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

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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 citizens' patterns of trust. From 1968 to 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 to account for selection into being sent-down, we show that former sent-down students are more critical of local government performance compared to their counterparts, yet they are less critical of the national government and generally more supportive of the regime. 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 the close social control and isolation from family associated with the sent-down experience.

1 Introduction

Many regimes forcibly move citizens to other regions of the country, justifying these moves as providing economic and ideological benefits to the resettled people, the regions to which they were sent, and the nation as a whole. The Soviet Union resettled millions of Ukrainians, Balts, Tatars and Chechens (Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov, 2017; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017), the United States "interned" tens of thousands of Japanese Americans (Komisarchik, Sen and Velez, 2019), 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). While there was considerable variation in the goals and implementation of these policies, all were ultimately based on some form of coercion: At a minimum, the resettled were unable to return to where they came from, and they were often subjected to some enhanced form of social control in their new homes.

The planners who implemented these policies thought that they would strengthen the regimes they served through a combination of intimidation and ideological reeducation, by isolating the population from social influences other than the regime's propaganda. 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 toward the regime, and in fact, a substantial "scar literature" has grown up around the trauma of the sent-down experience. The sent-down policy was thus a bundled treatment, associated with increases in both coercion and indoctrination, even relative to the high levels of coercion and indoctrination to which most Chinese urbanites were exposed in these years.

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. Far from creating grievances or discouraging participation, the Sent-down Movement on average led those involved to become *more* enthusiastic supporters of the regime and participants in its activities, and more likely to blame its failures on local officials rather than central institutions. This is consistent with qualitative evidence of the sent-down experience, which emphasize its transformative importance on individual lives, the degree to which students actively participated in the regime's ideological program, and their decidedly mixed opinions of the overall experience (Bernstein, 1977; Pan, 2009; Bonnin, 2013; Yang, 2017).

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 the Sent-down Movement had clear and discontinuous eligibility criteria. 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, though recently sent-down youths stayed in the villages for several years after the end of the program. Our main models compare students

who graduated from middle school before October 1978 and were "barely" eligible to be sent-down to those who graduated later and were "barely" ineligible.

The primary threat to causal inference in this design is the many other policy changes that occurred in China during the Cultural Revolution and the subsequent decades such as the violence and educational disruption of the Red Guard movement and the liberalization of the economy. However, while these policies had a differential effect on age cohorts, unlike the sent-down policy these effects did not vary discontinuously. Except for their differential liability to be sent-down, the 1978 middle school graduates were very similar to the 1979 middle school graduates in their childhood political experiences and subsequent political socialization. Note also that since our estimator focuses on "intention to treat" (age-based policy eligibility) it is not biased by the complex selection process within age cohorts which decided which students would be sent-down. In robustness checks, we show that our results are unrelated to the reopening of the university system or bias in survey responses. Note that since ineligible urban students were also subject to ideological indoctrination and regimentation during the cultural revolution, our estimate of the effects of the sent-down policy is probably smaller than the overall effect of state mobilization during the Maoist period.

The results show that being sent-down influences subsequent political attitudes in ways that make them more sympathetic to the Communist Party. 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 suggestive evidence that the sent-down youths are more likely to participate in state sponsored activities (local elections and the Com-

munist Party) and less likely to participate in unsponsored activities (demonstrations, petitions, and community groups).

This mixed pattern of political engagement can be traced to attitudinal differences between the two groups. 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 (on who they were dependent for economic and social support during their youth). As befits a group that was internally displaced, the sent-down are more likely to show a strong national identity and are more likely to be proud of the country and to demand a powerful government to regulate the economy.

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 and are willing to discuss social 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). These patterns are consistent with many Chinese adults having had experiences in their formative that exposed them to a great deal of regime propaganda while placing them under the coercive control of local officials with whom them had little in common.

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; Roland and Yang, 2017) but advances by focusing on its political effects. [1]

Our results suggest that the relative success of the Chinese regime in cultivating popular support is partially due to the policies of the Maoist regime rather than despite them. These policies have shaped a generation willing to defer politics to the party, skeptical of collective action, and receptive to central attempts to attribute failures to 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 to resistance.

2 Coercive Mobilization and Public Opinion

2.1 What are the Effects of Coercive Mobilization?

States seek to control the lives of citizens to ensure they pay taxes and cooperate with the regime's policy objectives. There is enormous variation in the ability of states to achieve this (Brambor et al., 2020; Lee, 2019), partly 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 wars and conquests are thought to offer opportunities to disrupt local networks of authority

[1] Shi and Zhang (2020) do analyze the political effects of the Sent-down Movement, finding that being sent-down reduces voting. We replicated the substance of their key findings using the same survey dataset. Their results depend upon conducting a regression discontinuity analysis without a bandwidth. As we show, models using the standard approach, conducting the analysis within a narrow bandwidth around the cutoff, give opposite results.

and increase state capacity (Dincecco and Prado, 2012), states may prefer to create such junctures themselves by breaking entrenched local networks through intensive coercion. Often, such campaigns involve the mass resettlement of citizens, which tends to disrupt local networks and place the relocated citizens under more intensive regime control (Silwal, 2015; Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov, 2017; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017).[2]

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 Tatars) and their descendants to be more hostile toward 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 victims' 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 mechanisms are fairly intuitive: those who suffer at the regime's hands will harbor anger against it and be wary 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

However, coercive mobilization is usually a bundled treatment. While individuals are being coerced, they are also usually being exposed to more intensive monitoring and indoctrination. Such mobilization can also change the cognitive framework of individuals—

[2]Resettlement may also provide strategic benefits to states by changing the demographic composition of border areas (McNamee and Zhang, 2019; Charnysh and Peisakhin, 2021).

how they view themselves and the world. To the extent that the regime has control of these changes, it can create citizens sympathetic to its goals. 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).

Coercive state mobilization might lead to higher levels of support for the regime by influencing whom citizens *trust*. Typically, repression is thought to reduce trust in the regime (Desposato, Wang and Wu, 2020). Indeed, in authoritarian contexts as varied as the post-Stalinist USSR (Hosking, 2013) and the medieval Middle East (Greif, 1989), citizens have relied on interpersonal networks of friends and family with high levels of trust, while adopting a suspicious attitude toward outsiders. In the language of (Tilly, 2005, 9), while "networks of trust" exist, they are not "integrated into public politics." Families, religious groups, and friend networks can all serve as alternative focuses of loyalty to the state in this way.

Banfield (1958) conjectures that exclusive trust in family is an obstacle to development because it leads to distrust in outside actors, including the state. When individuals are suspicious of public institutions, they are capable only of caring about their private interests. A negative correlation between family ties and participation in political institutions indeed exists across countries (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011).

However, if the state could isolate citizens from private networks or discredit private networks, citizens would become incapable of trusting their friends and families as fully as they otherwise would, 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 need to rely on some other individuals for support and information. A regime capable of destroying all alternative focuses for social loyalty would have achieved Arendt's (1973) "total

domination."

As Arendt's critics pointed out (Benhabib, 2003, p. 73), the overwhelming majority of dictatorships, including the ones she studied, were incapable of fully eliminating the private sphere, and were forced to share their citizens' loyalty with private networks. To make fully effective "total domination," a state would have to separate individuals from their families and friends, prohibit them from forming intimate relationships, provide them food and clothing, completely control their work and leisure, and keep them from all sources of information not produced by the state.

In the same way that they prioritize the regime over the private sphere, high-capacity regimes tend to strengthen loyalty to the central government over other levels of government. Many regimes, including democratic ones, seek to encourage citizens to identify with the nation rather than with subnational identities through policies such as universal education and military conscription (Weber, 1976). Resettlement, by relocating citizens to unfamiliar regions, is often designed to foster loyalty to the nation rather than to the locality.

The relationship between attitudes toward the regime and political participation is complex. 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 may participate in some of them. While attitudes and participation are thus correlated in authoritarian regimes, the relationship is much less pronounced than in democracies. We therefore expect the relationship between resettlement and participation to be more complex and context-dependent than the relationship between mobilization and attitudes.

3 Historical Background

3.1 The Sent-down Movement

In 1966, Mao Zedong and his 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 perceived as insufficiently radical and overly independent of Mao. Student supporters of the Cultural Revolution were organized into Red Guards (Walder, 2009), playing a key role in the period's violence and instability. All schools were shut down between 1966 and 1968, while college entrance exams were canceled from 1966 to 1977. However, urban high school and university students were also seen as a privileged group compared to workers and peasants and potentially in need of revolutionary education to counteract incipient elitism.

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, educated people to work in the countryside between 1968 to 1978. Before 1968, the program was 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 youths 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 called *zhiqing* (educated youths), went to the countryside through the program. In theory, all junior high school graduates were eligible for the movement, but only one third of the youths were actually sent 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 governments 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 likely 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 on the regime (Li, Rosenzweig and Zhang, 2010).

The eligibility procedures for being forcibly sent down were complex and inconsistently enforced, yet 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, as those without this level of education were not considered "educated youths." Bernstein (1977) wrote that "it is in the school that each graduating middle school student is assigned to a production unit, either industrial or agricultural, or to the People's Liberation Army (PLA)." Middle school usually occurred around the age of 15, but the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution period meant there was some variation in the age of graduates. While in the countryside, the sent-down youths were generally unable 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 Mao's death in September 1976 and then ended abruptly following the political disgrace of the Gang of Four in October 1978. In 1978, the National Sent-down Movement Conference officially decided to end

the program, sending existing *zhiqing* back to urban areas and arranging jobs for them. However, it took several years for all the *zhiqing* to be able to return home. Deng Xiaoping, a leading figure in the policy reversal, remarked, "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 countryside and the force that brought them back. This ambivalence is evident in the disturbances in Yunnan in 1978, where *zhiqing* eager to return home rallied against the policies of the local government while proclaiming their support for Deng (Zhou, 2010), a phenomenon termed "rightful resistance" (O'Brien, 1996; O'Brien and Li, 2006). Although the rioting *zhiqing* represented a minor fraction of the national *zhiqing* population, their protests played a crucial role in influencing the central government's decision to send *zhiqing* back to the cities (Qiao, 2021, p. 96).[3]

3.2 Experiences in the Countryside

During the Sent-down Movement, most of the youths being sent down were rusticated within their home provinces, while many students from the biggest cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, were sent to border provinces like Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Yunnan, and Heilongjiang. Most of the *zhiqing*, coming from relatively sheltered urban backgrounds, faced difficulties adjusting to rural life and dealing with the local officials who controlled their work, leisure time, and the distribution of food and clothing. Many were shocked by the shortage of food and poor living conditions in the countryside, where vegetables and meats were scarce and heavy manual labor was required. One *zhiqing* interviewed in Heiming (2006) recalled that:

> Upon their arrival, the 17 or 18-year-olds followed poor peasants into the

[3]In Appendix Tables D.16 and D.17, we show that the results are similar if we exclude provinces where protests occurred.

> mountains to serve as a labor force. The manual work was strenuous, and food was always scarce. To allocate the limited food supply fairly, people distributed it using scales...though the youths still quarreled over even slight inequalities in the weight of a bowl of noodles.

Another *zhiqing* 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.

Besides tough living conditions in the countryside, the sent-down students were under intense re-education. As one zhiqing recalled:

> In the morning we had to reflect on Mao's Thought, and at night report about our own thoughts and consciousness. For example, let's say I had a wheat bun for lunch but because the bun was half spoiled, I only ate parts of it and threw away the rest. Although I did this privately and no one else knew about it, at night I must report myself and my wrong consciousness, and tell the others what I did by reporting the account of my behavior that day. Then everyone would help you analyze the behaviopr according to Mao's Thought. They would critique it and collectively deconstruct your behavior and your motivation behind it for a while, make suggestions to you how you can improve yourself to achieve higher consciousness, and then move on to the next person. That was the method of studying Mao's Thought, and we did it every day (Rene, 2013, 165).

Their collective learning strengthened their beliefs in the blueprint that painted by the central leadership. Moreover, the sent-down students had vicarious contact with the national government at a distance. When Mao personally responded to a sent-down student's letter and sent him money. Zhiqing were touched that the government understood them and tried to improve their conditions (Pan, 2009, 140). Their convictions in the well-intentioned national policy in part explain why their later protests were respectful to the central leadership.

At the same time, those same adolescents had day-to-day contact with street-level bureaucrats and were able to form concrete opinions about their characters, as one zhiqing recalled that:

> The administrators only cared and organized things for the initial settlement of the sent-downs such as making arrangements for their food and shelter. However, once they were settled in, the administrators' jobs and responsibilities were done... They were not there to help us integrate with the local people or continuously monitor us or anything like that because they were not assigned with the task of acculturating the sent-downs and helping them to be absorbed among the people. To them, you were now a peasant like everyone else, so the less you bothered them, the better (Rene, 2013, 169).

Zhiqing clashed with local officials, and were often contemptuous of the cadres who assigned them work, considering them corrupt and unsophisticated (Bernstein, 1977). They observed malfeasance at the local level, including embezzlement of the resettlement fee and sexual violence against female zhiqing. When these problems broke out, it was the national government that performed top-down accountability by sending delegations and drafting orders to address the problems (Pan, 2009, 140-145). However, given the powerful social and economic role of the state and the party in this period, "sponsored

mobility" through links with cadres was virtually the only road to social and occupational advancement. As new residents, who were both outsiders and regarded as ideologically inferior to the peasants, *zhiqing* found it challenging to cultivate these connections and resorted to using charm or bribery (Chen and Cheng, 1999), as well as to engaging in performative deference.

On the other hand, the interactions of *zhiqing* with local peasants in the countryside shaped their political beliefs. *Zhiqing* became more knowledgeable about the rural part of the country and sympathetic to the peasants' perspectives. This ideological transformation demonstrated the success of the reeducation goal of the Sent-down Movement, which was conducive to building trustworthiness and righteousness in the decision-making by the central leadership. As a *zhiqing* recalled their changing ideology:

> I discovered that only after you had really immersed yourself among the "ignorant and backward" peasants and only when you had developed similar feelings with them could you really understand the term "people."[4] (Mi, 1993)

The *zhiqing* were cut off from their families and those friends who remained in the city or were displaced to different areas, whom they could visit only with difficulty. This isolation meant that their networks were smaller than those of their counterparts who stayed in the city, and they tended to marry much later (Wang and Zhou, 2017). In the villages, their means of communication were limited mostly to cadres, peasants, and fellow *zhiqing*. 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.

Since the 1970s, the sent-down experience has been enveloped in nostalgia for many participants (Prusik and Lewicka, 2016). A survey of long-term *zhiqing* cohorts shows

[4]The English translation is provided by (Yang, 2017, p. 113)

that while they acknowledged mistreatment at the time, the most common assessment was that they gained endurance and self-improvement, and the second most popular choice was that they blamed it on bad luck (Pan, 2009), beliefs that they pass on to their children (Roland and Yang, 2017). Yang (2003) finds that their nostalgia is for both emotional and instrumental reasons, and the sent-down generation was among the first social groups in China that took advantage of the Internet and organized social activities across regions, which is an indication of their bittersweet memory of the sent-down experience (Yang, 2009). Moreover, subsequent scholarly assessment of the movement has been positive on some dimensions. Consistent with Mao's purpose, the Sent-down Movement reduced social inequality (Chan, 1985; Alesina et al., 2020), gender inequality (Xie, 1994; Song and Zheng, 2016) and educational inequality (Chen et al., 2020; Deng and Treiman, 1997; Alesina et al., 2020) because of the radical wealth redistribution and rearrangement in working and educational 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. In the next section, we will explore 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 their families relatively less. *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 to spend holidays at home with their families until they were allowed to return to the cities after their service in the countryside. The most common way for them to express their homesickness to their

family members was through letters.[5] At the same time, they spent their days in close proximity to previously unfamiliar *zhiqing* and local peasants, with whom they bonded through repeated collaboration on production work and over shared struggles against boredom and material scarcity. Research from developmental psychology shows that social trust depends on the environment. When adolescents are physically away from their parents, their parental trust goes down. In addition to direct physical separation (Woodward, Fergusson and Belsky, 2000), it is generally more stressful for adolescents to make important decisions when they could not consult with their parents (Smetana, 2010). Under such circumstances, the sent-down students were forced to turn to alternative authorities, such as their peers and the government, for guidance.

We should thus expect the *zhiqing* to have lower levels of trust in family relative to strangers than others. This was, in fact, the goal of much of the political mobilization to which the sent-down were exposed, emphasizing the virtues of the regime and the collective over the family and individual. This double shift created a broader focus of trust among the sent-down.[6] Qualitative evidence indeed suggests that one of the political purposes of the Sent-down Movement was to replace family ties by ties between the individual and the state, compatible with Marxism (Rene, 2013, 91).

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 officials oversaw 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 flawed manner in which the policy was often executed, this made local officials the targets of *zhiqing*'s anger. Local officials were also, by definition, local, and outsiders relative to the urban students in a

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

[6] Note 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).

way that national and provincial officials were 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 being 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 toward the central government (Pan, 2009). Students were naturally unwilling to acknowledge that their labor and conditions were meaningless, and thus would often adhere to the indoctrination of the period, which highlighted the party's wisdom. If the party was the source of the *zhiqing*'s problems, it was also seen as the source of all solutions to those problems, and the entity upon which they depended for their material survival.

Interestingly, some *zhiqing* recall having much higher levels of trust, prosocial behavior, and adherence to 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 bell 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 (Rene, 2013, p. 138).

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 they were sent to and yet were very far from their areas of origin. Finally, the national

government at times intervened on behalf of the *zhiqing*, providing reimbursements for resettlement expenses, accepting petitions against local officials, and ultimately permitting all the *zhiqing* to return home after the program's conclusion.

We thus expect the sent-down to have divergent attitudes towards the local and national governments; the sent-down experience should lead to higher levels of regime approval, but lower levels of approval for local officials. Such divergence is still common in China, where the national government is much more popular than local government (Chen, 2004; Li, 2016; Wu and Wilkes, 2018).

The relationship between being sent down and political *participation* is more ambiguous. Intuitively, we might expect citizens who approve of the regime to be more likely to engage in political activities favored by the regime (the Communist Party, official local elections, etc.) and less likely to become involved in activities disfavored by the regime, such as protests and unofficial community groups. However, this relationship is complicated by official policy. The party rewards those who participate in officially favored activities with material benefits and sometimes sanctions those who engage in unofficial activities. As a result, many people with only mild support for the regime are party members, and even individuals with strong anti-regime views may refrain from protesting. Therefore, 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 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 is likely to be

biased. In particular, since qualitative evidence suggests that those politically active and 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. [7]

An alternative approach would be to consider *eligibility* for the sent-down program, rather than participation itself, by comparing those schooling cohorts whose members were eligible to be sent down with those who were too young or too old. However, this method would not only yield an attenuated estimate of the effect of being sent down (since many non-*zhiqing* would be included in the "treatment" group), but it would also be biased by various other policy changes during the Cultural Revolution that differentially affected specific age cohorts in this politically tumultuous period. The most significant of these was the shutdown of the high school and university system during the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966 and lasted until 1976. Therefore, the sent-down cohorts were, in general, less educated than the age cohorts before and after them, even among those who were not resettled. However, the last two age cohorts eligible for the program, those who graduated from junior high school in 1975 and 1976, could (if they stayed in the cities) complete their high school education and enter university through the newly restarted university examination system, just as subsequent age cohorts did.

To address the selection problem, we use a fuzzy regression discontinuity (RD) design based on age cohort. Since only middle school graduates were eligible to be sent down, middle school graduation year, our running variable, is strongly associated with whether students were eligible. 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. We are thus comparing individuals who differ

[7] This is the most probable explanation for the results in Shi and Zhang (2020).

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 the same memories of the Cultural Revolution and experience the same subsequent life courses, with only minor differences in the age at which they experienced these events. Recall that the gradual winding down of the policy meant that even the last sent-down students spent lengthy periods in the countryside: Figure A.1 shows that these individuals, on average, spent 3.9 years in the village.

Note that since the fuzzy RD design focuses on "intention to treat" determined by age, the control group to which we compare the sent-down are those who were barely ineligible to be sent down, not those of the same age who managed to avoid being sent-down. To the extent that the barely ineligible were exposed to a significant amount of ideological indoctrination and regimentation in their urban childhoods during the Cultural Revolution, our estimate of the effects of the sent-down policy is likely much smaller than the overall effect of state mobilization during the Maoist period.

Figure 1 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 being 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 youths to be sent-down in any numbers. Seven individuals reported being sent-down after 1978, almost certainly incorrectly. We include these misreported observations because the deletion of a non-random subset of observations, conditional on the endogenous regressor, might lead to bias. However, excluding these seven observations has virtually no effect on the reported results and, in fact, improves the precision of the second stage estimates.

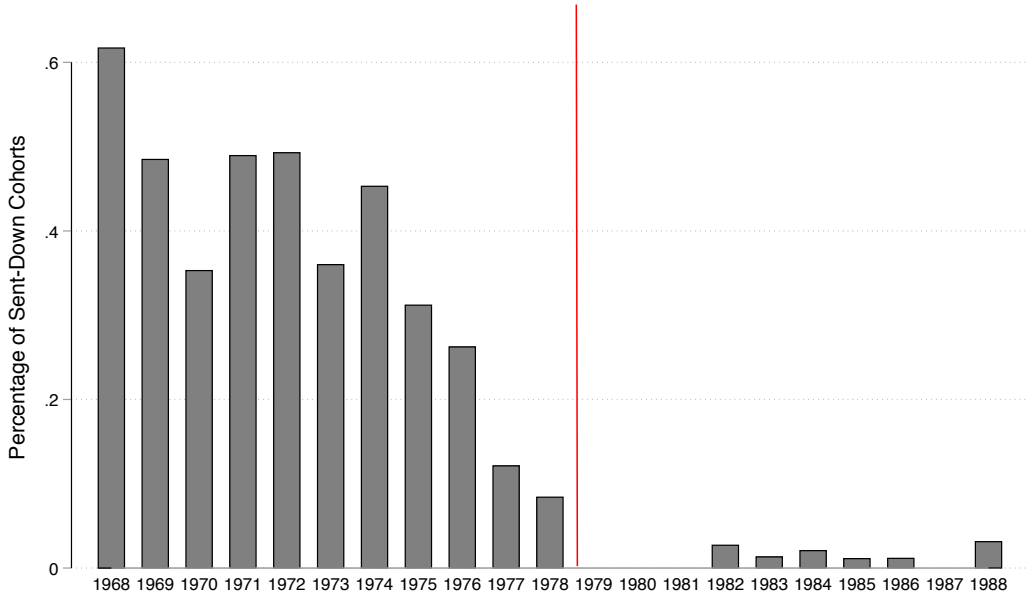

Figure 1: Probability of Being Sent-down by Graduation-year

Note: This figure illustrates the likelihood of being sent down based on individuals' graduation year. It shows that junior high school graduates were no longer sent down after 1978. Note that there are a few data points showing individuals being sent down after the 1980s, which are likely errors in data collection. To preserve the integrity of our research, we keep these points in our figures and regressions.

The fuzzy regression discontinuity design uses a two-stage least squares (2SLS) design (Hahn, Todd and Van der Klaauw, 2001) , 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:

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

Where $Eligibility_i = \mathbf{1}(c_i < c_0)$ represents whether the individual was eligible to be sent-down. The reduced form RD regression is:

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

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). We report results without covariates adjustment in the main paper, and the regression results with covariates adjustment are reported in the Appendix. Given the young age at which people were sent-down, the number of plausible pretreatment covariates is small, but we include gender, membership in a minority ethnic group, and self-reported family "class background."

Note are estimating the local treatment effect of being sent down by comparing those sent down immediately before the program's end in the 1970s to those who came of age immediately after them. This local treatment within the bandwidths might be different from the effect of being sent down on all zhiqing. However, we think it likely that the LTE in this case is biased towards zero. In the last years of the program, the original ideological enthusiasm had become muted and those who were sent down spent less time in the country, while the barely untreated group had received extensive indoctrination during the cultural revolution. By contrast comparing early zhiqing to those who came of age after China's economic reforms (using the whole sample) would represent a much larger difference in exposure to forcible resettlement and reeducation (though also, of course, to unobserved confounders).

4.2 Data and Variables

We use two datasets in our research: The China Family Panel Study (CFPS) from 2010-2016 (Institute of Social Science Survey, Peking University, 2015) and the 2008 China Survey.[8] The CFPS, a nationally representative survey initiated in 2010 by the Institute of Social Science Survey (ISSS) of Peking University, collects individual, family, and community-level longitudinal data in contemporary China. Our attitudinal measures primarily consist of thermometer scores evaluating feelings toward particular institutions (on a scale from 1 to 5) and the severity of specific social problems (on a scale from 0 to 10). Participation measures are mostly binary, indicating whether the respondent has recently participated in a certain type of activity. Since our independent variable of interest (being sent down) does not change over time, we estimate only cross-sectional models. Given that both attitude and participation variables are measured across all four survey waves, we use their four-year average in our models to minimize the impact of year-specific variations in the attitudinal variables. A detailed description of the variables is available in Section G of the appendix.

The disadvantage of the CFPS is that it features a limited number of questions on political issues and lacks measures assessing opinions about the national government or non-state political participation. For this reason, we augment our analysis with the 2008 China Survey, conducted by the Research Center for Contemporary China at Peking University. The scope of binary participation measures[9] and thermometer-based attitudinal measures is significantly wider in the China Survey than in the CFPS. It is further enriched by measures of relative identity (whether respondents identify more

[8]The 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. https://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/195989

[9]Many questions in the 2008 survey inquired about the recency of a respondent's engagement in an activity and their willingness to repeat it. We simplified this into a binary measure of whether they have ever undertaken the activity.

with the nation or with the province, etc.) and hypothetical participation (whom the respondent would contact if they had a problem, etc.).

However, the 2008 China 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 China Survey is much smaller than the CFPS. For these reasons, we only report results from the 2008 China Survey in the appendix.

Since the sent-down program applied only to urban youths, we restrict our sample to those who lived in urban areas as children and graduated from middle school. Our sample includes all urban graduates born between 1949 and 1972, though most of the RD models are estimated within much narrower bandwidths. Table A.1 reveals that our CFPS samples consist of 2,110 individual observations, with 408 of them having participated in the Sent-down Movement. Among the individuals who were sent down, 208 were females, and 200 were males. Their sent-down experiences ranged from two to nine years, and Figure A.1 illustrates that later cohorts spent shorter periods in the countryside compared to earlier cohorts. The majority of individuals in our samples completed middle school or high school, with the younger generations not affected by the movement receiving slightly higher education on average.

5 Results

5.1 Attitudes

What is the effect of being sent down on political attitudes? Table 1 presents the results of a set of fuzzy RD estimates regarding sent-down individuals' attitudes toward the state and society. Here, we report only the second stage estimates, while the first stage estimates (which demonstrate a consistent and positive relationship between graduating before 1978 and being sent down) are detailed in appendix Table A.3. Figure 2 illustrates the discontinuity in attitudes around 1978. It is important to note that Figure 2 and 3 differ from the tables by 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) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.41***	-3.48	-2.67***
	(1.63)	(2.25)	(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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Model 1 examines the perception of a fairly direct measure of trust in the government: average perception of official corruption, scored on an eleven-point scale. Perceived corruption is significantly 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

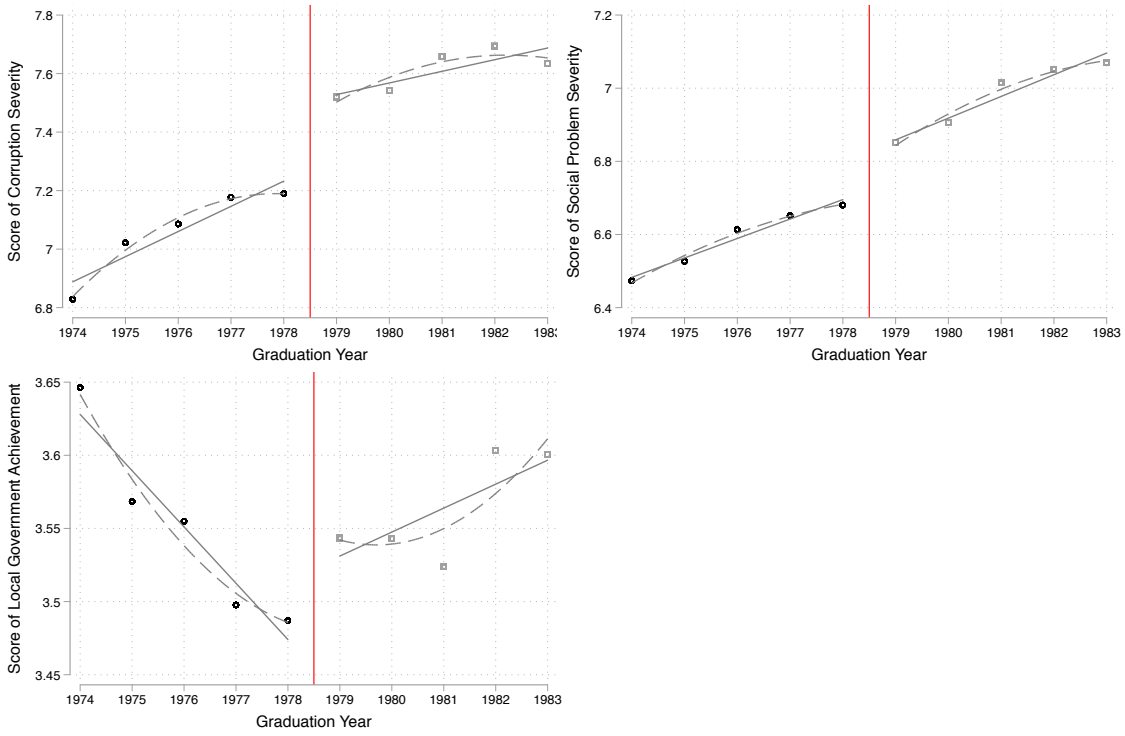

Figure 2: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes

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

on an eleven-point scale. Model 2 explores the effect of being sent down on the average perception of the severity of a range of socioeconomic problems, including the environment, education, unemployment, and social security. The index, like the underlying thermometer scores, ranges from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 10. Former *zhiqing* are less likely to perceive that China suffers from these problems, although the estimate falls just short of statistical significance. This is again consistent with *zhiqing* having higher support for the regime, as positive perceptions of social problems indicate approval of the political status quo.

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 afterward who were not sent down. The

effect is quite large in substantive terms: more than two points on the five-point scale—about four standard deviations. This is consistent with our expectation that zhiqing's dissatisfaction is at the local level rather than at the national level.

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. Similar to the CFPS models, the sent-down cohorts are less likely to express concern about economic problems and violations of democratic values, and they are more inclined to be satisfied with existing policies.

Table B.4 provides more direct evidence for a local-national gap in attitudes towards Communist Party officials. Panel A reveals that sent-down cohorts are more likely than others to trust officials, with the degree of trust decreasing from the national and provincial levels to the local level. Panel B displays a similar pattern: sent-down cohorts and others show equal satisfaction with the central and county governments, but the sent-down cohorts exhibit dissatisfaction with local governments.

The results present a clear depiction of the effect of being sent down on attitudes. Respondents who were sent down are more likely to approve of the regime as a whole and do not perceive corruption as a major issue. However, they are more inclined to be critical of local government performance. The causes of this local-national gap will be discussed in detail in Section 6.2.

5.2 Participation

Since sent-down respondents are more likely to approve of the regime, they should theoretically be more inclined than others to participate in it. This effect, however, is complicated by government policy. 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. Therefore, those who vote in local elections are more likely to be regime supporters, while abstention is more common (Chen and Zhong, 2002).[10] 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), and the effect is statistically significant at the 0.1 level. Figure A.2 shows that former sent-down students are more likely to join the party around the age of 30 rather than early 20s, but the difference is not statistically significant. There is no discernible difference between sent-down and not sent-down individuals 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	1.56***	0.64**	-0.22
	(0.46)	(0.32)	(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 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

[10] China is a one-party state, and elections are non-competitive with the exception of village elections between the 1980s and the 1990s (Martinez-Bravo et al., 2022).

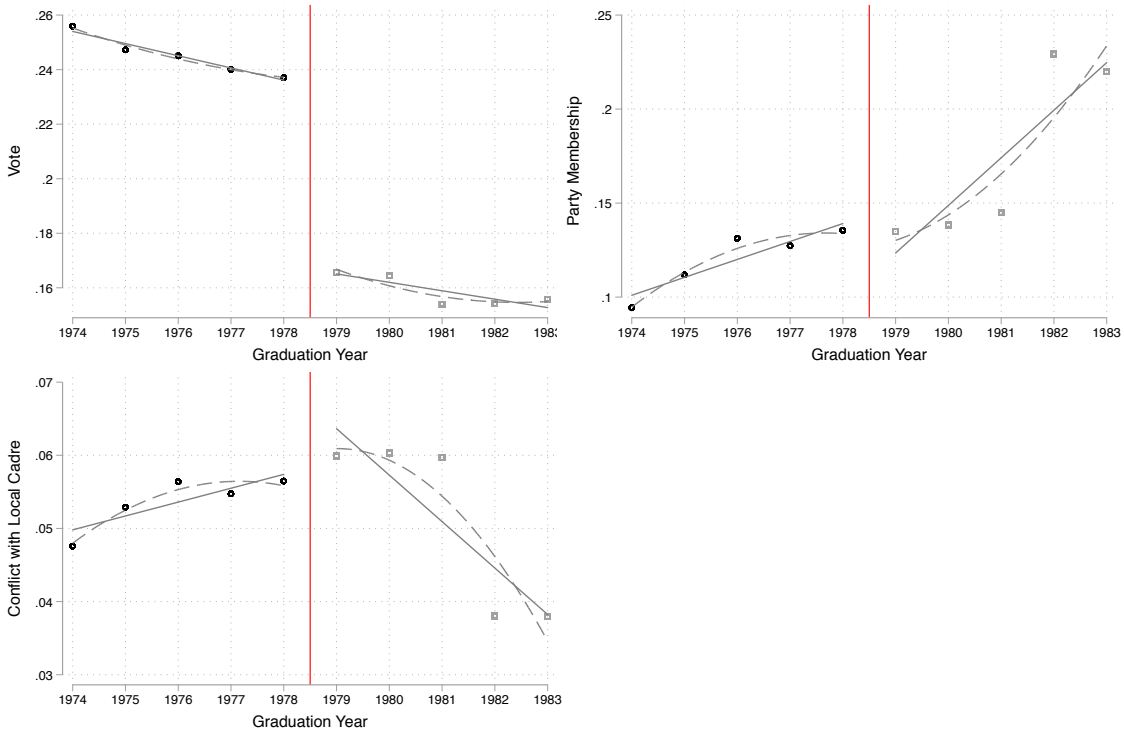

Figure 3: Effects of Sent-down on Participation

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

members, and show no difference from other groups in contacting cadres. The most striking results, in Panel B, examine non-official political participation, specifically measures of whether respondents had participated in a demonstration, a petition, a community group, or a civic organization. Being part of the sent-down cohorts is negatively associated with all these forms of participation, with almost all coefficients reaching statistical significance.

5.3 Robustness

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

The results are also robust to the choice of model. We follow the standard approach and report results with controlling for background characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, and family background (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). We also conduct a list of RD design checks for both survey datasets, including density tests of the running variable (McCrary, 2008), balance tests of control variables, placebo cutoffs, and placebo outcomes in Appendix E-F. We do not detect threats to internal validity.

6 Mechanisms

6.1 Trust

In Section 3, we suggested that when two institutions compete for trust, families' loss is the state's gain. The *zhiqing* are more trusting of those outside their immediate circle than their age-matched peers, making them more likely to hold pro-regime attitudes and participate 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. The evidence supports the hypothesis that when the state is able to isolate citizens with their families, they would turn to the state as an alternative, and our evidence is consistent with findings from Zhang, Zhang and

Zhang (2023) that adults with the sent-down experience provide less financial support to their elderly parents relative to their non-sent-down siblings. 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	3.57***	11.2***	-5.84***
	(0.58)	(0.95)	(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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results from the 2008 Survey are consistent, with the circle of trust of the sent-down cohorts being larger than their slightly younger contemporaries. Table B.1 shows 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. Trust in unknown people is indeed positively associated with pro-regime attitudes (Table B.8).

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 two reasons. Firstly, since they often had negative experiences with local officials while being sent-down, they should be more

likely to dislike them. Secondly, the nationwide process of being resettled strengthened their national identity.

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. A particular group of sent-down individuals, likely harboring grievances against local officials, includes those who remained in the countryside for years beyond the policy's official conclusion due to bureaucratic delays, often related to the complex process of residential registration (Bonnin, 2013). Table B.5 shows that among the sent-down, those who left the country after 1980 but before 1990 are more likely to rate local officials poorly than others.

Table B.6 provides suggestive evidence that the sent-down cohorts have a stronger national identity. Model 1 shows that the sent-down cohorts are more likely to feel proud of the country, and Model 2 shows that they are more likely to believe that China is a better country compared to other countries. sent-down cohorts are more likely to demand a powerful government to regulate the economy (Model 3). Table B.5 indicates that among the sent-down, those who left the countryside after 1980 but before 1990 tend to evaluate local officials more negatively than their counterparts.

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.12-D.15, 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.[11]

[11] Shen and Truex (2021) find that socially marginalized groups of population in China tend to display higher degrees of social desirability bias, and those indicators include urban-rural residency, education, and classes. In our analysis, all respondents are urban residents, and Table C.1 shows that individuals with the sent-down experience and individuals without the sent-down experience have similar levels of education and income. Our substantive results on political attitudes and participation (Table D.12-D.15) are also largely unchanged when we restricted the samples to the better educated individuals (high school and above) or the higher income individuals (above median income), which further ally the concern of social desirability bias.

Cognitive Baselines: A final alternative explanation is that the *zhiqing* have a different, and lower, cognitive baseline compared to those who remained in the cities. After several years of experiencing rural poverty and deprivation, they might view conditions in urban China as more favorable compared to those who have never experienced rural hardships, potentially leading them to regard the improvements in living standards over the past three decades as a significant accomplishment of the Communist Party. However, the evidence suggests that the *zhiqing* tend to be more pessimistic and backward-looking. Model 1 in Table C.4 indicates that sent-down respondents actually exhibit lower confidence in the future compared to others. Model 2 reveals that sent-down respondents are, on average, less happy, though the difference is not statistically significant.

7 Conclusion

Certain aspects of mass opinion and participation in contemporary China appear paradoxical (Nathan, 2016). On one hand, ordinary Chinese are aware of various political and social issues (Solinger, 1999; Yang, 2006; Alkon and Wang, 2018; Tsai, Trinh and Liu, 2022), and expressions of dissatisfaction or criticism towards government performance in public spaces are not rare (Hassid, 2012). On the other hand, these same citizens often demonstrate strong support for the regime, exhibit high levels of political satisfaction (Cunningham et al., 2021), and show a willingness to collaborate with the government (Teets, 2014; Gueorguiev, 2021). While some scholars have explored how political attitudes and behavior are shaped by official coercion and information control (King, Pan and Roberts, 2013; Chen and Xu, 2017*a*,*b*; Chang and Manion, 2021), there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact of past experiences with state-sponsored political socialization on political attitudes and behavior (Yang, 1996).

The same middle-aged Chinese individuals who exhibit these mixed attitudes have lived through a lifetime of remarkable, and sometimes challenging, political events, with the sent-down movement being among the most significant. This paper suggests that some of the conflicting patterns of belief in contemporary China can be attributed to these Maoist experiences.

The Sent-down Movement, "capstone of the Cultural Revolution" (Rene, 2013, 160), has altered the experiences of a generation of adolescents and their families. While our results derive from a within-bandwidth sample of survey respondents from late in the program, the findings might plausibly be larger among those who went to the countryside earlier or longer. Individuals who were sent down are less likely than those who were slightly too young to be sent-down to perceive officials as corrupt. However, they are also less inclined to view local government officials positively, while more likely to support the provincial and national government. While sent-down individuals are unwilling to involve themselves in unofficial political events, they go along with officially sponsored ones such as voting, even though they are somewhat less enthusiastic about local government.

This mixture of attitudes can be attributed to the *zhiqing*'s experiences during a formative period when they were entirely reliant on the regime for economic and social support and isolated from their families. Individuals who were sent-down tend to trust immediate family and friends less and are more trusting of strangers and officials, likely due to the distinct patterns of social interactions they had as teenagers. Their specific distrust in local government seems to stem from both their negative experiences with local authorities during the Sent-down Movement and a stronger identification with the nation as opposed to the locality.

Our findings indicate that under certain conditions, coercive state mobilization can be effective not only by intimidating individuals but also by making them more receptive

to the regime's perspective and reducing their exposure to competing loyalty sources, such as the family. This effectiveness might stem from its targeted focus on teenagers—a group particularly susceptible to cognitive shifts—and its capability to isolate them from other social influences. Consequently, the Sent-down Movement managed to transform coercion into persuasion. Although the Sent-down Movement did not achieve its primary objective of eliminating class disparities in China, it seems to have attained some level of success in its secondary aim of "reeducating" urban youths, despite the program's unpopularity.

The findings further reveal that the social upheavals during the Maoist era may be associated with the relative quietism in mass behavior in contemporary China. This insight could be applicable to other post-revolutionary societies that have implemented youth conscription and population mobilization policies. Although repression and population movement can often engender future resentments in some contexts, the mass mobilization of young people in Maoist China seems to have aided in sustaining the regime's long-term stability.

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Supporting Information

Online Appendix

A Summary Statistics and Additional Results

Table A.1: Summary Statistics

	Control			Treatment		
	N	Mean	St. dev.	N	Mean	St. dev.
Sent-down indicator	1702	0	0	408	1	0
Graduation year	1598	1979.0	6.12	394	1971.5	3.98
Male	1702	0.49	0.50	408	0.49	0.50
Ethnic minority	1702	0.029	0.17	408	0.020	0.14
Class background	1674	0.070	0.26	407	0.086	0.28
Corruption	1322	7.28	2.18	321	7.00	2.17
Socioeconomic problems	1325	6.77	1.52	323	6.49	1.45
Local gov. achievement	1695	3.54	0.68	407	3.57	0.66
Local elections voting	1050	0.22	0.41	267	0.25	0.43
Party membership	1702	0.14	0.35	408	0.23	0.42
Conflict	1615	0.11	0.30	388	0.097	0.27
Trust: Strangers	1325	2.05	1.69	323	1.78	1.59
Trust: Cadres	1324	4.09	1.95	322	4.32	2.00
Trust: Parents	1324	9.54	0.98	322	9.54	1.04
Education level	1702	3.84	0.91	408	3.57	0.77
ln(income)	1436	9.60	1.16	280	9.45	1.08
Evaluated concern	1702	2.77	1.23	408	2.81	1.18
Evaluated reliability	1702	5.63	0.84	408	5.71	0.76
Forced voting	229	0.42	0.49	67	0.45	0.50
Future confidence	1702	3.61	0.89	408	3.59	0.94
Experienced happiness	1702	3.89	0.92	408	3.90	0.94

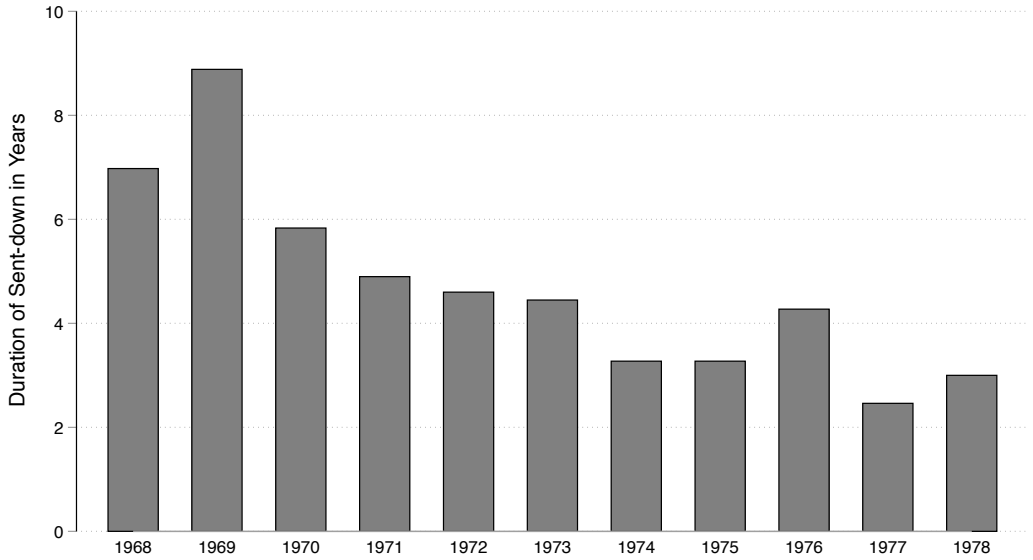


Figure A.1: Duration of the Sent-down Experience

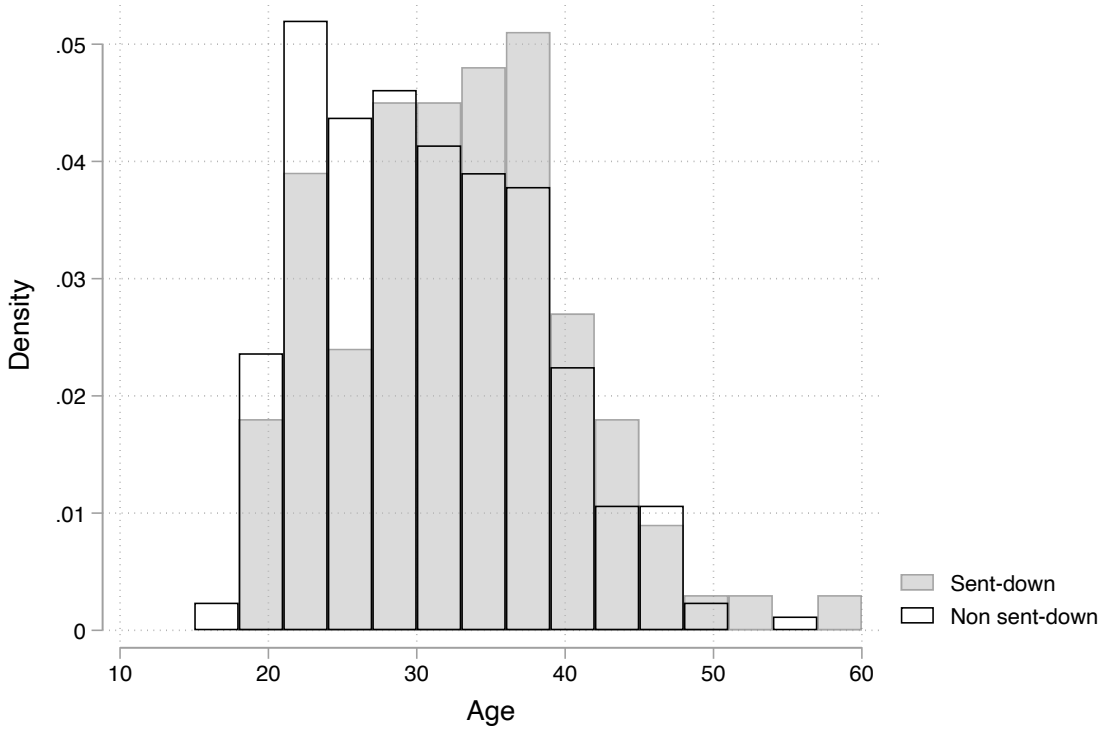


Figure A.2: Age Distribution of Joining the Party

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

Table A.3: First-stage Estimates

	Coefficients.	Standard errors.
Corruption	-0.050***	0.014
Socioeconomic problems	-0.050***	0.015
Local gov. achievement	-0.048***	0.014
Local elections voting	-0.072***	0.014
Party membership	-0.044***	0.014
Conflict	-0.038***	0.011
Strangers	-0.053***	0.014
Cadres	-0.053***	0.014
Parents	-0.057***	0.013

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	-1.12***	-0.17	0.64***
	(0.43)	(0.20)	(0.12)
Bandwidth	4.3	3.7	4.2
Effective obs. left/right	66/55	67/57	67/55
Observations	408	432	426

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.5: Participation (The 2008 Survey)

Panel A: *Official Participation*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Local elections voting	Party membership	Contacting cadres
Sent-down cohorts	0.23	0.12	0.029
	(0.16)	(0.086)	(0.047)
Bandwidth	4.0	6.4	5.0
Effective obs. left/right	27/26	99/85	78/72
Observations	192	432	404

Panel B: *Non-official Participation*				
	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Demonstration	Petition	Community group	Civic organization
Sent-down cohorts	-0.15**	-0.076	-0.19***	-0.078***
	(0.063)	(0.072)	(0.018)	(0.027)
Bandwidth	5.7	4.6	4.1	3.9
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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

B Additional Results: Main Mechanisms

Table B.1: Trust (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) Unkown	(2) Known
Sent-down cohorts	0.26^{***}	0.023
	(0.039)	(0.061)
Bandwidth	4.2	4.1
Effective obs. left/right	65/56	67/57
Observations	422	432

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.2: Trust and Attitudes

Panel A: *Corruption*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Strangers	-0.058		
	(0.037)		
Cadres		-0.33***	
		(0.031)	
Parents			0.13**
			(0.055)
R-squared	0.08	0.16	0.08
Observations	1555	1553	1553
Panel B: *Socioeconomic problems*			
	(4)	(5)	(6)
Strangers	-0.058**		
	(0.023)		
Cadres		-0.21***	
		(0.020)	
Parents			0.076*
			(0.041)
R-squared	0.12	0.19	0.12
Observations	1558	1556	1556
Panel C: *Local gov. achievement*			
	(7)	(8)	(9)
Strangers	0.038***		
	(0.0069)		
Cadres		0.11***	
		(0.0062)	
Parents			0.025
			(0.021)
R-squared	0.08	0.20	0.07
Observations	1558	1556	1556
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.3: Trust and Participation

Panel A: *Local elections voting*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Strangers	0.0060		
	(0.0067)		
Cadres		0.031***	
		(0.0063)	
Parents			0.018*
			(0.010)
R-squared	0.14	0.16	0.15
Observations	1243	1243	1243
Panel B: *Party membership*			
	(4)	(5)	(6)
Strangers	0.023***		
	(0.0053)		
Cadres		0.019***	
		(0.0044)	
Parents			0.025***
			(0.0081)
R-squared	0.07	0.07	0.06
Observations	1559	1557	1557
Panel C: *Conflict*			
	(7)	(8)	(9)
Strangers	0.0058		
	(0.0036)		
Cadres		-0.017***	
		(0.0033)	
Parents			-0.016**
			(0.0080)
R-squared	0.04	0.05	0.04
Observations	1559	1557	1557
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the graduation-year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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

Panel A: *Trust*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	National officials	Provincial officials	Local officials
Sent-down cohorts	0.53*	0.63***	0.41**
	(0.28)	(0.14)	(0.17)
Bandwidth	4.6	4.5	4.4
Effective obs. left/right	59/63	59/58	51/42
Observations	331	312	331
Panel B: *Satisfaction*			
	(4)	(5)	(6)
	National gov.	County gov.	Neighborhood gov.
Sent-down cohorts	-0.12	0.038	-0.51
	(0.26)	(0.24)	(0.40)
Bandwidth	5.2	3.8	4.4
Effective obs. left/right	79/73	61/54	62/54
Observations	413	402	393

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.5: Attitudes Among the Sent-down

	Local gov. achievement
	(1)
Late return	-0.23**
	(0.098)
Birth-year FE	Yes
Province FE	Yes
R-squared	0.07
Observations	1984

Note: Standard errors in parenthesis are clustered at the graduation-year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.6: Identity (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) National pride	(2) Better country	(3) Strong gov.
Sent-down cohorts	0.38***	0.48	0.38***
	(0.050)	(0.29)	(0.14)
Bandwidth	4.6	5.6	3.2
Effective obs. left/right	77/72	95/81	47/37
Observations	415	412	375

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.7: National Pride and Attitudes (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) Political problems	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Policy satisfaction
National pride	-0.61***	-0.14	0.31***
	(0.22)	(0.13)	(0.090)
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.22	0.26	0.23
Observations	397	415	411

Note: Standard error in parenthesis is clustered at the birth-year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table B.8: Trust in Unknown People and Attitudes (The 2008 Survey)

	(1) Political problems	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Policy satisfaction
Trust unknown	-0.22	-0.51***	0.27**
	(0.28)	(0.18)	(0.10)
Birth-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Province FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.20	0.29	0.20
Observations	401	422	416

Note: Standard error in parenthesis is clustered at the birth-year level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

C Alternative Mechanisms

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

	(1) Education level	(2) ln(income)
Sent-down	0.61	12.7
	(2.52)	(18.5)
Bandwidth	3.8	4.6
Effective obs. left/right	409/353	421/399
Observations	1992	1625

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

	(1) Evaluated concern	(2) Evaluated reliability	(3) Forced voting
Sent-down	-6.39***	3.19***	-54.2
	(0.78)	(1.02)	(471.1)
Bandwidth	3.1	3.0	6.8
Effective obs. left/right	325/281	325/281	112/67
Observations	1992	1992	278

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 C.3: Likelihood of No Response

	(1) Corruption	(2) Local gov. achievement	(3) Local elections voting
Sent-down	-1.99**	0.046	-0.81***
	(0.93)	(0.046)	(0.28)
Bandwidth	3.9	4.0	3.6
Effective obs. left/right	409/353	409/353	409/353
Observations	1992	1992	1992

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 C.4: Effects of Sent-down on Baselines

	(1) Future confidence	(2) Experienced happiness
Sent-down	-2.04**	-0.56
	(0.80)	(1.47)
Bandwidth	3.4	4.5
Effective obs. left/right	325/281	513/429
Observations	1992	1992

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

D Alternative Specifications

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

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-8.01***	-2.56	-2.63***
	(0.90)	(1.66)	(0.64)
Effective obs left/right	257/218	257/219	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 3-year bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	1.43***	0.35***	-0.053
	(0.45)	(0.13)	(0.41)
Effective obs left/right	207/179	325/281	303/271
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 3-year bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	3.39***	11.2***	-5.84***
	(0.50)	(0.90)	(1.45)
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 3-year bandwidth on both sides of the cutoff. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.4: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (With Background Characteristics)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.78***	-2.78	-2.17***
	(1.35)	(2.57)	(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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table D.5: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (With Background Characteristics)

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	1.77***	0.86	-0.19
	(0.50)	(0.58)	(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 D.6: Effects of Sent-down on Trust (With Background Characteristics)

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	5.50***	12.5***	-4.87***
	(1.44)	(1.26)	(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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-9.34***	-1.22	-3.51***
	(0.75)	(1.41)	(1.18)
Bandwidth	4.4	4.5	4.4
Effective obs. left/right	319/275	319/276	409/352
Observations	1555	1558	1984

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	1.56**	-0.33	0.082
	(0.75)	(0.38)	(0.35)
Bandwidth	5.8	4.5	4.8
Effective obs. left/right	359/330	513/429	480/414
Observations	1243	1992	1891

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	3.99***	11.6***	-5.40***
	(0.73)	(1.21)	(0.82)
Bandwidth	4.7	4.3	4.7
Effective obs. left/right	402/337	318/277	402/337
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.10: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (Binary)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-2.93***	-0.47	-1.98*
	(1.03)	(0.40)	(1.17)
Bandwidth	3.6	3.9	3.6
Effective obs. left/right	319/275	319/276	409/352
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.11: Effects of Sent-down on Trust (Binary)

	(1) Strangers	(2) Cadres	(3) Parents
Sent-down	1.91***	3.54***	-1.06***
	(0.29)	(0.46)	(0.16)
Bandwidth	3.8	3.4	3.5
Effective obs. left/right	319/277	256/220	319/277
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.12: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (High School and Above)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-5.98***	-8.09	-6.96
	(2.05)	(6.84)	(13.1)
Bandwidth	3.0	3.8	3.9
Effective obs. left/right	155/117	193/158	250/201
Observations	880	882	1130

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) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	3.92**	1.61***	-4.47*
	(1.56)	(5.2e-15)	(2.37)
Bandwidth	3.4	2.5	3.5
Effective obs. left/right	121/97	139/100	230/194
Observations	701	1133	1067

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

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-5.98***	3.43***	-2.71***
	(2.05)	(0.33)	(0.78)
Bandwidth	3.0	3.2	3.1
Effective obs. left/right	155/117	114/100	147/132
Observations	880	632	838

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

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	-0.084	0.21	0.14
	(0.30)	(0.24)	(0.27)
Bandwidth	3.6	3.1	3.2
Effective obs. left/right	101/103	147/133	139/124
Observations	501	840	790

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.16: Effects of Sent-down on Attitudes (without Protesting Provinces)

	(1) Corruption	(2) Socioeconomic problems	(3) Local gov. achievement
Sent-down	-7.78***	-2.79	-2.07***
	(1.35)	(2.59)	(0.37)
Bandwidth	3.6	3.8	3.0
Effective obs. left/right	316/271	316/272	321/276
Observations	1527	1529	1948

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.17: Effects of Sent-down on Participation (without Protesting Provinces)

	(1) Local elections voting	(2) Party membership	(3) Conflict
Sent-down	1.77***	0.79	-0.19
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Bandwidth	3.3	3.8	4.0
Effective obs. left/right	206/178	405/348	378/337
Observations	1226	1955	1858

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

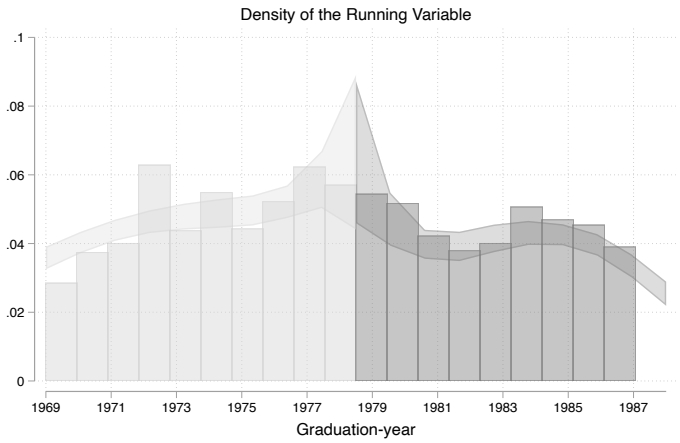


Figure E.1: Manipulation Testing Plot

E RD Design Checks

Table E.1: Background Characteristics

	(1) Gender	(2) Ethnic minority	(3) Family background
Sent-down	0.00033	0.013	0.0064
	(0.026)	(0.012)	(0.020)
Bandwidth	3.9	3.8	4.7
Effective obs. left/right	409/353	409/353	509/423
Observations	1992	1992	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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure E.2: Placebo Cutoffs: Attitudes

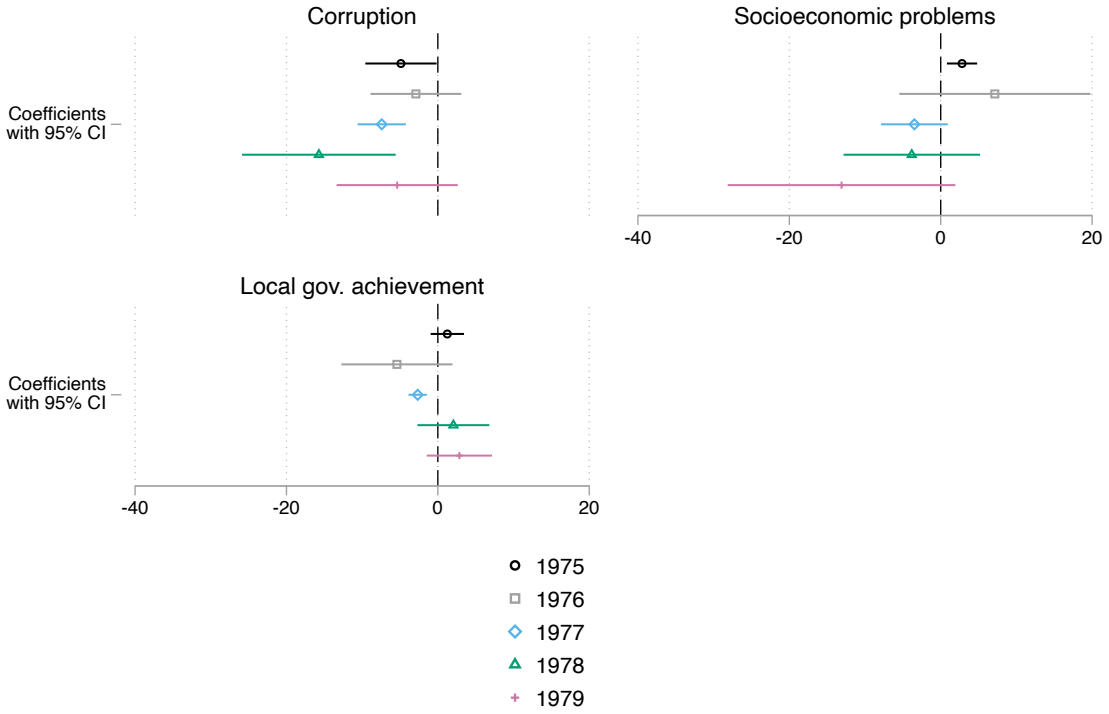
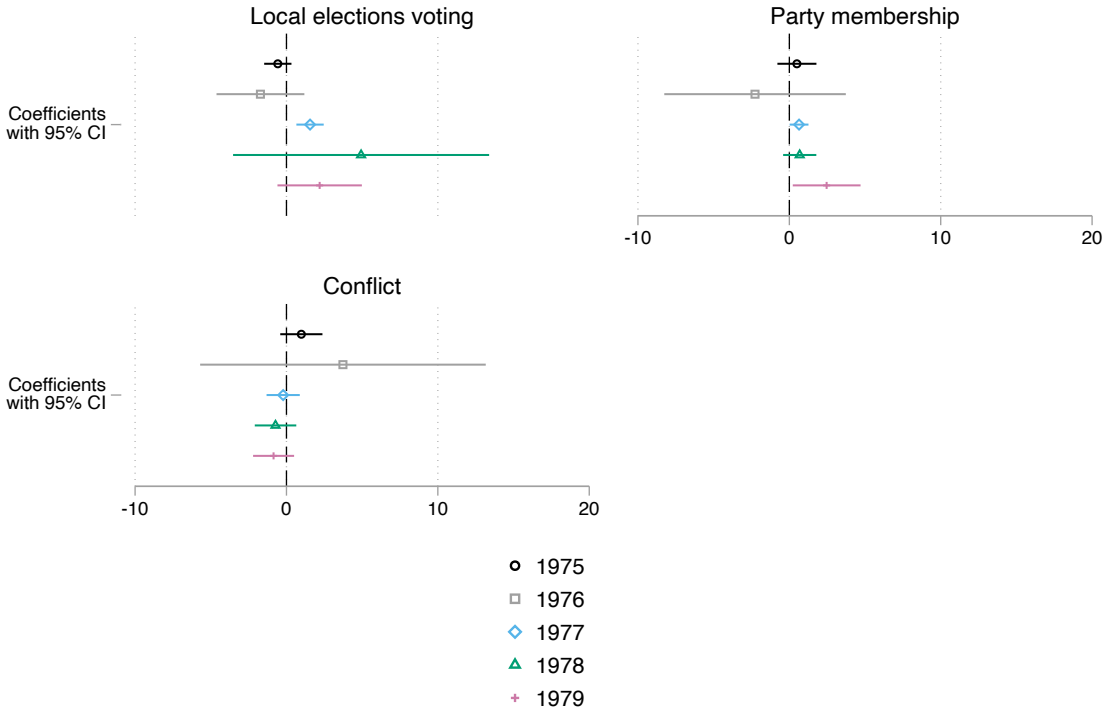


Table E.2: Placebo Outcomes

	(1) Altruism	(2) Life satisfaction	(3) Delay at gov. agency
Sent-down	0.39	-0.87	0.11
	(0.49)	(1.23)	(0.43)
Bandwidth	3.2	3.9	3.7
Effective obs. left/right	224/201	409/353	387/342
Observations	1365	1992	1904

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure E.3: Placebo Cutoffs: Participation



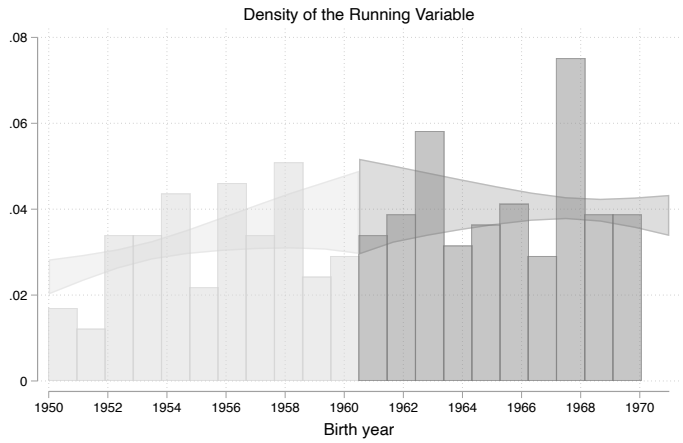


Figure F.1: Manipulation Testing Plot (The 2008 Survey)

F RD Design Checks (2008 Survey)

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

	(1) Ideology	(2) Workplace gender eq.	(3) International news
Sent-down cohorts	-0.32	-0.29	-0.16
	(0.52)	(0.19)	(0.82)
Bandwidth	6.7	6.1	4.8
Effective obs. left/right	38/49	97/84	80/75
Observations	184	417	415

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. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

G Variable Description

Variable Names	Section	Description	Available years
Corruption	Results: Attitudes	Corruption is respondents' perception of the severity of corruption The scale is from 0 (not severe) to 10 (very severe).	2012, 2014, 2016
Socioeconomic problems	Results: Attitudes	Socioeconomic problems is respondents' perception of the severity of socioeconomic issues. The list of issues consists of environment, inequality, employment, education, health care, housing, and social security. The scale is from 0 (not severe) to 10 (very severe).	2012, 2014, 2016
Local gov. achievement	Results: Attitudes	Local government achievement is respondents' perception of local county/district governments' performance. The scale is from 1 (poor performance) to 5 (great performance).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Local elections voting	Results: Participation	Local elections voting is respondents' voting outcomes in the most recent neighborhood community elections. The scale is 1 (voted) or 0 (not voted).	2014
Party membership	Results: Participation	Party membership is respondents' political status. The scale is 1 (communist party member) or 0 (not a communist party member).	2010 (time-invariant)
Conflict	Results: Participation	Conflict is whether respondents had conflict with government officials in the past year. The scale is 1 (conflict) or 0 (no conflict).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Trust: Strangers	Mechanisms: Trust	Stranger trust is respondents' level of trust in strangers. The scale is from 0 (low trust) to 10 (high trust).	2012, 2014, 2016
Trust: Cadres	Mechanisms: Trust	Cadre trust is respodnents' level of trust in cadres. The scale is from 0 (low trust) to 10 (high trust).	2012, 2014, 2016
Trust: Parents	Mechanisms: Trust	Parents trust is respondents' level of trust in their parents. The scale is from 0 (low trust) to 10 (high trust).	2012, 2014, 2016
Edu. level	Alternative mechanisms: Education	Education level is respondents' highest education degree obtained. The scale is from 1 (illiterate) to 8 (doctor) discrete.	2010

ln(income)	Alternative mechanisms: Education	ln(income) is the natural log of respondents' self-reported total income.	2010
Evaluated concern	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	Evaluated concern is interviewers' perception of respondents' level of suspicion about the interview. The scale is from 1 (not concerned) to 7 (much concerned).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Evaluated reliability	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	Evaluated reliability is interviewers' perception of the reliability of respondent's responses. The scale is from 1 (not reliable) to 7 (very reliable).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Forced voting	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	Forced voting is whether respondents were voluntary or forced to vote, given that the respondents voted in the most recent neighborhood community elections. The scale is 1 (forced) or 0 (voluntary).	2014
No response: Corruption	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	This variable measures whether respondents answered the corruption question. The scale is 1 (not answered) or 0 (answered).	2012, 2014, 2016
No response: Local gov. achievement	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	This variable measures whether respondents answered the local government acheivement question. The scale is 1 (not answered) or 0 (answered).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
No response: Local elections voting	Alternative mechanisms: Biased response	This variable measures whether respondents answered the local elections voting question. The scale is 1 (not answered) or 0 (answered).	2014
Future confidence	Alternative mechanisms: Baselines	Future confidencen is respondents level of confidence about their future. The scale is from 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Experienced happiness	Alternative mechanisms: Baselines	Experienced happiness is respondents level of subjective happiness. The scale is from 0 (not happy) to 5 (happy).	2010, 2014, 2016

Altruism	Placebo outcomes	Altruism is whether respondents think that most people are selfish or willing to help. The scale is 0 (seflish) or 1 (willing to help).	2014, 2016
Social status	Placebo outcomes	Social status is respondents self-rated social status in their local areas. The scale is from 1 (low status) to 5 (high status).	2010, 2012, 2014
Life satisfaction	Placebo outcomes	Life satisfaction is respondents self-rated satisfaction with their life. The scale is from 1 (not satisfied) to 5 (satisfied).	2010, 2012, 2014, 2016
Smoking	Placebo outcomes	Smoking is whether respondents have ever smoked. The scale is 1 (smoked) or 0 (never smoked).	2010