the Eight Requirements have been firmly enforced and strictly supervised. Within half a year of the implementation of the new regulations, more than 2000 officials were punished for violating these new rules.⁴ Although many people suspected that the campaign was only a short-term gesture of the new administration, there has been no sign of an end to

³ Xinhua News Agency, 'New CPC Leadership Rejects Extravagance, Bureaucracy', available at: <http://english.people.com.cn/102774/8046103.html> (accessed 5 March 2014).

⁴ People.cn., '*Baxiang guiding man banzai xinfeng chuילו liangqian yu weigui guanyuan*' (Eight Requirements has been enforced for half a year, over two thousand rule-breaking officials have been punished), 13 June 2013, available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0613/c1001-21821498.html> (accessed 4 February 2015).

the campaign since the requirements were made. The decreased sales of large catering enterprises and expensive liquor also appear to verify the effect of Xi's new policy.⁵

Third, although the policies of previous leaders appeared only in the Party's mouthpieces for several days or months, considerable effort has been invested into creating propaganda for Xi's campaign. For example, Figure 1 illustrates that the *People's Daily* and *PLA Newspaper* have provided substantially higher reporting frequencies and a longer reporting period for Xi's Eight Requirements than for Hu Jintao's antiwaste speeches. The China Central Television Station (CCTV), China's national television network, has also served as a platform for dispersing information about Xi's campaign by creating programmes discussing the problem of waste and periodically publishing the names of officials violating the Eight Requirements. CCTV also created the documentary *One Year after the 'Eight Requirements'* in 2014 to further emphasize Xi's antiwaste campaign to the public.⁶

⁵ According to National Statistic Bureau, the revenue of large catering enterprises (annual revenue above 2 million RMB) has decreased 2.6% for the first quarter of 2013, compared with that of last year. Qiushi.cn, available at: http://www.qstheory.cn/jj/jjggyfz/201311/t20131111_289150.htm (accessed 4 February 2015).

⁶ CCTV, '*Shendu shicha zhualuoshi, "baxiang guiding' yinian lai"*' (Strictly supervising and investigating, "Eight Requirements" for the first year), 27 January 2014, available at: <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10326/db5eaa129c374e3b9c418d81a589ca1d> (accessed 4 February 2015).

Insert Figure 1 Here

Although the official media boasts that Xi's antiwaste campaign has been a successful move by the new administration to strengthen the party's leadership, the campaign and its style are counterintuitive in several theoretical respects. First, authoritarian leaders with a smaller ruling coalition would presumably be more inclined to tolerate corruption or a level of waste by officials to solicit loyalty from them.⁷ This may be particularly true when considering the relatively low salary of government officials in China. Several scholars have argued that extra benefits related to public positions, such as lavish banquets, gifts from work units or other sectors during holidays, overseas tours sponsored by public funds or private businesses, and bribes, are actually types of incentive compensation for Chinese bureaucrats, intentionally allowed by the Chinese government.⁸ Therefore, Xi's harsh campaign has affected officials' interests, which may arouse widespread dissatisfaction from this group because the Eight Requirements have been indiscriminately applied to all officials. During our interviews, some cadres expressed confusion and unhappiness towards the campaign because some of their basic welfare, such as bonuses and other gifts awarded by work units during

⁷ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

⁸ Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993); Yuenyuen Ang, 'Bureaucratic incentives, local development & petty rents' Paper presented at Symposium on Economic Governance in China and the Developing World, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong, 31 May 2013.

holidays were prohibited because of the campaign. A military cadre also said that he was shocked by Xi's large-scale antiwaste campaign in the army.⁹ Therefore, why would Xi launch his campaign on such a large scale, regardless of the cost of offending the interests of the entire cadre corps?

Moreover, enforcing a large-scale antiwaste campaign is difficult in practice. Research has shown that officials and government institutions often resist this type of campaign, and claim that their practices, such as eating and drinking, were to meet only the demands of their work.¹⁰ However, this raises more questions: If enforcement of regulations is difficult, why has Xi drawn wide public attention to the current campaign by using extensive propaganda, and why has he created numerous explicit and visible policies, such as no grand receptions for officials, easy for the public to supervise and judge? By creating an attentive public, the leader bears additional potential political costs, because open incompliance with a policy may embarrass the leader, as well as indicate incompetence of the incumbent and instigate challenges against him from the opposition inside and outside the ruling circle. In addition, several of the specific regulations that Xi implemented on cadre lifestyles have existed since the revolutionary years of the CCP. Xi and his predecessors faced similar policy choices when launching

⁹ Interviews conducted in Tianjin (February 2014), Shanghai (March 2014), Beijing (January 2015), and Zhejiang (Jan 2015).

¹⁰ Zengke He, 'Corruption and anti-corruption in reform China', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32(2), (2000), pp. 243-70.

their respective antiwaste drives. Therefore, the question is not only why Xi would adopt a risky strategy during his campaign; but also why it is Xi who chose and implemented the campaign in this urgent manner.

One explanation is that Xi actively fights waste primarily to combat economic overheating. Several rounds of anticorruption enforcement campaigns in the past coincided with a period of macroeconomic austerity actuated to reduce overinvestment and inflation.¹¹ However, macroeconomic data show no serious inflation occurring immediately before Xi's antiwaste campaign. Another explanation is that government extravagance is now too serious to tolerate, forcing Xi to oppose it; however, government extravagance has been a serious problem for decades. As early as the 1980s, reports of extravagant banqueting had already been common in the Chinese press, and funds spent on eating and drinking had already reached tens of billions of yuan.¹² The situation would not have suddenly worsened after the power transition from Hu to Xi. Therefore, Xi Jinping faces no more pressure or urgency than his immediate predecessors to address this problem.

¹¹ Elizabeth Quade, 'The logic of anticorruption enforcement campaigns in contemporary China', *Journal of Contemporary China* 16(50), (2007), pp. 65-77.

¹² Yufan Hao and Michael Johnston, 'Corruption and the future of economic reform in China', in Arnold J. Heidenheimer and Michael Johnston, eds, *Political Corruption: Concepts & Contexts* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp. 583-604.

Alternatively, could the campaign style be a result of Xi Jinping's personality? Perhaps he is more assertive than his predecessors, or perhaps coming from the generation tempered during the Cultural Revolution has rendered him more keen to large-scale campaigns. It is also possible that Xi and his allies, such as Wang Qishan, the current head of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Committee (CDIC), simply care more about antiwaste and anticorruption than their predecessors did, and genuinely deem unhealthy work styles as the hotbed of official corruption. Each PSG undeniably has a distinct ruling style influenced by his personality and personal background. However, a policy that a PSG prefers is not necessarily what he ultimately performs in practice. A rational leader must consider the political feasibility of a policy and choose the policy that benefits him or her the most. Therefore, the various campaign strategies of each PSG are more likely the result of their own rational choices influenced by various political concerns rather than purely the leader's personal preferences.

Finally, is it possible that the antiwaste campaign aims to remove Xi's political rivals; for example, to facilitate the even tougher anticorruption campaign targeting the "big tigers"? Wang Qishan remarked on several occasions that the Eight Requirements are closely related to the greater cause of the anticorruption drive within the CCP. However, an anticorruption campaign against corrupt officials alone could achieve the objective of removing one's political enemies, as Jiang and Hu achieved against Chen Xitong and Chen Liangyu, respectively. Xi has launched a large anticorruption drive surpassing those of his predecessors; therefore, it is unclear why he has also initiated a large-scale antiwaste movement that involves the entire Chinese government. Thus,

although the aforementioned explanations may be valid, numerous questions remain regarding Xi's antiwaste campaign.

An Analytical Framework:

Signalling Informal Personal Networks in Institutionalized Authoritarianism

Recent literature has argued that the primary task for authoritarian leaders is to ensure that their allies are willing to share power peacefully, because the majority of authoritarian leaders have been removed by government insiders, such as other government officials, officers in the military, or security forces.¹³ The balance of power amongst the ruling elites, which entails issuing credible coercive threats to constrain each other, fundamentally ensures power sharing in authoritarian regimes.¹⁴ Whether allies decide to unite (e.g., for a coup or a vote) against the current authoritarian leader depends on each ally's individual perception of the leader's power

¹³ Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, *The Logic of Political Survival*; Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, 'Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats', *Comparative Political Studies* 40(11), (2007), pp. 1279-1301; Milan W Svobik, 'Power sharing and leadership dynamics in authoritarian regimes', *American Journal of Political Science* 53(2), (2009), pp. 477-94; and *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Carles Boix and Milan Svobik, 'The foundations of limited authoritarian government: institutions and power sharing in dictatorships', *Journal of Politics* 75(2), (2013), pp.300-16. It is true that authoritarian leaders can encourage power-sharing by giving economic and political benefits to allies. However, such reciprocity lacks enforcement in authoritarian regimes. See Victor Shih, 'Nauseating' displays of loyalty: monitoring the factional bargain through ideological campaigns in China', *Journal of Politics* 70(4) (2008), pp. 1-16.

and likelihood for collaboration with other allies. Therefore, supreme leaders should be strongly motivated to inform allies of their power to prevent allies from underestimating them and challenging their positions, particularly if they truly are politically strong.

However, because institutions are not constitutionally guaranteed in authoritarian regimes, the formal positions of political elites may not accurately indicate their real political power. An almost indispensable power base for any senior politician is his or her informal personal networks within the formal institutions, developed along institutional, tribal, ethnic, or sectarian lines. Members in this network provide their primary loyalty to the senior leader rather than to the regime or party.¹⁵ The personal network garners a politician a type of political capital that can provide a competitive advantage for pursuing his or her ends. Leaders who are more widely and deeply connected with key players in the system typically receive news earlier and more broadly, and are able to mobilize more resources.¹⁶

However, informal power based on personal connections within formal institutions is not easily observable, particularly when voting is only a facade. Authoritarian leaders often must signal to other political elites that their informal power matches their formal position. However, historical methods for authoritarian

¹⁵ Svobik, 'Power sharing and leadership dynamics in authoritarian regimes'.

¹⁶ Ronald S. Burt, 'The network structure of social capital', *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22, (2000), pp. 345-423.

leaders to signal power, such as promoting their own allies or delivering rhetoric that stimulates wide support, have proven to be futile.¹⁷

A more credible method for signalling power is to deliver publicly visible policy outcomes that incur a cost for the authoritarian leader. In Fearon's model of audience cost, leaders who back down from a publicly issued threat by an adversary during interstate crises may face punishment by their political audience at home. Leaders who bear higher audience costs are perceived as sending threat signals more credibly.¹⁸ These types of audience costs also exist in institutionalized authoritarianism, in which domestic elites can coordinate in punishing their leader.¹⁹ Authoritarian leaders bear substantial audience costs when they launch publicly noticeable campaigns that contain explicit policy orders requiring the compliance of subordinates and inviting public observation of policy outcomes. Large-scale noncompliance with a policy by officials can easily be attributed to the incompetence of the incumbent and can evoke public doubt about the incumbent's ability to hold power. Exposing incumbent weakness may also induce oppositionists inside and

¹⁷ Jeffrey Banks, 'A model of electoral competition with incomplete information', *Journal of Economic Theory* 50(2), (1990), pp. 209–325; Joseph Farrell and Matthew Rabin, 'Cheap talk', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10(3), (1996), pp. 103–18; Shih, 'Nauseating' displays of loyalty'.

¹⁸ James D. Fearon, 'Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes', *American Political Science Review* 88(3), (1994), pp. 577-92.

¹⁹ Jessica L. Weeks, 'Autocratic audience costs: regime type and signaling resolve', *International Organization* 62(1), (2008), pp. 35-64.

outside the ruling circle to challenge the incumbent. Therefore, we argue that bearing audience costs and mobilizing personal networks within a formal institution to achieve policy goals constitute a credible method for signalling a leader's power base to allies.

Moreover, we contend that authoritarian leaders have the most incentive to signal power in this credible manner when their base of power is in question with other political elites and they must consolidate the topmost position to deter potential challenges in the decision-making process. Particularly, because informal power is often the private knowledge of a leader, authoritarian leaders can take advantage of this asymmetry in information to strengthen their position and employ as much political capital as is available for manipulation to increase the public's assessment of their informal power and to garner loyalty from wavering officials. The more manoeuvrable political capital a leader has, the higher the incentive to signal his or her power. Xi Jinping exemplified this when he first came to power.

Signalling Power: Xi's Incentive and Capacity

Although the CCP has expended effort in establishing institutions since the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, informal politics continue to play a crucial role in Chinese politics, particularly on matters of leader selection.²⁰ Crises during

²⁰ Andrew Nathan, 'Authoritarian resilience', *Journal of Democracy* 14(1), (2003), pp. 6–19; Victor Shih, 'Factions matter: personal networks and the distribution of bank loans in China', *Journal of*

leadership successions have also repeatedly shown that if leaders want to remain in power, then they must convince other political elites that their formal positions are supported by corresponding informal power. In addition, the emergence of the new leader-collectives in recent years has increased the necessity for political elites, particularly a new PSG such as Xi, to signal their informal power base.

Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping established their leadership roles through several rounds of internal and external struggles. Their talents in military, governance, and ideological mobilization and their personalities were clearly observed by their peers and ruling allies. As Tsou argues, the most effective method for demonstrating informal power is to succeed.²¹ Mao and Deng withstood numerous tests, demonstrating that they were able to succeed in critical situations. These tests and intimate interactions between revolutionaries during the prolonged struggle helped to confer on Mao and Deng their “core” status (*hexin*) within the collective leadership. In the interregnum, former PSG Jiang Zemin was recognized

Contemporary China 13(38), (2004), pp. 3-19; Victor Shih, Christopher Adolph and Mingxing Liu, ‘Getting ahead in the communist party: explaining the advancement of central committee members in China’, *American Political Science Review* 106(1), (2012), pp. 166-87; Cheng Li, ‘The end of the CCP’s resilient authoritarianism? A tripartite assessment of shifting power in china’, *The China Quarterly* 211, (2012), pp. 595-623.

²¹ Tang Tsou, ‘Chinese politics at the top: factionalism or informal politics? balance-of- power politics or a game to win all?’ *The China Journal* 34(2), (1995), pp. 95-156.

by his quick response and loyalty to the Party Centre in the 1989 political turbulence. His “core” status was also consolidated by Deng’s repeated confirmation. When Deng relinquished power because of health reasons, Jiang became the indisputable paramount leader. However, after the Jiang era, the ruling circle preferred stressing “collective leadership” and no longer explicitly called the PSG the leading “core.”²² This is a strong sign that the CCP emphasizes power sharing amongst the ruling elites in the PSC. According to our analytical framework, the power distribution amongst the elites becomes crucial to maintaining power sharing in such a scenario. Without the title of “core,” a PSG such as Hu Jintao or Xi Jinping must exhibit that he is sufficiently powerful to be the first amongst equals.

However, rather than through shared experiences of revolution, current leaders are often promoted from regional or central key positions before entering the PSC. Many of them do not have many observable achievements in their previous positions. Furthermore, the ruling allies may not have close personal interactions with the PSG, and thus may not be as familiar with his competences, connections, and personality as the revolutionaries were with one another. Before entering the PSC, Xi Jinping spent most of his political career in local government, maintaining a low profile and

²² A search for the frequency of the term “leadership core” (*lingdao hexin*) in the *People’s Daily* newspaper database revealed that 893 articles called Jiang Zemin the “core” from 2000 to 2013, only one article called Hu Jintao the “core,” and no articles referred to Xi Jinping that way.

serving a relatively short period as the designated successor.²³ His capability appeared to be unclear to others. Before gaining power, the Xi Jinping–Li Keqiang administration was suspected to be even weaker than that of their predecessors, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao because of their obvious need to share power with other elites and the increasing competitive pressure imposed by their peers.²⁴

Another obstacle hindering Xi’s pursuit of paramount status in the CCP is the power of his predecessors. Because of the prevalence of informal politics, retired senior officials in China can exert an influence on incumbents through their strong personal networks.²⁵ This occurred to Jiang Zemin, who worked in the shadows of Deng for six years before Deng fully retired, and to Hu Jintao, who did not simultaneously receive the position of CMC chairman from Jiang when assuming the PSG. Jiang maintained control of the military for two additional years. After his retirement, the “Jiang Zemin Office” still remained influential in Zhongnanhai, advising and approving decisions regarding critical policies. Jiang’s political legacy served as Hu’s Waterloo in the fight over the 2012 PSC; only one of Hu’s protégés

²³ Cheng Li, ‘Xi Jinping’s inner circle: the Shaanxi gang’, *China Leadership Monitor* 43, (2014), pp. 1-21.

²⁴ Li, ‘The end of the CCP’s resilient authoritarianism?’

²⁵ Jing Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

(i.e., Li Keqiang) remained in Xi's cabinet.²⁶ Because Xi must run the country with two predecessors alive, the public was expected to cast doubt on his autonomy.²⁷

According to a common measurement of the informal power of Chinese political elites (i.e., their factional ties within the central committee [CC]), Xi has less informal power than his two predecessors did.²⁸ When leaders called for antiwaste, Jiang had 33 ties amongst the 189 CC members in 1997; Hu had 33 ties

²⁶ Cheng Li, 'A biographical and factional analysis of the post-2012 politburo', *China Leadership Monitor* 41, (2013), pp. 1-17.

²⁷ For example, in a CNN interview right after the 18th party congress, the host especially asked Liu Yawei, a China expert, how Xi was going to rule the country with two predecessors alive. Liu commented that it is going to be difficult.

²⁸ Tsou (1995) argues that formal and informal politics often intertwine in China. The formal position is the source of the informal power, while the informal power supports the formal authority. The CC is the formal selectorate of PSC members of the CCP. Although the CC is by no means the universe of the power elite in China, arguably most officials holding important positions are CC members. CC members often wield substantial power by controlling functional bureaucracies, different provinces, military regions, and so forth. Therefore, to measure the informal power of a PSG, scholars often examine the CC members who had direct factional ties with them. See Victor Shih, Wei Shan and Mingxing Liu, 'The central committee, past and present: a method of quantifying elite biographies', in Allen Carlson, Mary E. Gallagher, Kenneth Lieberthal and Melanie Manion, eds, *Contemporary Chinese Politics: New Sources, Methods, and Field Strategies* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 51-68. Factional ties are measured by shared birthplace, more than one year common working experience, and the university schoolmates of CC members, see Shih et al. (2012).

amongst the 204 CC members in 2007, and Xi had only 25 ties amongst the 205 CC members in 2012 (Table 1).

However, we argue that all uncertainty and potential doubt over Xi's position, and even the appearance of relatively unstable power bases, can only increase Xi's incentive to signal that his informal power matches his formal authority. In this respect, Xi has two advantages associated with his personal career and experience, which have provided him with the necessary political capital to launch a large scale antiwaste movement as a means of signalling power.

First, Xi enjoys substantially more military connections than did many post-Deng civilian leaders, including Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. Xi Jinping has direct connections with several CMC members, as well as with several senior military CC members. By contrast, as Table 1 shows, when Hu was the PSG in 2007, he had ties with only three non-CMC military CC members; Jiang had ties with only two non-CMC military CC members in 1997. It is widely known that Xi obtained his military background primarily through his service between 1979 and 1982 as the youngest secretary of Geng Biao, the then vice premier and secretary general of the CMC, as well as a former subordinate and friend of Xi's father. During that time, Xi participated in numerous central conferences and dealt with military affairs. When Xi was promoted to the position of local governor of Xiamen, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai, he concurrently served as the head of the respective local military regions. He was thus familiar with many powerful military commanders, including Wu

Shengli (the current commander-in-chief of the PLA Navy of China) and Liang Guanglie (the former minister of the Ministry of National Defence of China). He also maintained a reputation for treating local troops well. In addition, Xi's wife is a famous folk singer, with the title of major general of the PLA, which has also likely won Xi popularity with the army.

The military's support of and loyalty to the PSG plays the most critical role in aiding China's paramount leader to successfully consolidate his power.²⁹ Gaining the support of China's coercive leaders and the army also establishes a major barrier for any opponent who attempts to claim power.³⁰ The prevalence of military coups in many developing countries convincingly proves this point, even though coup d'états have arguably been rare since the CCP attained power in China.³¹ With a superior military background and more connections, Xi receives more military support than his predecessors did. As a military observer commented, "The military surely likes a future leader with more [extensive] military and political backgrounds. In comparison, leaders from the Communist Youth League (CYL) are not that

²⁹ Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ji You, 'Jiang Zemin's command of the military', *The China Journal* 45, (2001), pp. 131-38.

³⁰ Yuhua Wang, 'Empowering the police: how the Chinese Communist Party manages its coercive leaders', *The China Quarterly* 219, (2014), pp. 625-48.

³¹ Ruixue Jia and Pinghan Liang, 'Government structure and military coups', Working Paper, Stockholm University, 2012. There are also rumors of a coup directed by Bo Xilai and Zhou Yongkang before the 18th Party Congress, which featured a power transition between Hu and Xi.

welcome by the military.”³² Shirk also noted that Hu had “some difficulty winning over the military,” because “calls for the military to show its absolute loyalty to the Party” occurred frequently when Hu was the PSG.³³

Xi’s second advantage is his princeling status, or *taizidang*, a word referring to people whose parents or parents-in-law were/are senior officials in the government. This special status can garner uncommon political capital for a leader because princelings tend to enjoy privileges that ordinary people can rarely access. For example, Shih, Adolph, and Liu revealed the positive effect of the princeling status on officials’ promotion in China.³⁴ Many princelings act as the core leaders of various sectors in China, including the party organs, state systems, the military, large state-owned enterprises, shareholding companies, and social organizations. To pursue common objectives, princelings occasionally make horizontal alliances to gain exceptional influence.³⁵ Their statuses can provide them with wide and powerful connections and, to some degree, legitimacy to inherit power in a nondemocratic society. This status also casts a mysterious veil on a leader’s political

³² Handong Xia, *Shui kongzhi zhongguo jundui* [‘Who Controls China’s Military’] (New York, N.Y.: Mirror Books), p. 59.

³³ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, p. 73.

³⁴ Shih et al., ‘Getting ahead in the communist party’.

³⁵ Pin He and Xin Gao, *Zhonggong taizidang* [‘CCP’s Princeling Party’] (New York, N.Y.: Mirror Books, 1992).

power base because of China's often obscure elite politics, which may grant the leader increased advantage for manipulation in an information-asymmetric context.

Xi Jinping is the second son of Xi Zhongxun, a communist veteran of Deng Xiaoping's generation. As one of the founders of the CCP guerrilla base area in Shaanxi province before 1949, Xi Zhongxun worked closely with several early CCP top leaders, including Zhang Zongxun, Liu Zhidan, Wang Zhen, Peng Dehuai, He Long, and Zhou Enlai. From 1959 to 1962, Xi Zhongxun served as vice premier of the People's Republic of China. Despite several setbacks during the Cultural Revolution, he was reinstated by Deng Xiaoping and actively assisted in Deng's economic reforms. Several contemporary Chinese leaders are former subordinates of Xi Zhongxun, including Wei Jianxing, the former general secretary of the CDIC. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, as former PSGs, respected him. Xi Zhongxun was also reported to be friendly to his colleagues, never offended or conflicted with anyone, and maintained long-term friendships with many revolutionaries and their families.³⁶ Through these deep connections, Xi Jinping enjoys an advanced platform to network with other princelings, particularly the children of his father's colleagues. Therefore, in addition to the factional ties based on Shih's coding scheme, we also added potential ties between Xi and 12 additional CC members with princeling status, as

³⁶ Central Party History Research Office [*Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiu shi*], *Xi Zhongxun jinian wenji* ['Xi Zhongxun in Memoriam'] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2013).

shown in Table 1. These princeling ties reinforce Xi's control over the Politburo, the state system, and the military. For example, several princelings, such as Liu Yuan (son of Liu Shaoqi) and Zhang Youxia (son of Zhang Zongxun), are influential military generals whose parents maintained deep friendships with the Xi family. In addition, princeling ties enable Xi to demonstrate a strong power base and garner increased support in systems in which he has relatively fewer connections than Hu or Jiang, such as the party departments and amongst provincial leaders.

Insert Table 1 Here

However, a problem with Xi's informal power authority is that neither princeling status nor military ties can be equated with his actual power. Although the military can be used as the final resort to resolve political fighting, after the Cultural Revolution it was seldom used in this manner. The post-Mao CCP leadership has instead intentionally prevented it from intervening in politics.³⁷ Although Xi can take advantage of the privileges associated with his princeling status, princelings have some disadvantages. First, this group is different from other factions within the CCP, including the so-called Shanghai Gang (*Shanghai bang*) or the CYL faction

³⁷ An exception is during his famous Southern Tour in 1992, Deng threatened the conservative leaders in Beijing that they would be possibly deposed if they continued stalling economic reform. This trip was entirely arranged by the police forces within the PLA and accompanied by Deng's ally in the military, Yang Shangkun, to show the military's support of Deng. See Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

(*tuanpai*), which appear to be more cohesive and function around one patron. By contrast, many of the princelings, because of their abundant political capital, are leaders in their own right, with followers amongst lower-level officials, business people, and intellectuals, who hope to attain rapid promotion in the CCP's political hierarchy. Second, relationships between princelings also tend to be complicated, primarily affected by their personal interactions and their parents' past animosity and friendships, as well as influenced by timeworn relations caused by generation gaps within the group.³⁸ Therefore, the princelings cannot be treated as a coherent faction. It is reasonable for people to question whether the shared princeling status between Xi and many other high-level officials can really transform into political allegiance. When Xi achieved power, queries lingered regarding whether the princeling status, regarded as Xi's major power foundation, would enable him to consolidate power.³⁹ The public has also shown interest in evaluating how Xi surpassed other candidates, indicating the inception of political distrust.

It is unclear to what extent the princeling status and military ties can support Xi's power unless he is able to demonstrate that he can effectively use these political

³⁸ He and Gao, *Zhonggong taizidang*.

³⁹ Enchinese. com, '*Meiguo waijiaoguan: Xi Jinping yixin zhixiang kuajin zuigaoceng, meiyou xingqu gao minzhu*' (U.S. Diplomat: Xi Jinping Only Wants to Step Into the Power Center, Not Interested in Progressing Democracy), 10 December 2010, available at:

<http://www.enchinese.com/news/1210/22670.html> (accessed 15 January 2014).

assets to his advantage. This suggests that Xi must signal his informal power in a credible manner, particularly if he wishes to maintain the capacity to be the first amongst equals.

Power-Signalling Through the Antiwaste Campaign

Xi Jinping chose to implement a large-scale antiwaste campaign because this type of movement entails an obvious audience cost that creates a credible signalling of his power. As evidenced in Xi's statement in Hebei that implementing the Eight Requirements shows that the party "can get things done", Xi deemed the campaign symbolic in signalling to the entire cadre corps and to the public that he was able to mobilize the party-state hierarchy to accomplish his tasks. In particular, Xi promoted his antiwaste campaign by personally commenting on a report from the Xinhua News Agency, criticizing the large amount of waste from eating and drinking, and calling for a stop to it. Official media, such as the *People's Daily* and *PLA Newspaper*, wrote intensive reports on the Eight Requirements for several months. It is worth noting that both newspapers have historically been major media channels for political leaders to endorse various policy signals.⁴⁰ Xi also intentionally exhibited several of his advantages during this campaign. Amongst the formal systems of the party-state, Xi primarily issued orders to the PLA to demonstrate his power base within the army. On 21 December 2012, the CMC, now under the leadership of Xi, issued "Ten Provisions" to echo the Eight Requirements made at the Politburo meeting. In

⁴⁰ Shih, 'Nauseating' displays of loyalty'..

addition to those regulated in the Eight Requirements, the military explicitly declared that the receptions of high-ranking officers can no longer feature liquor or luxury banquets.⁴¹ Figure 1 shows that the *PLA Newspaper* responded actively to Xi's Eight Requirements earlier than did the *People's Daily*, which is another sign of Xi using his military power base to urge other bureaucratic systems to follow suit. Thus, Xi, similar to Deng Xiaoping, aimed to signal his personal authority over the armed forces by showing that he dared to be tough on the military.⁴²

Moreover, Xi empowered the CDIC, now led by Wang Qishan, to supervise and enforce his regulations from the top down. Wang Qishan, also a princeling, is likely Xi's most notable ally in the current PSC. He reportedly has been a personal friend of Xi since they served in rural areas during the Cultural Revolution.⁴³ This informal connection bears particular importance in the antiwaste movement because the CDIC performs disciplinary work in China and can mobilize local disciplinary inspection committees to enforce the Eight Requirements strictly.⁴⁴ Wang Qishan

⁴¹ See "Chinese Military Bans Luxury Banquets" <http://english.people.com.cn/102774/8067393.html>, accessed 5 March 2014.

⁴² Deng ordered the military not to demand higher budget allocations, because he was confident of the military's loyalty to him. See You, 'Jiang Zemin's command of the military'.

⁴³ Cheng Li, 'Xi Jinping's inner circle: friends from Xi's formative years.' *China Leadership Monitor* 44, (2014), pp. 1-22.

⁴⁴ Xuezhi Guo, 'Controlling corruption in the party: China's central discipline inspection commission.' *The China Quarterly* 219, (2014), pp. 597-624.

has talked to the leaders of several central departments about strengthening their work styles. The CDIC's central inspection teams have also been sent to various places on inspection tours. Reports periodically emerge regarding strict punishment of government and military officials violating the new rules.

By contrast, Xi's two predecessors never expanded their antiwaste campaigns to the military so widely and seriously.⁴⁵ Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were careful to keep the military satisfied; they were more willing to expend resources on it and to tolerate corruption in the military because they were not confident of the PLA's allegiance.⁴⁶ Neither Hu Jintao nor Jiang Zemin had close informal connections with their then CDIC secretaries, He Guoqiang 贺国强 and Wei Jianxing, respectively, when they were the PSGs. Xi's two predecessors thus lacked the necessary capacity to risk an intensive antiwaste campaign; even if they wanted to signal power, they would likely have chosen a different policy area in which they had more control. Amongst the three, Jiang also had less incentive to signal power

⁴⁵ Jiang did with the cooperation of Zhu Rongji prohibit the PLA from engaging lucrative businesses in 1998. However, in the meantime Jiang enhanced the welfare treatment of the military in order to appease the army. See 'Yan' zi dangtou, junwei zhuxi men de zhijun gushi' (strictness comes first, the stories of all former the Chairmen of the Central Military Commission), *Liberation Daily*, 9 September 2013, available at: http://newspaper.jfdaily.com/jfrb/html/2013-08/09/content_1073554.htm (accessed 4 February 2015).

⁴⁶ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*.

because his leading status was more dominant and obvious compared with those of Hu and Xi. Therefore, it is unsurprising that active implementation and enforcement of orders did not occur during the campaigns of Hu and Jiang.

The outcome appears to elucidate Xi's success. Figure 2 shows that although only Zhejiang and Shaanxi, provinces in which Xi has loyal protégés,⁴⁷ actively responded to the Eight Requirements by reporting heavily in their provincial newspapers in the first few months, more provinces joined to show their support to the orders when officials nationwide increasingly sensed Xi's power. The differences in official provincial newspaper report frequencies regarding the Eight Requirements between Zhejiang and Shaanxi and other provinces became insignificant in March 2013.⁴⁸ In addition, more than 17 provinces formulated specific regulations based on the Eight Requirements within one year after the announcement of the central policy.⁴⁹ Furthermore, our interviews in Guangdong,

⁴⁷ Xi cultivated strong connections with officials in Zhejiang during his tenure there and his native ties with Shaanxi are also strong. Li, 'Xi Jinping's inner circle: the Shaanxi gang', *China Leadership Monitor* 43, (2014), pp. 1-21; and 'Xi Jinping's inner circle: political protégés from the provinces', *China Leadership Monitor* 45, (2014), pp. 1-22.

⁴⁸ Provincial official newspapers are major channels for provincial leaders to signal loyalty to national leaders, see Shih, 'Nauseating' Displays of Loyalty'.

⁴⁹ People.cn.com, 'Gedi chutai xize luoshi baxiang guiding' (Many localities have introduced bylaws to enforce the "Eight Requirements"), 2 January 2013, available at:

<http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0102/c64094-20070716.html> (accessed 4 February 2015).

Henan, Shanghai, and Beijing have shown that although originally considering the campaign to be only a formality, most local officials now consider Xi to be a formidable leader, take the regulations seriously, and are more cautious when receiving banquet invitations.⁵⁰ Xi's resolute fight against official extravagance, along with his anticorruption campaign, have received praise from the public, which now regards Xi as a determined strongman and speaks highly of the efficacy of his policy.

Insert Figure 2 Here

Conclusion

Our research attempts to explain several puzzles regarding the recent antiwaste movement launched by China's new PSG, Xi Jinping. Rather than deny the explanatory power of existing conjectures, we propose a theoretical framework based on recent studies on authoritarian regimes to provide a more systematic explanation to Xi's motivation behind his campaign, as well as to contribute to the broad literature on the survival of authoritarian regimes.

Existing literature indicates that the balance of power amongst political allies is a major factor ensuring the stability of institutions in authoritarian regimes. However, it is not well known how major power holders learn about the power

⁵⁰ Interviews were conducted respectively in Beijing (February 2014), Shanghai (March 2014), Henan (July 2014), and Guangdong (August 2014).

distribution amongst themselves, particularly given the inherent lack of transparency in authoritarian politics. Our study shows that authoritarian leaders can signal their informal power base through public campaigns to avoid unnecessary confrontations amongst the ruling coalition that might destabilize the regime. In particular, an authoritarian leader who feels the need to show that his informal power matches his formal position and that he has political capital to manipulate and mobilize, such as Xi Jinping, tends to have a greater incentive to signal that power credibly by bearing a potential political cost and choosing a policy area that most effectively demonstrates his informal power advantages. During policy campaigns, an authoritarian leader is inclined to garner public attention, create explicit and visible policies, employ various government systems to enforce the policies, launch intensive propaganda, and invite public observation of policy outcomes. Therefore, our theory facilitates explaining why Xi's predecessors adopted various trajectories. Jiang Zemin, who was powerful and the only core leader after Deng Xiaoping, did not have an urgent need to signal his power by implementing a risky campaign. Hu Jintao lived in the shadow of Jiang Zemin and should have had the incentive to signal his power; however, his informal power could not afford him a risky campaign. Evidence shows that the Hu–Wen administration attempted to signal its power by

selecting issues that they could control and with a low political cost of offending cadres on a large scale.⁵¹

Our research shows that signalling is a crucial mechanism in authoritarian regimes, which are more severely affected by incomplete information than democracies. Authoritarian leaders can employ signalling to detect the loyalty of followers, as well as to demonstrate their own informal power bases that are less observable to the public, thereby deterring political challenges from inside and outside the ruling circle.⁵² Through his large-scale campaign against extravagance and waste at official dinners and excessive consumption of luxuries, Xi Jinping has effectively signalled his control over the military, the disciplinary system, and the state system. Witnessing his dominance in several major governing organs, many provinces without Xi's factional ties have become more active in responding to his antiwaste call and in cooperating with him and showing obedience. These actions also imply that Xi's power signalling may gradually change the equation of power distribution amongst the ruling elites, a situation that requires more observation to verify.

⁵¹ For example, early on in Hu-Wen administration, Wen Jiabao intervened in a single case of wage arrears, which created a wave of mobilization by other aggrieved migrant workers. This launched a national campaign and risked significant audience costs.

⁵² Shih, 'Nauseating' displays of loyalty'.

Finally, the logic of power signalling indicates that anticorruption strength in an authoritarian regime, such as that of China, may vary with the leader's informal power strength and his or her need to signal power base. When authoritarian leaders are only weakly backed by informal power or have consolidated their position as the "first amongst equals," anticorruption is likely to fall to a secondary place. In addition, anticorruption campaigns ultimately work against the interests of the ruling coalition. Extant research has shown that dictatorship fundamentally relies on two means to sustain itself: coercion and buying off. Shirk suspects that corruption in China is actually higher-level government incentive compensation for local officials.⁵³ Therefore, anticorruption campaigns in China tend to be limited in scale, target, and strength.⁵⁴ Although Xi has a relatively wide informal power base and appears to be firmly against extravagance through his current movement, it is still unclear whether he will push for policies that undermine the ruling circle's fundamental interests. The political elite's calculation of anticorruption campaigns facilitates further understanding the resilience and inflexibility of authoritarian regimes. Senior politicians can implement various policies, including anticorruption drives, to signal their power base to others to avoid unnecessary confrontations, ensure

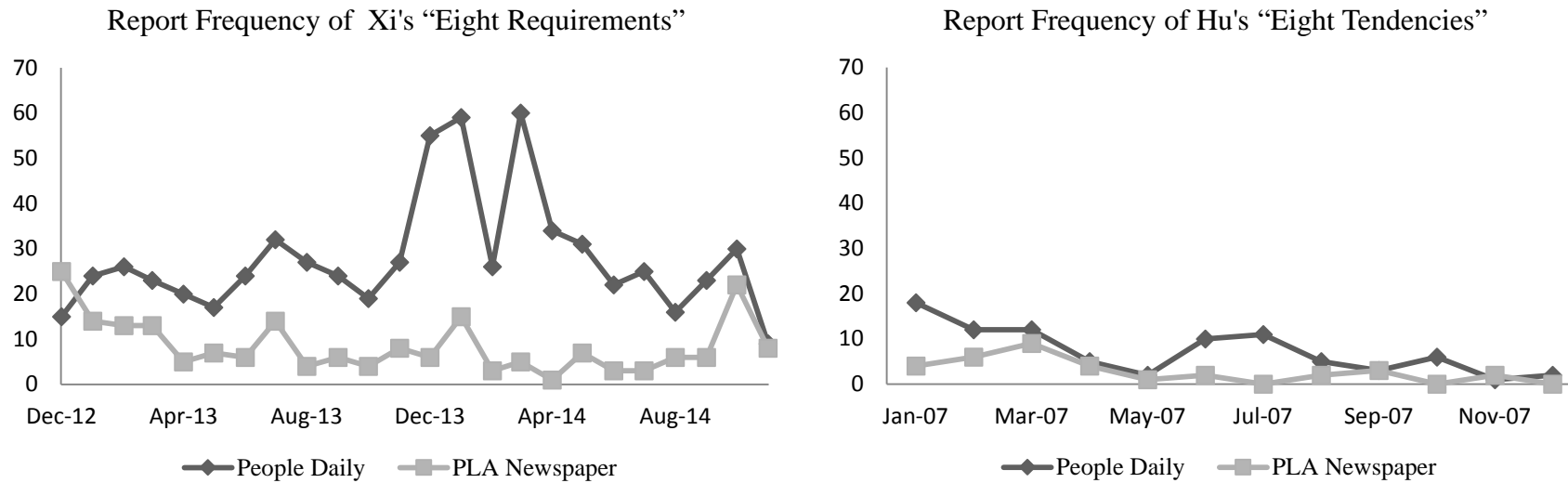
⁵³ Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*.

⁵⁴ Melanie Manion, *Corruption by Design : Building Clean Government in Mainland China and Hong Kong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

institutionalization of the authoritarian regime, and constrain some types of corruption.

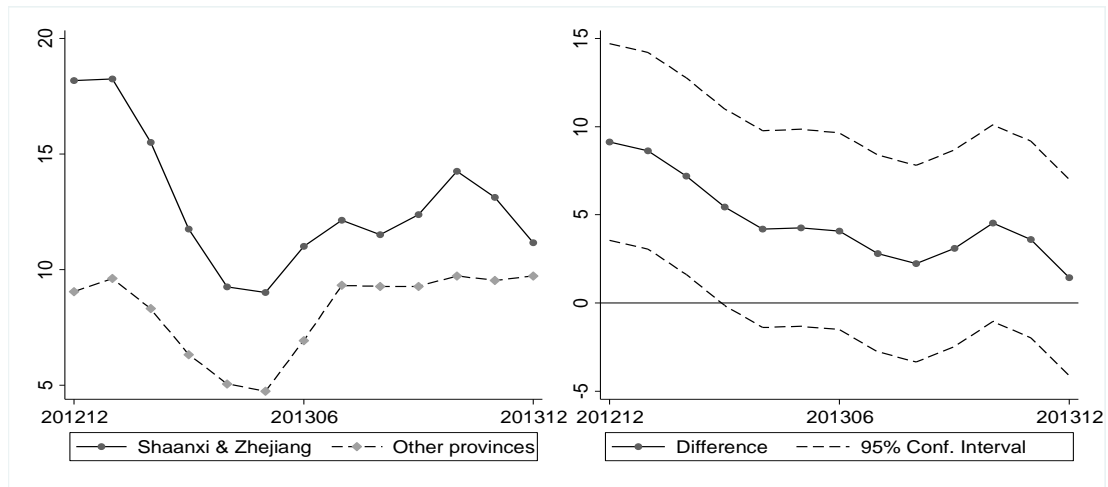
Conversely, because anticorruption may be used for power signalling to ultimately avoid serious conflicts amongst major political elites, senior politicians tolerate and ignore many problems that exist at a deeper level.

Figure 1 Reporting Frequencies for the Antiwaste Speeches Delivered by Xi and Hu



Note: Data were collected by searching “baxiang guiding” and “baxiang zuofeng” as keywords in the two newspapers by using CNKI.net. CNKI includes only newspapers published since 2000; therefore, data on the Jiang Zemin period were unavailable. However, a Google search showed that Jiang’s frugality speech appeared in the *People’s Daily* only as two editorials.

Figure 2 Reporting Frequencies of Provincial Newspapers on the Eight Requirements



Note: Data were collected from CNKI by searching “baxiang guiding” in each provincial party newspaper between December 2012 and December 2013. The left figure provides a comparison between the average reporting frequency of Shaanxi and Zhejiang and that of other provinces. The right figure is the 95% confidence interval of the frequency differences between the two provincial groups. When the lower bound of the confidence interval is below zero, report frequency differences between the two provincial groups are negligible.

Table 1 Factional Distribution within Various Systems in the Respective Central Committees of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping

System	Faction	Num*	Name
Politburo	Jiang	3	Ding Guangen, Li Lanqing, Wu bang Guo
	Hu	5	Li Yuanchao, Liu Yandong, Li Yuanchao, Wang Zhaoguo, Wang Yang
	Xi	2(6)	Li Zhanshu, Zhao Leji, <i>Liu Yandong, Li Yuanchao, Li Jianguo, Ma Kai</i>
CMC	Jiang	0	
	Hu	0	
	Xi	4(5)	Fang Fenghui, Ma Xiaotian, <i>Wu Shengli</i> , Zhang Youxia, Zhao Keshi
Military	Jiang	2	Zhou Keyu, Zhu Dunfa
	Hu	3	Li Changcai, Sun Dafa, Dong Guishan
	Xi	4(9)	Cai YingTing, Liu Chengjun, Wang Jiaocheng, Wu Changde, <i>Liu Yazhou, Liu Xiaojiang, Liu Yuejun, Liu Yuan, Zhang Haiyang</i>
State	Jiang	12	Deng Hongxun, He Chunlin, He Guangyuan, Huang Zhendong, Liu Jianfeng, Lv Peijian, Luo gan, Qian Qichen, Shao Qihui, Tao Siju, Wu Wenying, Yuan weimin, Zou jiahua
	Hu	8	Han Changfu, Huang Jianmin, Li Haifeng, Li Xueju, Liu binjie, Zhou Ji, Li Changjiang, Liu Peng
	Xi	6(9)	Bai Chunli, Han Changfu, Lou Jiwei, Wang Xia, Xie Zhenhua, Zhou Ji, <i>Zhang Mao, Wang Guangya, Wang Yi</i>
Party	Jiang	4	Chen Muhua, Jiang Minkuan, Lv Feng, Zhu Xun
	Hu	5	Cai Wu, Li Congju, Ling Jihua, Wang Shengjun, Zhou Qiang
	Xi	2	Chen Xi, He Yiting
Province	Jiang	12	Chen Huanyou, Chen Yuying, Cheng Weigao, He Zhukang, Huang Ju, Huang Huang, Jia Qinlin, Jiang Zhuping, Ruan Chongwu, Shen Daren, Wang Maolin, Ye Liansong

		Chu Bo, Hu Chunhua, Jiang Daming, Lie que, Liu Qibao, Tian Chengping,
Hu	12	Wang Mi, Yang Chonghui, Yuan Chunqing, Zhang Baoshun, Zhang Ping, Zhang Qingli
Xi	6	Bayin Chaolu, Chen Miner, Huang Xingguo, Lu Zhangong, Xia Baolong, Zhang Guoqing

Note: *is the number of faction ties within each system of the CC. The numbers in the brackets include potential princeling connections. Princeling names are in bold italics.

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