

State Mobilization and Political Attitudes: The Legacy of Maoist Rural Resettlement in Contemporary China

Alexander Lee* Weihong Qi † Dehua Sun ‡,§

November 18, 2021

Abstract

What are the effects of campaigns of coercive social mobilization on political attitudes? We show that such policies can strengthen authoritarian regimes by altering citizen's identities and patterns of trust. Between 1968 and 1978, 16 to 17 million Chinese teenagers were "sent-down" to labor in rural areas, where they lived without their families under difficult conditions. Using a regression discontinuity design, we show that former sent-down students are more critical of local government performance than others, but less critical of the national government and more supportive of the regime in general. We see no significant differences in political participation, though there is some suggestive evidence that the sent-down students are more likely to favor officially sanctioned political activities. These results appear to stem from specific cognitive consequences of the sent-down experience, which encouraged increased trust in strangers and reduced trust in family while encouraging identification with the nation over the locality.

*Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Rochester, Harkness Hall, Rochester, NY 14627. Email: alexander.mark.lee@rochester.edu.

†PhD student in Political Science, University of Rochester, Harkness Hall, Rochester, NY 14627. Email: wqi3@ur.rochester.edu.

‡PhD student in Political Science, University of Rochester, Harkness Hall, Rochester, NY 14627. Email: dsun6@ur.rochester.edu.

§We thank Jack Paine, Anderson Frey, Mayya Komisarchik, Yuhua Wang, Dali Yang, Xiaojun Li, and seminar participants at the University of Rochester, Peking University, the Midwestern Political Science Association annual meeting, and the China Workshop for valuable comments.

1 Introduction

States, particularly authoritarian ones, are often dissatisfied with their capacity to control and tax the population (Migdal, 1988; Lee and Zhang, 2017). State capacity, however, is usually thought of as particularly difficult to change without major events like wars (Dincecco and Prado, 2012; Queralt, 2019), being shaped by long-ago historical events (Dell, Lane and Querubin, 2015; Lee, 2019; Brambor et al., 2020) and the interests of elites (Suryanarayan and White, 2021; Mazumder and Wang, 2020). Some states seek to enhance their control over their citizens through sustained campaigns of coercion and institutional change. Often, state control is enhanced by moving citizens away from their homes. The Soviet Union resettled millions of Ukrainians, Balts, Tartars and Chechens (Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov, 2017; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017), the Polish communist government resettled millions of Poles and Ukrainians (Charnysh and Peisakhin, 2021), and the Tanzanian government resettled millions of villagers in planned “developmental” villages (Silwal, 2015). However, such campaigns can also involve intensive surveillance, enhanced regime control over economic resources, and programs of ideological indoctrination.

The planners that implemented these policies thought that they would strengthen the regimes they served through some combination of intimidation and ideological reeducation. However, in the long run coercive mobilization policies might well weaken regime support by increasing levels of grievance against the regime (Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017). Indeed, the literature on authoritarian repression has found that coercion leads to short-term demobilization and long-term alienation (Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov, 2017; Rozenas and Zhukov, 2019; Wang, 2019; Balcells, 2012).

One of the largest programs of political mobilization in human history was the “Sent-down Movement” (上山下乡) in Maoist China. As a result of this policy, 16 to 17 million teenagers were displaced from cities to the countryside between 1968 and 1978 (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou and Hou, 1999). The movement was officially framed as a way to reeducate potentially elitist urban youth in Maoist ideology while using their labor and skills to develop rural areas. During the time of the Sent-down Movement, the resettled students were not free to leave, and lived under difficult conditions in the

countryside. Such conditions might be expected to foster hostility to the regime, and in fact a substantial “scar literature” has grown up around the trauma of the sent-down experience.

However, this paper suggests that even coercive programs of authoritarian mobilization can have positive effects on regime legitimacy when they are able to give the regime control over the socialization of young adults for an extended period of time. On average the Sent-down Movement, far from creating grievances or discouraging participation, led those involved to become *more* enthusiastic supporters of the regime, and more likely to blame its failures on local officials rather than institutions. By altering patterns of trust and identity, the program made participants more open to the regime’s narrative even as they became more skeptical of its day-to-day workings.

To examine the effects of the sent-down policy, we use data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), supplemented by data from the 2008 China Survey. Since assignment to being sent down was not random, we use a fuzzy regression discontinuity design that takes advantage of the fact that only those who had completed middle school were eligible to be sent-down, and that the sending of students ended suddenly following the fall of the Gang of Four faction in 1978. Our main models compare students who were graduated middle school before October 1978 were “barely” eligible to be sent down and those who graduated later and were “barely” ineligible. We present evidence that our results are related to the sent-down policy, rather than other time-varying policies and events during the Cultural Revolution period, or bias in survey responses.

The results show that being sent-down influences subsequent political attitudes. Former sent-down students are less likely than others to believe corruption and other social issues are major problems and to perceive restrictions on civil liberties as problematic. While they are less likely than other Chinese to approve of local government, they are more likely to approve of the national government. While the relationship between political attitudes and political participation in China is complex due to the narrow range of political activities sanctioned by the state, there is some suggestive evidence that the sent-down are more likely to participate in state sponsored activities (local elections and the Communist Party) and less likely to participate in unsponsored activities (demonstrations, petitions, and community groups).

This mixed pattern of political engagement can be traced to two attitudinal differences between the two groups that are directly traceable to the sent-down experience. The sent-down tend to be less trusting of their immediate families (with whom they spent much less time than the untreated group in their youth) and more trusting of strangers and the government. As befits a group that was internally displaced, the sent-down are more likely to identify with the nation than the province and with the city than the province, a potential explanation for the perception gap between the local and national officials.

Our findings shed light on some superficially contradictory patterns of political behavior in China. On the one hand, ordinary Chinese are often highly critical of local government officials, are aware of the existence of social problems, and are willing to discuss these problems, at least in private (Lei, 2019; Lü, 2014; Whyte, 2010). On the other hand, the same citizens can be vocally enthusiastic about national leaders and the broad principles of the single party regime, participate in the political institutions of the regime, and avoid unofficial collective action (Li, 2016; Tang, 2016). While some of these patterns can be explained by regime control of political information or fear of repression (Chen, Pan and Xu, 2016; King, Pan and Roberts, 2013), they appear to be in part a reflection of deep-seated attitudes (O'Brien and Li, 2006)

This paper also contributes to the literature on the legacy of Maoist policies in China (Deng and Treiman, 1997; Harmel and Yeh, 2016; Walder, 2015; Zhou and Hou, 1999). In particular, we find that the more subtle and sustained experience of being sent down had a very different effect than more violent and episodic political violence studied by Wang (2019). The paper is also closely related to the large body of literature in economic effects of the Sent-down Movement (Chen et al., 2020; Li, Rosenzweig and Zhang, 2010; Wang and Zhou, 2017; Xie, Jiang and Greenman, 2008), but advances by focusing on its political and attitudinal effects of the policy.

Our results suggest that the relative success of the Chinese regime in cultivating popular support is in part because of the policies of the Maoist regime rather than in spite of them, since these policies a generation willing to leave politics to the party, skeptical of collective action and receptive to central attempts to blame failures on local officials. Even highly coercive policies of state mobilization can, at least in the medium

term, lead to increased reliance on the forces that created them rather than resistance.

2 Coercive Mobilization and Public Opinion

2.1 What are the Effects of Coercive Mobilization?

States seek to control the lives of citizens, so that they will pay taxes and cooperate with the regime's policy objectives. There is enormous variation in the ability of states to do this (Lee and Zhang, 2017; Brambor et al., 2020; Dell, Lane and Querubin, 2015; Lee, 2019) in part due to the presence of non-state actors who compete with the state for political and social authority (Migdal, 1988) and seek to undermine state capacity when the state's goals do not align with theirs (Suryanarayan and White, 2021; Mazumder and Wang, 2020). While critical junctures such as war and conquest are thought to provide opportunities to disrupt local networks for authority and increase state capacity (Dincecco and Prado, 2012; Queralt, 2019), states may prefer to create such junctures themselves by breaking entrenched local networks through the intensive application of coercion. Often, such campaigns involve the mass resettlement of citizens, which tends to break up local networks and place the relocated citizens under more intensive regime control (Silwal, 2015; Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov, 2017; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017).¹

What is the effect of these programs on the resettled? Lupu and Peisakhin (2017) find that the violence and social dislocation inseparable from mass resettlement have led the resettled (in this case, Crimean Tartars) and their descendants to be more hostile towards the government that dispatched them. This finding builds on the large body of literature on the effects of repression and violence, which are widely thought to have profound effects on the victim's psychology, overall social structure, and patterns of political participation. On this last point, the debate has generally been between those who emphasize the demobilizing effects of repression (Komisarchik, Sen and Velez, 2019; Zhukov and Talibova, 2018) and those emphasizing its tendency to encourage grievances against the regime (Wang, 2019; Balcells, 2012). Both of these mechanisms are fairly intuitive. Those who suffer at the regime's hands will have anger against it, and be wary

¹Resettlement may also provide strategic benefits to states by changing the population of border areas (McNamee and Zhang, 2019; Charnysh and Peisakhin, 2021).

of challenging it in the future—in fact they may be wary of the efficacy of a wide range of activities after such a profound experience of personal powerlessness (Rozenas and Zhukov, 2019).

2.2 Coercive Mobilization and Social Control

Coercive mobilization can also change the cognitive framework of individuals—how they view themselves and the world. To the extent the regime has control of these changes, it can create citizens sympathetic to its goals and responsive to its propaganda. In many cases, such mass ideological refashioning was a major goal of the coercive state mobilization in the first place, and older accounts of “totalitarian” regimes claimed that this mechanism tended to dominate (Arendt, 1951). Certainly, there does seem to be a first order correlation between state capacity and political trust (Hutchison and Johnson, 2011).

We suggest two ways in which coercive state mobilization might lead to higher levels of support for the regime. The first of these is *trust*. Typically, repression is thought of as reducing trust in the regime (Desposato, Wang and Wu, 2020). What could be a better demonstration of lack of trustworthiness than wounding or forcibly resettling someone? However, families, religious groups and friend networks all serve as alternative focuses of loyalty to the state. If the state could isolate citizens from these alternatives or discredit them, particularly at a formative age, they will be incapable of trusting their friends and families as fully as they would otherwise, and might turn to the state as an alternative, even if an imperfect one. The state, in this conception, gains trust not by becoming more trustworthy, but by eliminating all alternative objects of trust and relying on the human desire to trust something. In authoritarian regimes which have been more successful in eliminating non-regime social institutions, such as North Korea, identification of the regime and leader with family and society is reported to be very high (Lankov, 2014).

Trust in the regime might also interact with the increased consumption of regime propaganda that regimes can force on the resettled once they are separated from their normal environment. While those skeptical of the regime might be able to tune out

propaganda, those who trust the regime will be likely to regard it as trustworthy and ignore other sources of social information. This may predispose them to interpret negative events through the interpretive frames preferred by the regime (as minor, unavoidable imperfections) rather than as evidence for the problematic nature of the regime.

The second factor is *identity*. Many regimes, even democratic ones, seek to encourage citizens to identify with the nation rather than subnational identities through policies such as universal education and military conscription (Weber, 1976). Authoritarian regimes pursue this program even more doggedly, given the political danger of substate identities. Resettlement, by moving citizens to unfamiliar regions, is frequently designed to encourage loyalty to the nation rather than the locality. To the extent that the regime is able to identify itself with the nation, it may benefit from any such shift in loyalties. For instance, Tanzania's program of compulsory villagization and education is often thought to have refocused the loyalty of Tanzanians from the tribe to the nation, leading to the long-term entrenchment of the "nationalist" ruling party and the marginalization of ethnic competitor parties (Miguel, 2004).

The relationship between attitudes toward the regime and political participation is complex, due to the use of coercion by most authoritarian regimes. When extreme costs are imposed on those who overtly oppose the regime, only those with very extreme anti-regime beliefs will be tempted to do so (Kuran, 1991). Conversely, the regime may use both rewards and punishments to encourage participation in its own institutions and activities, meaning that even regime opponents will participate in some of them. While attitudes and participation are thus correlated in authoritarian regimes, the relationship is much less marked than in democracies. We thus expect the relationship between resettlement and participation should be more complex and context-dependent than the relationship between repression and participation.

3 Historical Background

3.1 The Sent-down Movement

In 1966, Mao Zedong and his close supporters, the “Gang of Four,” launched the Cultural Revolution, which was designed to mobilize the “revolutionary masses” (students, workers and peasants) against a bureaucratic establishment viewed as being insufficiently radical and overly independent of Mao. Student supporters of the Cultural Revolution were organized as Red Guards (Walder, O’Leary et al., 2009), and these students played a key role in the violence and instability of the period. All schools were shut down between 1966 and 1968, while college entrance exams were canceled between 1966 and 1977. However, urban high school and university students were also viewed as a privileged group relative to workers and peasants, and potentially in need of revolutionary education to counteract incipient elitism. Indeed, many Maoist purists saw the existence of a group of highly educated urbanites as a threat to the egalitarian goals of the revolution.

The term “Sent-down Movement” is short for the “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages Movement” and a policy of forcibly relocating young well-educated people to work in the countryside between 1968 to 1978. Before 1968, the program was a limited and voluntary, descending from earlier Soviet and Chinese rural resettlement programs (Bernstein, 1977; Zhou and Hou, 1999). However, the Cultural Revolution led to a vast expansion of the program’s scope and profile, with Mao proclaiming that “it is necessary for the educated youth to go to the countryside, and be re-educated by the poor peasants. We need to persuade cadres and others in urban areas to send their children who graduated from junior high, senior high, and college to rural areas.” From 1968 to 1978 more than 16 million urban youths, who were named *zhiqing* (well-educated youth), went to the countryside through the program. In theory, all junior high school graduates were eligible to the movement, but only one third of the youths were actually sent-down to the countryside, with the others serving in the military or an urban work unit.

In its expansive period, the Sent-down Movement used both persuasion and coer-

cion to recruit *zhiqing*, the youths to be sent-down to villages. Due to the political ferment of the Cultural Revolution era, many young people were enthusiastic about the program's goals, while others were anxious to demonstrate their political loyalty to Mao and the Communist Party. However, when there were insufficient volunteers, local government's conscripted eligible youths. Both in the initial conscription and in the subsequent administration of exemptions, alternatives and punishments, those with "bad" (anti-communist) family backgrounds were more vulnerable to be sent-down (Gee, 2011; Rene, 2013), as well those without a sibling already in the countryside (Zhang, Liu and Yung, 2007). Relative to other political movements of the period, the Sent-down Movement thus influenced a large subset of urban families with a wide variety of views of the regime (Li, Rosenzweig and Zhang, 2010).

The eligibility procedures for being forcibly sent-down were complex and inconsistently enforced, but one thread remained consistent: students were not forcibly sent down until they graduated from middle school, the age at which formal education ended during most of the Cultural Revolution period. Mao's exhortation covered only these students, since those without this qualification were not "well-educated youth" (Bernstein, 1977). Middle school school usually occurred around the age of 15, but the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution period meant some variation in the age of graduates. While in the countryside, the sent-down were generally not able to attend high school or university, except for a tiny number recommended as "worker-peasant-soldier college students."

The Sent-down Movement declined gradually after the death of Mao in September 1976, and then ended abruptly after the political disgrace of the Gang of Four in October 1978. In 1978, the National Sent-down Movement Conference officially determined to end the program and send existing *zhiqing* back to urban areas and arrange jobs for them. However, it took several years for all the *zhiqing* to be able to go home. Deng Xiaoping, a leading figure in the policy reversal, remarked that "The nation spent thirty trillion yuan to buy three unsatisfactory things: *zhiqing* are unsatisfied, parents are unsatisfied, and peasants are unsatisfied." The Communist Party was thus both the force that sent students to the country and the force that took them back. The ambivalence can be seen in the disturbances in Yunnan in 1978, where *zhiqing* anxious to be sent home rioted

against the policies of the local government while proclaiming their support for Deng (Zhou, 2010).

3.2 Experiences in the Country

During the Sent-down Movement, most of the youths being sent-down were rusticated within their home provinces, while many students from biggest cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, were sent to border provinces like Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Yunnan, and Heilongjiang. Most of the zhiqing, from relatively sheltered urban backgrounds, had difficulties adjusting to rural life and dealing with the local officials who controlled their experiences. Many were shocked by the shortage of food and bad living conditions in the countryside, where vegetables and meats were not provided for months and heavy manual labor was required. One zhiqing interviewed in Heiming (2006) recalled that:

Right after their arrival, the 17 or 18-year-olds were following poor peasants up to mountains as labor force. Manual work was heavy, and foods were always in short. To equally allocate limited foods, people distributed food with scales...though the youths still fought with each other only for slightly unequal in weights of a bowl of noodles.

Another interviewed by (Rene, 2013, 139) remarked that

The sent downs who wanted to leave but could not, they were in a permanent state of restlessness...They were waiting aimlessly for any opportunity to get back home [and were burdened with feelings of] hopelessness, sadness, despair and indifference.

Zhiqing often clashed with local officials. Zhiqing were often contemptuous of the cadres who assigned them work, considering them corrupt and unsophisticated (Bernstein, 1977). However, given the pervasive social and economic role of the state and party in this period, “sponsored mobility” through links with cadres was virtually the only road to social and occupational advancement. As the new residents were both

outsiders and considered ideologically inferior to the peasants, zhiqing found cultivating these links difficult, and resorted to charm, bribery, or the giving of sexual favors (Chen and Cheng, 1999).

The zhiqing were cut off from their family and those friends who remained in the city or were displaced to different areas, who they were able to visit only with difficulty. This isolation, combined with the communal housing and feeding and group work, led to intense friendships and bonding among the students. Even though the zhiqing's relations with farmers might not always be amicable, they were not enemies. Exchanges of favors between zhiqing and farmers were common. Zhiqing could trade lightbulbs and medicine that they could get from contacts' cities for food (Bernstein, 1977). One zhiqing recalled that "some peasants might not want us, but on the whole people were friendly, simple, and honest." Another zhiqing recalled that "if not for the warm care of the peasants, I would not have survived" (Pan, 2009).

The zhiqing were exposed to intense indoctrination about the value of their work in the countryside, the goals of the Communist Party and the personal example of Chairman Mao, reinforced through mandatory political meetings. Even students who were skeptical of this narrative were forced into conformity for fear of criticism by peers at "struggle sessions," where those suspected of "reactionary" or selfish attitudes were beaten or humiliated by their peers. However, this idealistic propaganda clashed with the obviously deep-seated nature of poverty in the villages, and the waste that occurred in many zhiqing labor projects.

Since the 1970s, the Sent-down experience has become cloaked in nostalgia for many participants (Prusik and Lewicka, 2016; Oba et al., 2016). One survey of long-term zhiqing cohorts shows that while they acknowledged mistreatment at the time, the most popular assessment was that they gained endurance and improvement, and the second most popular choice was that they blamed it on bad luck (Pan, 2009). Moreover, subsequent scholarly assessment of the movement has often been positive. Consistent with Mao's purpose, there is some evidence that the Sent-down Movement reduced social inequality (Chan, 1985; Alesina et al., 2020), gender inequality (Xie, 1994; Song and Zheng, 2016) and educational inequality (Deng and Treiman, 1997; Alesina et al., 2020) because of the radical wealth redistribution and rearrangement in working and educa-

tional system during the movement. However, despite the high political salience of the policy, the influence of the Sent-down Movement on subsequent political attitudes and participation has not been systematically studied.² In the next section, we will consider what that influence might be.

3.3 Possible Long-term Effects of the Sent-down Experience

The Sent-down Movement had several effects on zhiqing that correspond to those discussed in Section Two. Firstly, the sent-down tend to trust individuals outside the family more. Zhiqing spent their best years in the countryside with other zhiqing, with whom they bonded over their shared background and culture and shared struggles against boredom and material scarcity. Such bonds generated nostalgia, and some zhiqing still pay visits to the countryside where they were sent-down today, and maintain touch with friends that they met there.

Tian Huiguang (Shao, Wang and Zhang, 2014) recalled that

I won't forget the days in the farm. There were over 20 people from different regions living in one room, spending each day together, and taking care of each other. Although zhiqing life was more than 40 years ago, we are still very close with each other. Once we get together today, we still have much to talk about. Under that difficult conditions, we worked together, had meals together, and slept on the same big bed. We are like a family.

At the same time, zhiqing spent virtually no time with their parents and friends in cities during a crucial formative period of their lives. Many of them had no chance of spending holidays at home with families until they were allowed to return to cities after their service in the countryside. The most common way to communicate with

² Shi and Zhang (2020) do analyze the some political effects of the Sent-down Movement, finding that being sent-down reduces voting. While Shi and Zhang did not reply to requests for replication data, we were able to replicate the substance of their key findings by using the same survey dataset. Their results depend upon conducting a regression discontinuity analysis without a bandwidth, where the entire sample is used in the analysis. As we show, models using the more normal practice, conducting the analysis within a narrow bandwidth around the cutoff, give opposite results.

family members was through letters, which frequently expressed their homesickness.³ We should thus expect the zhiqing to have higher levels of trust in strangers and lower levels of trust in family than others. This was in fact the goal of much of the propaganda to which the sent down were exposed, which emphasized the virtues of the party and the collective over the family and individual. This double shift created a wider focus of trust among the sent down.⁴

The issue of the effect of being sent-down on trust in the Communist Party is more complex. On the one hand, the Sent-down Movement tended to pit the zhiqing against local officials. Local and provincial officials were in charge of the day-to-day implementation of this very unpopular policy: forcing individuals to leave the cities, feeding and clothing them in rural areas, and disciplining them if they protested. Given the incompetent way in which the policy was often carried out, this tended to make them the targets of zhiqing anger. Local officials were also, by definition, local, and thus considered the students as outsiders and interlopers in a way that local and provincial officials did not. The national government encouraged this trend by condemning local abuses and stressing the need to hold “local emperors” accountable while praising zhiqing for their bravery, tenacity, and contributions.

At the same time, despite the fact that they were in the countryside as a result of a national policy, zhiqing were often reluctant to condemn the central government—in fact, even zhiqing’s demonstrations demanding to be sent home were extremely respectful of the central government (Pan, 2009). One possible reason for this is cognitive dissonance. Students were naturally unwilling to admit that their labor and conditions were meaningless, and thus would often cling to the intensive indoctrination of the period, which emphasized the wisdom of the party and Mao. One ex-student quoted by (Rene, 2013, 20) recalled the “total unflinching blind trust people placed in Mao...who was given a status close to, if not god himself.”

Moreover, the very act of traveling to a distant province might tend to strengthen the “national” identification of students, since they were manifestly not local to the areas

³A digital collection of letters is available at Dartmouth College Library <https://www.dartmouth.edu/library/digital/collections/manuscripts/rusticated-youth/>

⁴Note that contemporary China is usually thought to be a society with relatively high levels of trust in a cross-national context (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser, 2016).

they were sent to and yet were very far from their areas of origin. Finally, the national government at times intervened in favor of the zhiqing, giving out reimbursements for resettlement expenses, receiving petitions against local officials, and, finally, allowing all the zhiqing to go home after Mao's death.

We thus expect the sent-down to have divergent attitudes towards the local and national governments, disparaging the local while supporting the national. Such divergence is still very common in China, where the national government is much more popular than local government. (Chen, 2004; Li, 2004, 2016; Saich, 2007; Shi, 2001; Wu and Wilkes, 2018). Today, the Chinese national media appears to encourage this divergence, covering the failings of local officials in a way they would not do for national officials (Cai, 2008; Lee, 1994; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011).

Interestingly, some zhiqing recall that they had much higher levels of trust, prosocial behavior and Maoist ideology than the peasants who were supposed to be reeducating them.

Many [peasant] families had long-term feuds and they wouldn't trust each other to be the bookkeeper...But zhiqing were removed from these kinship relations so they were neutral and the peasants wanted the zhiqing to do the accounting...The local bureaucrats and the village cadres really liked zhiqing because they were idealistic and enthusiastic...In the morning, the team leader always had to ring the well multiple times and the peasants would act like they didn't even hear it and delay showing up, but the zhiqing were motivated and eager. (Quoted in Rene (2013, 138))

Figure 1 provides a summary of our theoretical expectations. We expect that the sent-down experience should influence political attitudes through a variety of channels, but that all these mechanisms should lead to higher levels of regime approval among the sent-down, though we may see the opposite effect for local officials.

The relationship between being sent-down and political *participation* is more ambiguous. Intuitively, we should expect citizens who approve of the regime to be more likely to participate in those political activities favored by the regime (the Communist Party, official local elections etc.) and less likely to become involved in activities disfa-

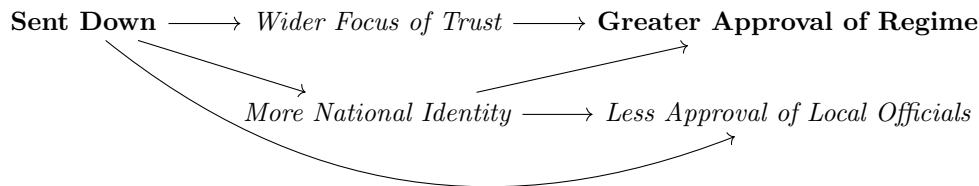


Figure 1: Theoretical Expectations

vored by the regime such as protests and unofficial community groups. However, this relationship is confounded by official policy. The party grants material rewards to those who engage in officially favored activities and sometimes sanctions those who engage in unofficial activities. In consequence, many people with only a weak affection for the regime are party members, and even people with decided pro-regime views do not engage in protests. We should thus expect the relationship between being sent-down and pro-regime political participation, while positive, to be weaker than that for political attitudes.

4 Data and Research Design

4.1 The Regression Discontinuity Design

Since selection into being sent-down was non-random, a naive estimate of the influence of being sent-down on subsequent political participation and attitudes will likely be biased. In particular, since the qualitative evidence suggests that the politically active and those hostile to the regime were more likely to be sent-down than others, we might expect estimates of the effect of the experience on participation and regime hostility to be biased upwards.⁵

An alternative approach would be to look at *eligibility* for the sent-down program, rather than participation itself, comparing those schooling cohorts whose members were eligible to be sent-down to those who were too young or too old. However, not only

⁵The equation for the naive OLS model, used in some supplemental tests, is $Y_i = \alpha + \beta \times SentDown_i + \gamma X_i + \epsilon_i$, where Y_i is the outcome variables in political attitudes and participation of interest of individual i , $SentDown_i$ is the binary variable of whether the individual was sent-down, X_i represents the set of pre-determined covariates, and ϵ_i is the error term.

would these comparisons return an attenuated estimate of the effect of being sent-down (since many non-zhiqing would be included in the “treatment” group), but they would be biased by many other policy changes during the Cultural Revolution period that differentially effected specific age cohorts during this politically tumultuous period. The most important of these was the shutdown of the high school and university system during the Cultural Revolution, beginning in 1966 and continuing until 1976. The sent-down cohorts were thus, in general, much less educated than the age cohorts before and after them, even among those who were not resettled, though the last two age cohorts eligible for the program, those who graduated from junior high school in 1975 and 1976, were able (if they remained in the cities) to complete their high school education and enter university through the newly restarted university examination system, just like subsequent age cohorts.

To deal with the selection problem, we use a fuzzy regression discontinuity (RD) design based on age cohort. We take advantage of the sudden end of the movement determined by the Communist Party in October, 1978, which created a discontinuous drop (to nearly zero) in probability of being sent down. Since only middle school graduates were eligible to be sent-down, middle school graduation year determines whether students were eligible to be sent down, as the running variable. We are thus comparing individuals who differ in age by only a few years—those who were “barely” eligible to be sent down and those who were barely ineligible. Both the treatment and control groups would have vivid memories of the Cultural Revolution, and there are only small differences in the age at which they experienced these events.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of urban youth within a given graduating year who were sent down, taken from the 2010 China Family Panel Survey (CFPS). The percentage of junior high school graduates to be sent-down dropped significantly after the National Sent-down Movement Conference in 1979, from mostly above 20% to nearly 0. Individuals who graduated from junior high school in 1978 were thus the last urban youth to be sent-down in any numbers. Figure A.1 shows that even these individuals spent a long period of time in the countryside (3.9 years) due to the slow dismantlement of the program.

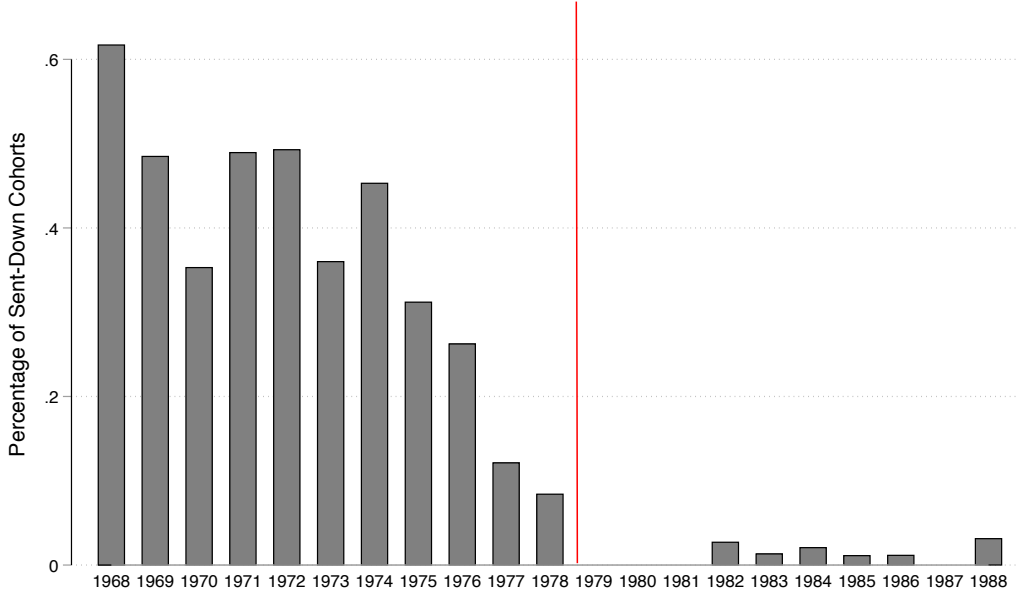


Figure 2: Drop in the Probability of being Sent-down after the Official End of the Movement

Figure 2 makes it clear that there was a discontinuous change in the probability of being sent-down in 1978. The fuzzy regression discontinuity design uses a two-stage least squares (2SLS) (Hahn, Todd and Van der Klaauw, 2001) design, with the first stage being the influence of the cutoff on treatment (in our case, the effect of age cohort on being sent-down) and the second stage regresses the outcomes on the predicted treatment values from the first stage. The model can be written as:

$$Pr(SentDown_i = \mathbf{1}) = \begin{cases} p_0(c_i) & c_i \geq c_0 \\ p_1(c_i) & c_i < c_0 \end{cases}$$

Where c_0 is the cut-off of graduating year, which is 1978. c_i is the running variable, which is graduating year. Since the movement ended following the National Sent-down Conference in 1978, it must be $p_0(c_i) > p_1(c_i)$, which represents the sudden drop in the probability of an individual being sent down.

The first stage regression, which uses a triangular kernel function, is:

$$SentDown_i = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 Eligibility_i + \gamma_1(c_i - c_0) + \theta_1 Eligibility_i(c_i - c_0) + \eta_1 X_i + u_i$$

Where $Eligibility_i = \mathbf{1}(c_i < c_0)$ represents whether the individual was eligible to be sent-down. X_i are control variables, including gender, ethnic minority and family class background. The reduced form RD regression is:

$$Y_i = \alpha_2 + \beta_2 Eligibility_i + \gamma_2(c_i - c_0) + \theta_2 Eligibility_i(c_i - c_0) + \eta_2 X_i + \epsilon_i$$

The estimated coefficient is $\beta_{RD} = \beta_1/\beta_2$. Standard errors are clustered by junior high school graduating year. In most models, we used optimal bandwidths calculated using the procedure described in [Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik \(2014\)](#).

To improve the precision of our estimates, most of the models also include control variables. Given the young age at which people were sent-down, the number of plausible pretreatment controls is limited, but we include gender, membership in a minority ethnic group, and self-reported family “class background.” Models without controls are reported in the appendix, and show virtually identical results.

4.2 Data and Variables

We use two datasets in our research: China Family Panel Study (CFPS) from 2010-2016 ([Institute of Social Science Survey, Peking University, 2015](#)) and the 2008 China Survey.⁶ CFPS is a nationally representative survey launched in 2010 by the Institute of Social Science Survey (ISSS) of Peking University. The survey includes individual, family, and community-level longitudinal data in contemporary China. Most of our attitudinal measures are thermometer scores assessing feelings about particular institutions (on a scale 1 to 5) and the severity of particular social problems (on a scale 0 to 10). Most of the participation measures are binary measures of whether the respondent has recently engaged in some type of activity. Since our independent variable of interest (being sent-down) does not vary over time, we estimate only cross-sectional models. Since the attitude and participation variables are measured in all four survey waves, we use the average of the four years in our models, reducing the influence of year-specific noise in the attitudinal variables. A detailed description of variables is available in Section G of the appendix.

⁶The China Survey is a project of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University, in collaboration with the Research Center for Contemporary China at Peking University.

The disadvantage of the CFPS survey is that it includes a very limited number of questions involving in political issues, and none that measure opinion about the national government or non-state political participation. For this reason, we supplement the CFPS with the 2008 China Survey, implemented by the Research Center for Contemporary China of Peking University. The range of binary participation measures⁷ and thermometer-based attitudinal measures is much broader than in the CFPS, and is supplemented by measures of relative identity (whether respondents identify more with the nation or province etc.) and hypothetical participation (who the respondent would contacts if they had a problem etc.)

However, the 2008 survey has two major shortcomings from our perspective. First, it does not measure whether an individual was ever sent-down, or when they graduated from middle school. We are thus forced to estimate a reduced form, single stage model where being a member of an age cohort that should have spent the normal amount of time in school would have been eligible to be sent-down, rather than being sent-down itself. We believe that this will result in an attenuation of our estimates. Secondly, the sample size in the 2008 survey is much smaller than the CFPS. For these reasons, we report results using the 2008 data only in the appendix.

Since the Sent-down program applied only to urban youths, we confine our sample to those who lived in urban areas as children and who graduated from middle school. Our sample includes all urban graduates born between 1949 and 1994, though most of the RD models are estimated within much narrower bandwidths. Overall, our CFPS sample includes 2110 individuals as valid observations, and the 2008 survey sample includes 432 individuals.

⁷Many of the 2008 survey questions asked how recently a respondent had engaged in an activity, and whether they would do it again. We collapsed this to a binary measure of whether they have every done the activity.

5 Results

5.1 Attitudes

What is the effect of being sent-down on political attitudes? Table 1 reports the results of a set of fuzzy RD estimates of sent-down individuals' attitudes towards the state and society. We only report the second stage estimates here, and the first stage estimates (which show a consistent and positive relationship between graduated by 1978 and being sent-down) are reported in appendix Table A.3. Figure 3 presents the discontinuity of attitude around 1978. Note that both Figure 3 and 4 differ from the tables in showing the raw data, without accounting for the fact that many in the eligible cohorts were not sent-down.

Table 1: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Corruption	Socioeconomic problems	Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.78*** (1.35)	-2.78 (2.57)	-2.17*** (0.48)
Bandwidth	3.6	3.8	3.0
Effective obs. left/right	316/271	316/272	322/276
Observations	1534	1537	1958

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Model 1 examines perception of a directly political measure, average perception of official corruption, scored on an eleven-point scale. Perceived corruption is dramatically lower among the sent-down than the not sent-down, with being sent-down associated with an estimated decrease in perceived corruption of seven points on an eleven-point scale. Model 2 examines the effect of being sent-down on average perception of the severity of a range of socioeconomic problems, including environment, education, unemployment, and social security. The index, like the underlying thermometer scores, has

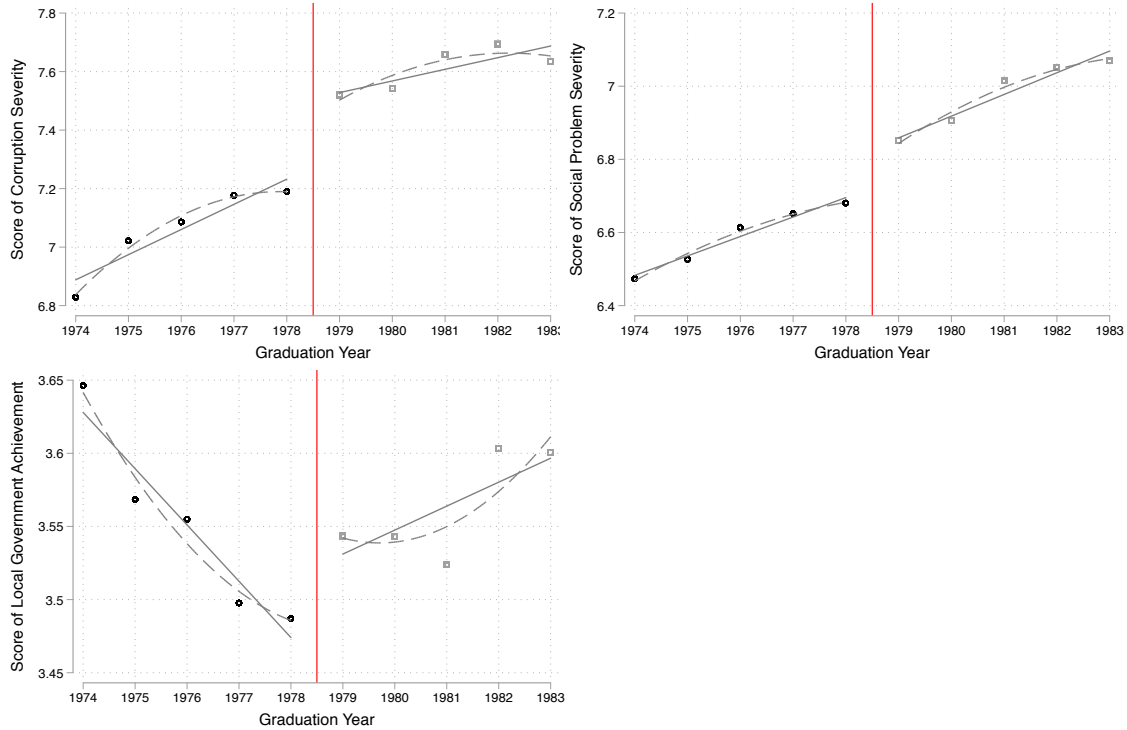


Figure 3: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes

Note: This figure shows the visualized RD results of sent-down experience on individual political attitudes. We take the average score each year to derive the linear and quadratic fit lines.

a minimum of zero and a maximum of 10. Former zhiqing are less likely to see China is suffering from these problems, although the estimate falls just short of statistical significance.

Model 3 reports the effect of being sent-down on average perceived local government achievement, scored on a five-point scale. Former zhiqing rate local government performance much worse than those born shortly afterwards who were not sent-down. The effect is quite large in substantive terms: more than two points on the five-point scale—about 3.2 standard deviations.

In Table A.4, we show additional evidence from the 2008 China Survey on attitudes. Note that the coefficient of interest in these models is the effect of being in a *cohort* that was exposed to the risk of being sent-down, rather than being sent-down itself. The sent-down cohorts are less likely to be concerned about economic problems and violations of democratic values, and they are more likely to be satisfied with existing

policies.

Table B.4 provides evidence for a local-national gap in attitudes towards Communist Party officials. Panel A shows that sent-down cohorts are more likely than others to trust officials, and magnitude decreases from national to local. Panel B shows that sent-down cohorts and others are equally satisfied with central and county governments, but sent-down cohorts are dissatisfied with local governments.

The results paint a clear picture of the effect of being sent-down on attitudes. The sent-down respondents are more likely to approve the regime as a whole and do not see corruption as a major problem, without significantly differing in their perception of socioeconomic problems in general. However, they are more likely to be critical of local government performance. We will discuss the causes of this local-national gap in detail in Section 6.2.

While we have coded sent down as a binary variable, there was considerable variation in the amount of time zhiqing spent in the country. One additional implication of our theory is that the effects we predict should be stronger among the more intensely treated (those who were sent down longer periods). In Appendix Table B.6, we show that individuals who stayed in the countryside longer are more negative about local government. Note, however, that in these OLS models the length of time spent in the country is endogenous to individuals' political traits.

5.2 Participation

Since the sent-down respondents are more likely to approve of the regime, they should be more likely than others to participate in it. This effect, however, is complicated by government policy. The tiny minority that protest against the regime are subject to harassment and imprisonment. Similarly, many who join the Communist Party or express support for it are driven by careerist considerations rather than genuine enthusiasm.

Perhaps as a consequence, the effects of being sent-down on pro-regime participation appear large, positive, and poorly estimated. Model 1 of Table 2 shows the effect of being sent-down on voting in neighborhood community elections. While voting is largely symbolic in urban China, it signals regime support at the local community level, because

there are no opposition candidates. Therefore, those who vote in local elections are more likely to be regime supporters, while abstention is more common. Indeed, sent-down individuals are more likely to vote than other individuals, with the estimated effect being larger than the unit interval. Sent-down individuals are more likely to become party members (Model 2), but the coefficient does not reach statistical significance. There is no difference between the sent-down and not sent-down in their level of self-reported conflicts with local officials.

Table 2: Effects of Sent-down on Participation

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	1.77*** (0.50)	0.86 (0.58)	-0.19 (0.50)
Bandwidth	3.3	4.0	4.0
Effective obs. left/right	206/178	406/348	378/337
Observations	1233	1965	1866

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.5 using the 2008 China Survey, further explores the effect of participation. Panel A shows that the sent-down cohorts are more likely to vote and to become party members, and are no different than other groups on the measure contacting cadres. The most striking results, in Panel B, examine non-official political participation, in particular a measure of whether respondents had taken part in a demonstration, a petition, a community group, and a civic organization. Being in the sent-down cohorts has a statistically significant and negative relationship with all these forms of participation.

5.3 Robustness

In Appendix D, we report several tests of whether our models are sensitive to function form or sample. For the CFPS results, we report results using narrower bandwidths

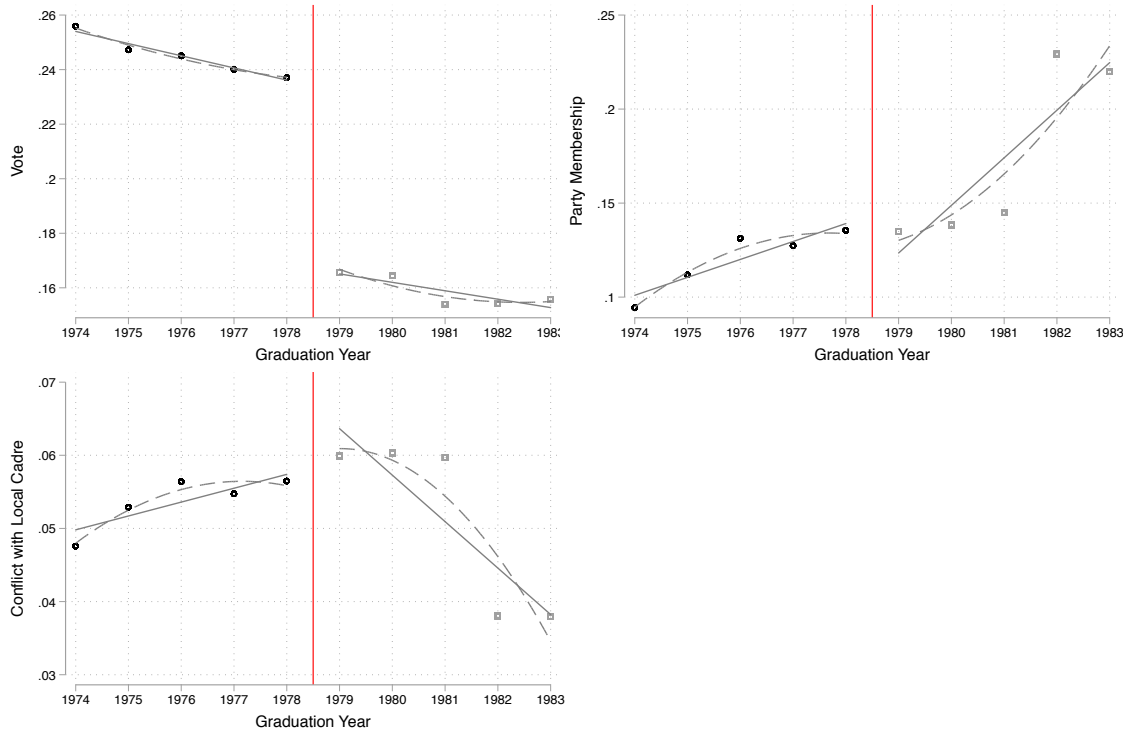


Figure 4: Effects of Sent-down on Participation

Note: This figure shows the visualized RD results of Sent-down experience on individual political participation. We take the average score each year to derive the linear and quadratic fit lines.

(Table D.1-D.3). The key advantage of these narrower bandwidths is that they include only cohorts where all non-sent-down individuals had access to a college education, and thus do not conflate the effects of the Sent-down Movement with school closure. Since the first post Cultural Revolution meritocratic college class began school in 1978 and high school took three years, the last three cohorts exposed to being sent-down (those who graduated junior high school in 1976-8) were not directly affected by the university shutdown.

We report results without pretreatments covariates (Table D.4-D.6), results using local quadratic polynomials rather than local linear ones (Table D.7-D.9), and results using a binary version of the various thermometer measures (Table D.10-D.11). Our results are robust to the choice of model. We perform a list of standard RD design checks and do not find threats to internal validity. We report density tests of the running variable (McCrary, 2008), balance tests of pretreatment covariates, placebo cutoffs, and

placebo outcomes in Appendix E-F.

6 Mechanisms

6.1 Trust

In Section 3, we suggested that the zhiqing are more trusting of those outside of their immediate circle than others of a similar age, and thus more likely to engage in pro-regime activities. Table 3 provides evidence for this mechanism. Sent-down respondents are more likely than others to trust strangers and cadres, but they are less likely than others to trust their parents. In the appendix, we show a consistent and positive relationship between trust in strangers and cadres and attitudes and a consistent and negative relationship between trust in parents and attitudes toward the regime (Table B.2-B.3).

Table 3: Effects of Sent-down on Trust

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	5.50*** (1.44)	12.5*** (1.26)	-4.87*** (1.38)
Bandwidth	3.5	3.2	2.9
Effective obs. left/right	316/273	253/217	254/217
Observations	1538	1536	1536

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results from the 2008 Survey are consistent, with the circle of trust of the sent-down cohorts being larger than for their slightly younger contemporaries. Model 1 of Table B.1 show that the sent-down cohorts are more likely to trust people who they do not personally know and equally likely to trust people who they personally know.

6.2 The Local-National Gap

Why do the sent-down approve of most aspects of the current political order, but disapprove of local officials? Section 3 proposed that zhiqing are more likely to dislike local government officials than national ones, for three reasons. Firstly, since they trust the party more, they are likely to trust official propaganda that blames policy failures on local officials. Secondly, since they often had negative experiences with local officials while being sent-down, they should be more likely to dislike them. Finally, the process of being resettled strengthened their identification with the nation rather than the city or locality.

Tables 3 and B.1 casts some doubt on the first of these mechanisms. Trust in cadres has a very strong positive association with local government trust. Moreover, in the 2008 survey the subsample of people who trust the national government more have lower trust levels than others on average (Table B.5).

The direct experience mechanism is difficult to test directly, since we have no information on the details of particular sent-down experiences. However, one indirect test provides some imperfect evidence for this mechanism. One group of the sent-down especially likely to have a sense of grievance against local officials is those who were detained in the countryside for years after the policy ended by bureaucratic delays, often because of the complicated process of residential registration (Bonnin and Horko, 2013). Table B.6 shows that among the sent-down, those who stayed in the country longer or left the country after 1980 but before the liberalizing reforms of the 1990s are more likely to rate local officials poorly than others.

There is also some evidence that the sent-down identify with the nation rather than the locality. Table B.7 shows that sent-down cohorts are more likely to identify with the nation, to be proud of the country, and to support having a strong government. Table B.8 shows a positive correlation between people who identify with the nation and people who trust the national government.

6.3 Alternative Explanations: Education, Biased Response, and Baselines

Education: We can rule out several plausible alternative explanations for the difference in political attitudes between the sent-down and not sent-down. Most obviously, the sent-down might have lower levels of education and income than others, due to the fact that they spent several years of their youth outside of the educational system and performing unskilled labor with little transferability to other tasks (Angrist and Keueger, 1991). However, even youth who remained in urban areas during the Cultural Revolution had poorer educational and occupational prospects than subsequent generations of Chinese. Our results in Table C.1 show that the negative effect of being sent-down on education is substantial (one level of education), but poorly estimated and statistically insignificant. Intuitively, while it was very difficult for the sent down to become educated, education was provided at very low levels in the China of the mid-1970s even in urban areas.

However, the presence of a small educated group among the not sent-down does not influence the results. In appendix Table D.15-D.18 we show that the results are substantively similar among educated and high income individuals.

Biased Response: Another alternative explanation is that the sent-down, perhaps because of their close experience with regime coercion, are more likely to give insincere responses to surveys for fear of punishment, leading them to give artificially pro-regime responses. Table C.2 provides suggestive evidence that our study does not suffer from this type of political or social desirability bias. According to the assessments of the interviewers, the sent-down respondents appeared to be less concerned about their responses and more reliable when they were answering questions than others. This finding is also consistent with the higher levels of trust in strangers found in the sent-down. Table C.3 shows that the sent-down are often more likely to respond to survey questions. Similarly, if the sent-down fear coercion more than others, they might be more likely to participate in officially encouraged activities even if they dislike the regime. However, Model 3 of Table C.2 reports that sent-down respondents are no more likely than others to report that they were forced to vote in local elections, indicating that their higher levels of participation are not a result of coercion.

Cognitive Baselines: A final alternative explanation is that the zhiqing have a different, and lower, cognitive baseline than those who remained in the cities. After several years of rural poverty and deprivation, they might perceive conditions in urban China as more attractive than those who have never experienced anything else, and be especially likely to view the improvements in living standards of the past three decades as a major achievement of the Communist Party. However, if anything it appears that the zhiqing are more pessimistic and backward-looking. Model 1 of Table C.4 shows that sent-down respondents actually have lower confidence than others for the future. Model 2 shows that sent-down respondents are less happy on average, though the difference is not statistically significant.

7 Conclusion

Mass opinion in China is shaped by private skepticism toward local government, support for national officials and the regime, and the avoidance of unofficial political participation. This paper finds that some of these conflicting patterns can be traced to the Maoist era. Individuals who were sent-down are less likely than those who were slightly too young to be sent-down to view officials as corrupt, but less likely to view local government officials positively, and more likely to approve of the provincial and national government. While the sent-down are unwilling to involve themselves in unofficial political events, they go along with officially sponsored ones such as voting, even as they are somewhat less enthusiastic about local government.

This mix of attitudes can be traced back to their patterns of trust and identity. Sent-down individuals tend to be less trusting of immediate family and friends and more trusting of strangers and officials, which may be related to their very different patterns of social contacts as teenagers. Their particular lack of trust in local government appears to stem from a combination of their negative experiences with local government during the Sent-down Movement and their stronger identification with the nation relative to the locality.

Our findings suggest that coercive state mobilization can be effective not simply by intimidating individuals, but by making them more open to the regime's point of view

and less exposed to competing sources of loyalty like the family. Perhaps because of its combination of its focus on a group (teenagers) very open to changes in cognitive patterns and its ability to isolate this group from other social influences, the Sent-down Movement was able to turn coercion into persuasion. While the Sent-down Movement failed in its goal of eradicating class differences in China, it appears to have had some partial success in its secondary goal of “reeducating” urban youths, in spite of the unpopularity of the program.

The findings also show that the social upheavals of the Maoist era have contributed to the relative quietism of mass behavior in contemporary China. This finding has potential applications to other post-revolutionary societies that engaged in policies of youth conscription and population mobilization. While repression and population movement may breed future resentments in many contexts, the mass mobilization of young people in Maoist China appears to have contributed to the regime’s long-term stability.

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Online Appendix

A Summary Statistics and Additional Results

Table A.1: Summary Statistics

	N	Mean	St. dev.	Min	Max
Sent-down	2110	0.19	0.40	0	1
Graduation year	1992	1977.5	6.48	1962	1998
Male	2110	0.49	0.50	0	1
Ethnic minority	2110	0.027	0.16	0	1
Class background	2081	0.073	0.26	0	1
Corruption	1643	7.22	2.18	0	10
Socioeconomic problems	1648	6.72	1.51	0	10
Local gov. achievement	2102	3.55	0.67	1	5
Local elections voting	1317	0.22	0.42	0	1
Party membership	2110	0.16	0.37	0	1
Conflict	2003	0.11	0.30	0	3
Trust: Strangers	1648	2.00	1.67	0	8
Trust: Cadres	1646	4.13	1.96	0	10
Trust: Parents	1646	9.54	0.99	0	10
Education level	2110	3.79	0.89	1	8
ln(income)	1716	9.57	1.15	0	13.5
Evaluated concern	2110	2.77	1.22	1	7
Evaluated reliability	2110	5.65	0.83	1	7
Forced voting	296	0.43	0.50	0	1
Future confidence	2110	3.60	0.90	1	5
Experienced happiness	2110	3.90	0.92	0.5	5

Table A.2: Summary Statistics (The 2008 Survey)

	N	Mean	St. dev.	Min	Max
Birth year	432	1962.0	8.08	1946	1975
Female	432	0.48	0.50	0	1
Ethnic minority	424	0.075	0.26	0	1
Father's literacy	403	0.76	0.42	0	1
Political problems	408	4.37	2.45	0	10
Socioeconomic problems	432	6.46	1.48	0.4	10
Policy satisfaction	426	3.94	0.90	1	5
Local elections voting	192	0.70	0.46	0	1
Party membership	432	0.18	0.38	0	1
Contacting cadres	404	0.26	0.44	0	1
Demonstration	399	0.030	0.17	0	1
Petition	392	0.087	0.28	0	1
Community group	432	0.12	0.33	0	1
Civic organization	400	0.10	0.31	0	1
Trust: National officials	331	3.17	0.81	1	4
Trust: Provincial officials	312	2.75	0.87	1	4
Trust: Local officials	331	2.59	0.82	1	4
Satisfaction: National gov.	413	7.94	2.20	0	10
Satisfaction: County gov.	402	6.05	2.53	0	10
Satisfaction: Neighborhood gov.	393	5.32	2.79	0	10
Identity: Nation vs. provinces	429	0.81	0.39	0	1
Identity: Provinces vs. cities	421	0.56	0.50	0	1
National pride	415	3.37	0.66	1	4
Strong gov.	375	3.91	0.98	1	5

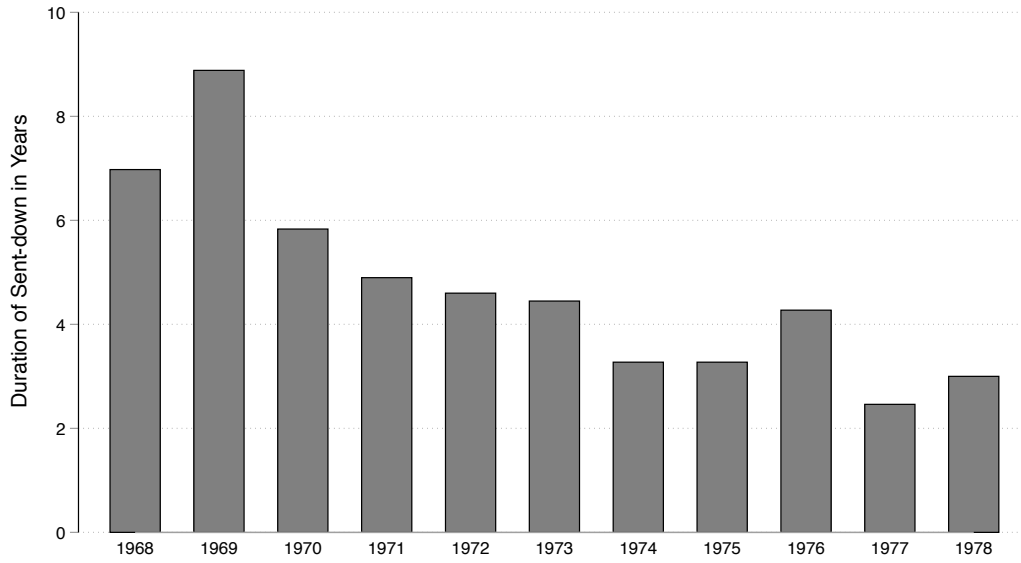


Figure A.1: Duration of the Sent-down Experience

Table A.3: First-stage Estimates

	Coefficients.	Standard errors.
Corruption	-0.053***	0.016
Socioeconomic problems	-0.051***	0.016
Local gov. achievement	-0.051***	0.015
Local elections voting	-0.072***	0.015
Party membership	-0.044***	0.016
Conflict	-0.038***	0.013
Strangers	-0.054***	0.016
Cadres	-0.057***	0.015
Parents	-0.061***	0.015

Note: Treatment status of being sent down is on the left side of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.4: Attitudes (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) Political problems	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Policy satisfaction
Sent-down cohorts	-1.39*** (0.53)	-0.55*** (0.17)	0.79*** (0.12)
Bandwidth	4.4	3.1	4.3
Effective obs. left/right	62/50	50/37	63/50
Observations	375	396	392

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the birth-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and father's literacy controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.5: Participation (The 2008 Survey)

Panel A: <i>Official Participation</i>				
	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Contacting cadres	
Sent-down cohorts	0.21 (0.18)	0.15*** (0.055)	0.034 (0.039)	
Bandwidth	4.5	5.8	4.9	
Effective obs. left/right	27/26	99/85	78/72	
Observations	192	432	404	
Panel B: <i>Non-official Participation</i>				
	(4) Demonstration	(5) Petition	(6) Community group	(7) Civic organization
Sent-down cohorts	-0.17*** (0.055)	-0.085 (0.071)	-0.20*** (0.011)	-0.11*** (0.034)
Bandwidth	5.6	4.6	4.1	4.2
Effective obs. left/right	92/81	73/73	67/57	62/53
Observations	399	392	432	400

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the birth-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and father's literacy controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

B Additional Results of Mechanisms

Table B.1: Trust (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) Unkown	(2) Known
Sent-down cohorts	0.28*** (0.038)	0.042 (0.052)
Bandwidth	4.2	4.9
Effective obs. left/right	61/50	76/68
Observations	386	396

Note: The list of unknown people consists of city dwellers, businessmen, non-locals, farmers, strangers, and foreigners; The list of known people consists of family, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, supervisors, classmates, locals, and friends. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the birth-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and father's literacy controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.2: Trust and Attitudes

Panel A: <i>Corruption</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Strangers	-0.081** (0.036)		
Cadres		-0.33*** (0.031)	
Parents			0.13** (0.056)
R-squared	0.09	0.17	0.09
Observations	1534	1532	1532
Panel B: <i>Socioeconomic problems</i>			
	(4)	(5)	(6)
Strangers	-0.060** (0.024)		
Cadres		-0.22*** (0.021)	
Parents			0.074* (0.039)
R-squared	0.12	0.19	0.12
Observations	1537	1535	1535
Panel C: <i>Local gov. achievement</i>			
	(7)	(8)	(9)
Strangers	0.040*** (0.0069)		
Cadres		0.12*** (0.0065)	
Parents			0.028 (0.020)
R-squared	0.09	0.21	0.08
Observations	1537	1535	1535
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. Control variables are gender, ethnic minority, and class background. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.3: Trust and Participation

Panel A: <i>Local elections voting</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Strangers	0.0070 (0.0070)		
Cadres		0.030*** (0.0062)	
Parents			0.019* (0.011)
R-squared	0.15	0.16	0.15
Observations	1233	1233	1233
Panel B: <i>Party membership</i>			
	(4)	(5)	(6)
Strangers	0.018*** (0.0050)		
Cadres		0.023*** (0.0044)	
Parents			0.023** (0.0086)
R-squared	0.10	0.10	0.10
Observations	1538	1536	1536
Panel C: <i>Conflict</i>			
	(7)	(8)	(9)
Strangers	0.0044 (0.0034)		
Cadres		-0.016*** (0.0034)	
Parents			-0.018** (0.0084)
R-squared	0.05	0.06	0.05
Observations	1538	1536	1536
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. Control variables are gender, ethnic minority, and class background. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.4: The Local-National Gap (The 2008 Survey)

Panel A: <i>Trust</i>			
	(1) National officials	(2) Provincial officials	(3) Local officials
Sent-down cohorts	0.70*** (0.18)	0.82*** (0.096)	0.48*** (0.14)
Bandwidth	4.6	4.2	4.1
Effective obs. left/right	54/55	44/35	48/37
Observations	300	285	301
Panel B: <i>Satisfaction</i>			
	(4) National gov.	(5) County gov.	(6) Neighborhood gov.
Sent-down cohorts	-0.079 (0.39)	0.11 (0.31)	-0.83* (0.49)
Bandwidth	5.1	3.8	4.2
Effective obs. left/right	73/65	57/48	59/48
Observations	380	369	362

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the birth-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and father's literacy controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.5: Patterns of Trust Between Nationalists and Nonnationalists (The 2008 Survey)

	Nationalists - Nonnationalists	St. err.	N
Unknown people	-0.12	0.055	310
Known people	-0.083	0.043	310

Table B.6: Attitudes Among the Sent-down

	Local gov. achievement	
	(1)	(2)
Duration	-0.015** (0.0071)	
Late return		-0.23** (0.099)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.07	0.07
Observations	1956	1958

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. Control variables are gender, ethnic minority, and class background. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.7: Identity (The 2008 Survey)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Nation vs. prov.	Prov. vs. cities	National pride	Strong gov.
Sent-down cohorts	0.069** (0.033)	-0.14* (0.084)	0.55*** (0.11)	0.55*** (0.095)
Bandwidth	3.9	3.1	4.7	3.1
Effective obs. left/right	63/51	50/37	71/65	43/33
Observations	393	388	381	348

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the birth-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and father's literacy controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.8: National Identity and Trust (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) Trust in the national gov.
National identity	0.27 (0.16)
Controls	Yes
Birth-year FE	Yes
Province FE	Yes
R-squared	0.26
Observations	297

Note: Standard error in parenthesis is clustered at the birth-year level. Control variables are gender, ethnic minority, and father's literacy. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

C Alternative Mechanisms

Table C.1: Effects of Sent-down on Education and Income

	(1) Education level	(2) ln(income)
Sent-down	-0.57 (1.81)	19.3 (43.8)
Bandwidth	3.6	4.8
Effective obs. left/right	406/348	418/393
Observations	1965	1602

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table C.2: Effects of Sent-down on Biased Response

	(1) Evaluated concern	(2) Evaluated reliability	(3) Forced voting
Sent-down	-5.84*** (0.94)	2.66*** (0.89)	11.5 (22.9)
Bandwidth	3.3	2.9	5.7
Effective obs. left/right	322/277	322/277	88/58
Observations	1965	1965	275

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table C.3: Likelihood of No Response

	(1) Corruption	(2) Local gov. achievement	(3) Local elections voting
Sent-down	-2.06** (1.04)	0.062 (0.045)	-0.75** (0.36)
Bandwidth	3.7	3.1	3.8
Effective obs. left/right	406/348	322/277	406/348
Observations	1965	1965	1965

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table C.4: Effects of Sent-down on Baselines

	(1) Future confidence	(2) Experienced happiness
Sent-down	-1.96** (0.89)	-1.09 (1.57)
Bandwidth	3.4	4.6
Effective obs. left/right	322/277	509/423
Observations	1965	1965

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

D Different Specifications

Table D.1: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (3-year Bandwidth)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Corruption	Socioeconomic problems	Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-8.01*** (0.90)	-1.55 (1.78)	-2.17*** (0.53)
Effective obs left/right	257/218	254/216	322/276
Observations	1555	1537	1958

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and 3-year bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.2: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (3-year Bandwidth)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Local elections voting	Party membership	Conflict
Sent-down	1.62*** (0.48)	0.31* (0.16)	-0.066 (0.37)
Effective obs left/right	206/178	322/277	300/267
Observations	1233	1965	1866

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and 3-year bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.3: Effects of Sent-down on Trust (3-year Bandwidth)

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	5.02*** (1.22)	12.3*** (1.21)	-4.92*** (1.57)
Effective obs left/right	254/217	253/217	254/217
Observations	1538	1536	1536

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and 3-year bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.4: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (Without Covariates)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.41*** (1.63)	-3.48 (2.25)	-2.67*** (0.62)
Bandwidth	3.7	3.7	3.1
Effective obs. left/right	319/275	319/276	325/280
Observations	1555	1558	1984

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.5: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (Without Covariates)

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	1.56*** (0.46)	0.64** (0.32)	-0.22 (0.56)
Bandwidth	3.3	3.7	4.3
Effective obs. left/right	207/179	409/353	381/342
Observations	1243	1992	1891

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.6: Effects of Sent-down on Trust (Without Covariates)

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	3.57*** (0.58)	11.2*** (0.95)	-5.84*** (1.32)
Bandwidth	3.5	3.4	3.0
Effective obs. left/right	257/220	256/220	257/220
Observations	1559	1557	1557

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.7: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (Quadratic Polynomials)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-8.89*** (0.96)	0.055 (1.44)	-2.91*** (0.99)
Bandwidth	4.4	4.5	4.5
Effective obs. left/right	316/271	316/272	406/347
Observations	1534	1537	1958

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use local quadratic regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.8: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (Quadratic Polynomials)

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	1.74*** (0.57)	-0.42 (0.31)	0.065 (0.34)
Bandwidth	5.3	4.4	4.7
Effective obs. left/right	311/265	406/348	476/409
Observations	1233	1965	1866

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use local quadratic regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.9: Effects of Sent-down on Trust (Quadratic Polynomials)

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	5.08*** (1.20)	11.9*** (1.73)	-4.63*** (1.07)
Bandwidth	4.5	4.4	4.5
Effective obs. left/right	398/333	315/273	398/333
Observations	1538	1536	1536

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.10: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (Binary)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-2.87*** (0.90)	-0.13 (0.41)	-1.80 (1.14)
Bandwidth	3.2	3.7	3.5
Effective obs. left/right	254/215	316/272	406/347
Observations	1534	1537	1958

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.11: Effects of Sent-down on Trust (Binary)

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	2.26*** (0.38)	3.61*** (0.43)	-1.04*** (0.21)
Bandwidth	3.6	3.1	3.5
Effective obs. left/right	316/273	253/217	254/217
Observations	1538	1536	1536

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.12: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (High School and Above)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Corruption	Socioeconomic problems	Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.58*** (1.53)	-8.78* (5.16)	-7.11 (25.4)
Bandwidth	3.2	3.6	4.1
Effective obs. left/right	154/116	192/156	249/198
Observations	871	873	1116

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.13: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (High School and Above)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Local elections voting	Party membership	Conflict
Sent-down	5.33 (3.95)	0.88*** (0.18)	-7.40 (9.75)
Bandwidth	3.7	3.1	3.8
Effective obs. left/right	148/130	199/148	229/191
Observations	697	1119	1054

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.14: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (Above Median Income)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Corruption	Socioeconomic problems	Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.58*** (1.53)	2.88*** (0.29)	-2.29*** (0.72)
Bandwidth	3.2	3.2	3.1
Effective obs. left/right	154/116	114/97	147/128
Observations	871	623	825

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.15: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (Above Median Income)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Local elections voting	Party membership	Conflict
Sent-down	0.028 (0.27)	0.40 (0.40)	0.35* (0.21)
Bandwidth	3.5	3.2	3.3
Effective obs. left/right	101/102	147/129	139/120
Observations	499	827	777

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

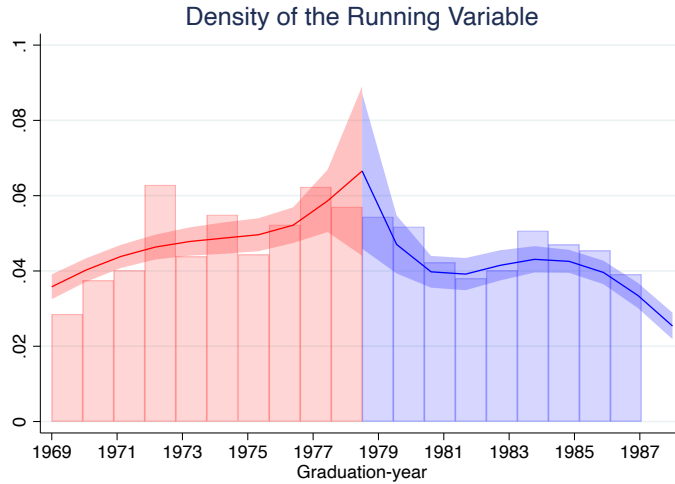


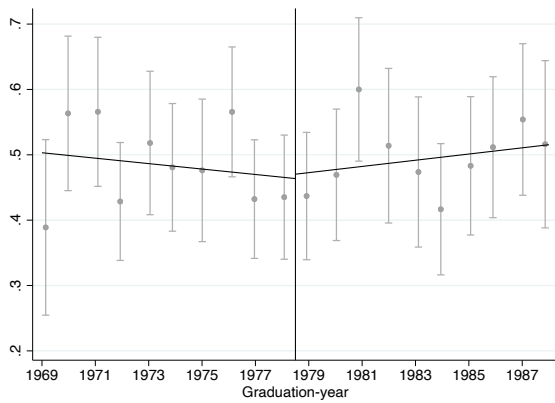
Figure E.1: Manipulation Testing Plot

E RD Design Checks

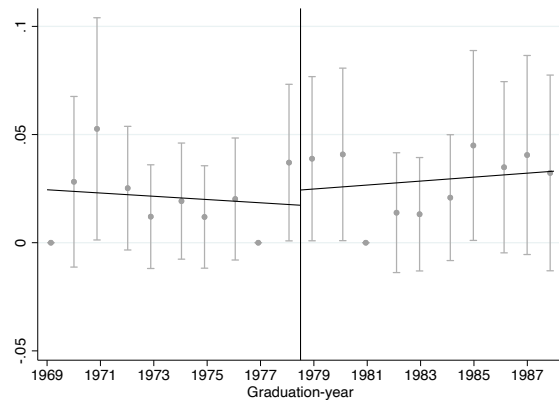
Table E.1: Placebo Outcomes

	(1) Altruism	(2) Social status	(3) Life satisfaction	(4) Smoking
Sent down	0.42 (0.52)	0.54 (0.68)	-1.14 (1.23)	0.076 (0.11)
Bandwidth	3.2	3.1	3.9	4.2
Effective obs. left/right	223/200	322/277	406/348	249/216
Observations	1353	1965	1965	1260

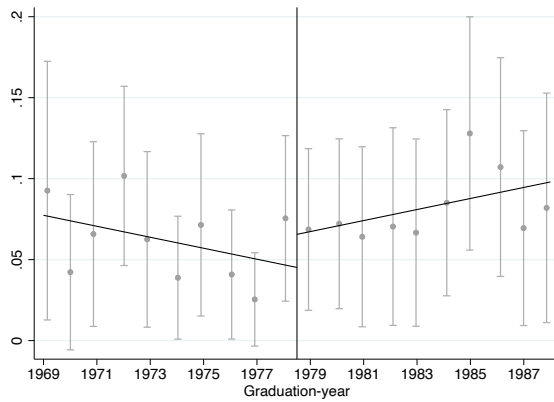
Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and class background controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.



(a) Gender: Male



(b) Ethnic Minority



(c) Class Background

Figure E.2: Balance Tests of Predetermined Covariates

Figure E.3: Placebo Cutoffs: Attitudes

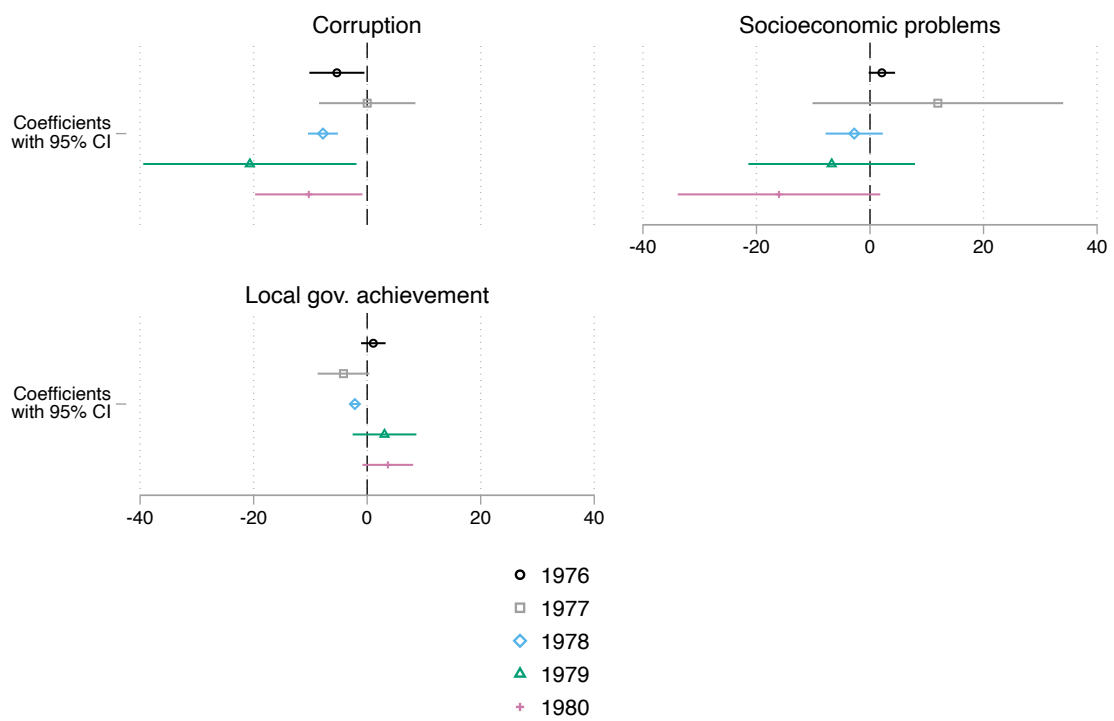
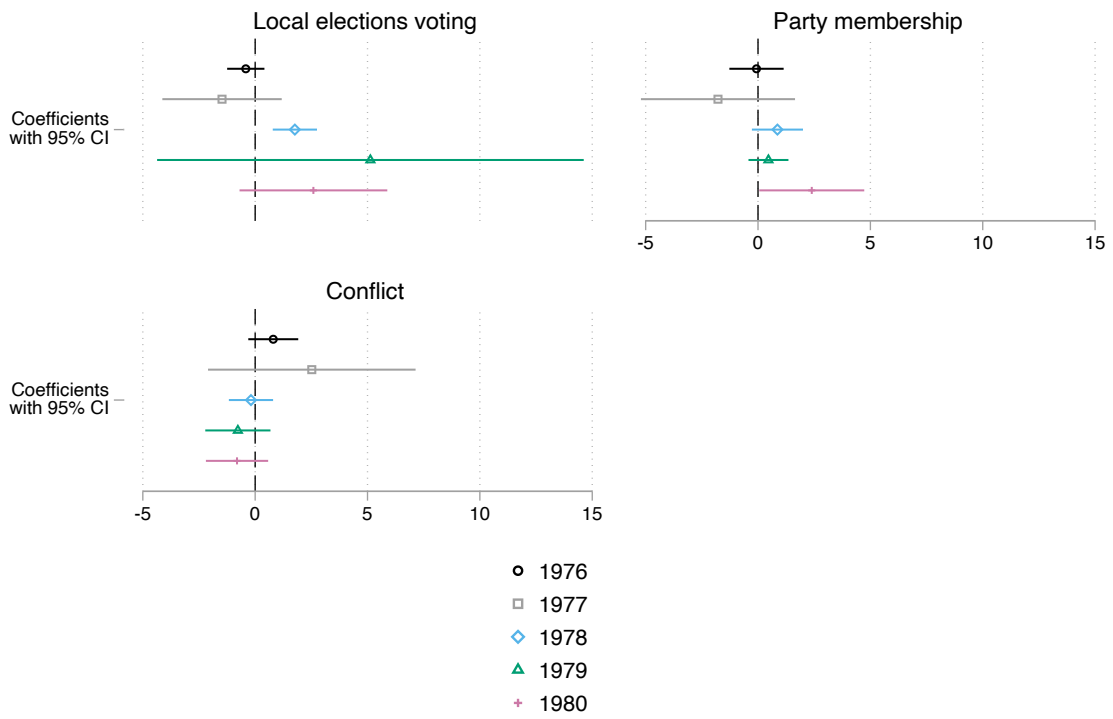


Figure E.4: Placebo Cutoffs: Participation



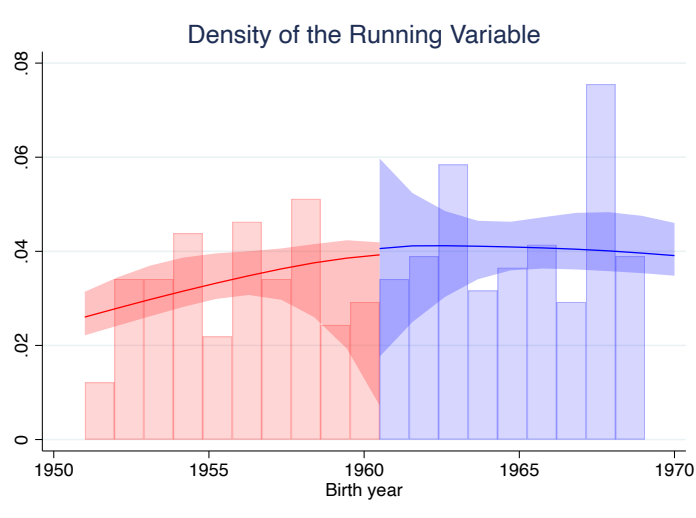


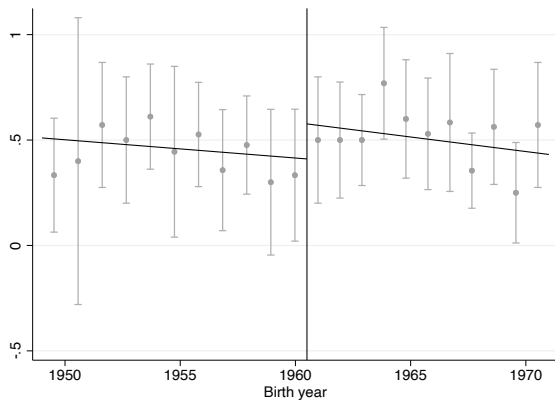
Figure F.1: Manipulation Testing Plot (The 2008 Survey)

F RD Design Checks (The 2008 Survey)

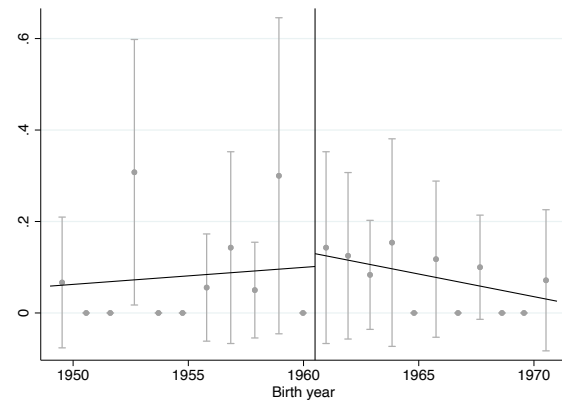
Table F.1: Placebo Outcomes (The 2008 Survey)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Envi. vs. Econ.	Ideology	Workplace gender eq.	International news
Sent-down cohorts	0.080 (0.13)	-0.44 (0.50)	-0.15 (0.20)	0.24 (0.82)
Bandwidth	3.9	6.7	6.0	5.1
Effective obs. left/right	57/42	35/47	90/74	74/67
Observations	359	174	382	383

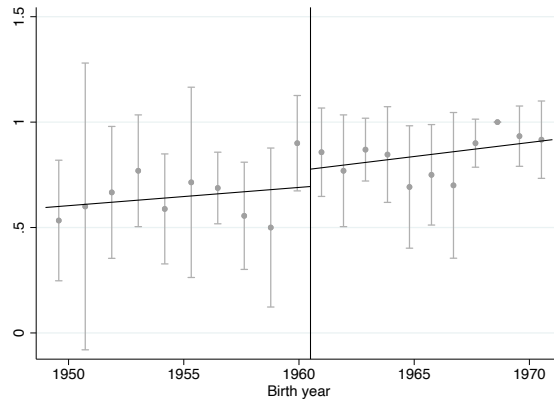
Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the birth-year level. All RD estimations use: local linear regressions, triangular kernels, and MSE-optimal bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff; gender, ethnic minority, and father’s literacy controls. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.



(a) Gender: Female



(b) Ethnic Minority



(c) Father's Literacy

Figure F.2: Balance Tests of Predetermined Covariates (The 2008 Survey)

G Variable Descriptions

Variable Names	Section	Description	Scale	Available years
Corruption	Results: Attitudes	Respondent's perception of the severity of corruption.	0-10 (worse)	2012, 2014, 2016
Socioeconomic problems	Results: Attitudes	Respondent's perception of the severity of socioeconomic issues? The list of socioeconomic issues consists of environment, inequality, employment, education, health care, housing, and social security.	0-10 (worse)	2012, 2014, 2016
Local gov. achievement	Results: Attitudes	Respondent's perception of local county/district government performance?	1-5 (better)	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Local elections voting	Results: Participation	Did a respondent vote in the most recent neighborhood community elections?	{0, 1}	2014
Party membership	Results: Participation	Is a respondent a member of the Chinese Communist Party?	{0, 1}	2010 (time-invariant)
Conflict	Results: Participation	In the past year, did a respondent have conflict with government officials?	{0, 1}	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016

Trust: Strangers	Mechanisms: Trust	How much does a respondent trust strangers?	0-10 (higher trust)	2012, 2014, 2016
Trust: Cadres	Mechanisms: Trust	How much does a respondent trust cadres?	0-10 (higher trust)	2012, 2014, 2016
Trust: Parents	Mechanisms: Trust	How much does a respondent trust your parents?	0-10 (higher trust)	2012, 2014, 2016
Edu. level	Alternative mechanisms: Education	The highest education degree that a respondent has obtained.	1-8 (higher)	2010
ln(income)	Alternative mechanisms: Education	Respondent's self-reported total income.	0-14 (continuous)	2010
Evaluated concern	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	Interviewer's perception of respondent's suspicion about the interview.	1-7 (more)	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Evaluated reliability	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	Interviewer's perception of reliability of respondent's response.	1-7 (more)	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016

Forced voting	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	Was a respondent forced or voluntary to vote?	0, 1 (forced)	2014
No response: Corruption	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	If a respondent did not answer the corruption question.	0, 1	2012, 2014, 2016
No response: Local gov. achievement	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	If a respondent did not answer the local government achievement question.	0, 1	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
No response: Local elections voting	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	If a respondent did not answer the local elections voting question.	0, 1	2014
Future confidence	Alternative mechanisms: Baselines	How confident is a respondent about their future?	1-5 (more)	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Experienced happiness	Alternative mechanisms: Baselines	How happy a respondent is?	0-5 (more)	2010, 2014, 2016
Altruism	Placebo outcomes	Does a respondent think that most people are selfish or willing to help?	{0, 1}	2014, 2016

Social status	Placebo outcomes	Respondent's self-rated social status in their local area.	1-5 (higher)	2010, 2012, 2014
Life satisfaction	Placebo outcomes	Respondent's self-rated satisfaction with their life.	1-5 (higher)	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Smoking	Placebo outcomes	If a respondent has ever smoked.	{0, 1}	2010