

Factional identity and selective protection in authoritarian regimes

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Abstract

Existing literature points to an authoritarian sanction dilemma: Dictators need to deter rent-seeking through strong sanction mechanisms, yet in doing so they risk antagonizing their own factional allies. Using a new dataset of disciplinary investigations in the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Party, I argue that regimes can resolve this dilemma by selectively protecting individuals who are perceived as allied with the dictator. Factional identity, the extent to which perceived and actual factional affiliation overlap, determines how selective protection manifests. In China, where factional identity is strong, the regime engages in ex-post protection by delaying sanctions and giving lenient punishments to investigated officials in provinces whose leaders share ties with the incumbent General Party Secretary. In contrast, under Vietnam's weak factional identity, such officials are protected ex-ante by being excluded from investigations. Altogether, these findings shed light into how authoritarian regimes with similar formal institutions produce divergent corruption and anti-corruption outcomes.

1 Introduction

To stay in power, an authoritarian leader has to ward off a dual threat: the threat of revolt from the mass and the threat of coup from the regime's own elites (Blaydes, 2010; Svobik, 2012). The former threat requires him to provide public goods to the mass, while simultaneously keeping a credible threat of sanction to deter his agents from rent-seeking and undermining public goods delivery. In doing so, however, the dictator gives up a key defense strategy against elite coups, namely the provision of rent-seeking opportunities to allies in exchange for loyalty. (Wintrobe, 1998; Bueno De Mesquita, 2003). This trade-off between punishing and protecting rent-seekers is the dictator's sanction dilemma.

A strand of literature argues that in response to this trade off, the dictator ultimately has to make a choice between providing protection or sanction based on whether political conditions allow him to risk public or elite dissent (Hollyer and Wantchekon, 2014). This paper presents an alternative strategy of selective protection, in which the dictator limits protection to a subset of the regime’s bureaucracy who are perceived factional allies of the dictator while threatening credible sanctions to the rest of the bureaucracy. Selective protection manifests in different forms depending on how such perception aligns with actual factional affiliation. When the regime has strong factional identity—where political actors have access to information that allows them to infer actual factional affiliation with high certainty—the dictator engages in *ex post* protection by actively interfering in investigations to lessen or negate investigated officials’ punishments. In contrast, when the regime’s factions are based on weak identity, and there is less certainty over factional affiliation, the dictator turns to *ex ante* protection by shielding his allies from becoming targeted in the first place.

The paper demonstrates the theory of selective protection through a comparative analysis of political sanctions in the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Party (CCP and VCP). The two parties share fundamental similarities in past political developments and current formal institutions as well as in recent anti-corruption trends. However, elite politics in Vietnam and China diverges when it comes to factional identity. Due to unique experiences with external military threats during the two countries’ wartime periods, elite factions in the CCP solidified around concrete and highly visible geographic ties, whereas Vietnam’s factions are more flexible and based on less visible ties (Trinh, 2019). Using a recent dataset on anti-corruption investigations in China and an original dataset of disciplinary activities conducted by the VCP’s Central Committee for Discipline Inspection¹, I find a diverging path when it comes to the fate of investigated officials in China and Vietnam. In China, disciplinary investigations show evidence of *ex post* but not *ex ante* sanction. Investigations are no less likely to take place in provinces whose party secretaries have shared hometown, workplace, and education ties with the incumbent CCP General Secretary than in provinces without such ties; however, once they occurred, investigations in provinces with ties are more drawn out, and result in more lenient sanctions compared to their counterparts in provinces without visible ties. In contrast, I observe *ex ante*, but not *ex post* sanction in Vietnam. Sanctions are less likely to occur in provinces with ties to the incumbent VCP General Secretary than in provinces without; yet once an investigation has taken place, shared ties no longer explain variations in political sanction outcomes.

¹The VCP and CCP use the same name for their respective Central Committees for Discipline Inspection. This paper will refer to the individual institution in China and Vietnam as CCDI-C and CCDI-V for short, respectively, and uses CCDI to refer to both.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the literature and presents the argument; section 3 provides a background of political sanction regimes in Vietnam and China. Section 4 is dedicated to the empirical analysis of political sanctions in Vietnam and China, sequentially. For each regime’s analysis, the paper discusses the data sources, its key findings, and address alternative explanations to its theory of selective protection. Finally, section 6 concludes the paper.

2 The dictator’s sanction dilemma

Dictators cannot rule alone (Bueno De Mesquita, 2003). To fend off the constant threat of mass protest and elite coup, he delegates power to two key groups. On one hand, just like in a democracy, the dictator enlists the support of a bureaucracy who implements policy and provides public goods to citizens on his behalf (Rauch and Evans, 2000; Egorov and Sonin, 2011). On the other hand, whereas a democratic leader’s political survival depends on popular votes, an authoritarian leader’s rests instead on a much smaller winning coalition, who holds high-ranking positions in the ruling party, military, or government. Collectively, these elites have a say in whether to stage a coup against the dictator (Bueno De Mesquita, 2003).

Delegation of power is an inherently risky business, as it exposes the dictator to various forms of agency loss (Strøm, Müller and Bergman, 2006). Bureaucrats can seek leisure or private rents at the principal’s and the citizen-clients’ expenses—in essence, diverting some of the public goods intended for the citizens into their own pocket (Shleifer and Vishny, 1993). Leisure- and rent-seeking activities undermine the dictator’s ability to deliver public goods to the citizens, who, even without the power of the votes, can still “punish” him through mass protests (Wintrobe, 1998; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2007; Desai, Olofsgård and Yousef, 2009). It is therefore in the dictator’s interest to implement sanction mechanisms to hold agents accountable. Sanction deters agency-loss behaviors by, among other things, raising the *perceived* probability that a transgression would be detected and punished (Saunders and Zeckhauser, 1993; Pitcher, 2013). Holding everything else constant, the more a bureaucrat believes that he might be the target of sanctions should he engage in leisure- or rent-seeking activities, the lower his expected payoff becomes, and the less likely he is to engage in them. When the threat of detection is sufficiently high, bureaucrats will make a rational decision not to seek rents or leisure altogether.

Oftentimes, however, the dictator also finds it necessary to tolerate, if not encourage a degree of agency loss among a subset of the regime’s bureaucracy. The root of this need

comes from the factional exchange between the dictator and his winning coalition. In fact, it is typical for dictators to “buy” loyalty with private goods and rent-seeking—the very things that sanctions are meant to prevent (Wintrobe, 1998). Thus, while strong sanctions can reduce agency loss, they also undermine the integrity of this elite bargain. If co-faction agents believe that they are potential targets for sanction, they will refrain from rent-seeking *and* supporting the dictator altogether. This can prove a grave danger to the dictator, who needs to stay on the elites’ good side to avoid a coup attempt. In fact, Svoboda (2009) estimates that of all 316 rulers who lost power through non-constitutional means between 1945 and 2002, only 68 were related to mass protest; 205 were ousted by insiders.

2.1 An inevitable trade-off?

The need to simultaneously limit agency loss and avoid antagonizing co-faction agents presents a sanction dilemma with no easy solution. An absence of sanction effort would allow agents to freely seek leisure and rents, and in doing so undermine the leader’s ability to placate the citizenry. In contrast, more credible sanctions limit agency loss, but in exchange, the dictator’s co-faction agents could interpret the threat of sanctions as the dictator’s failure to uphold his factional promise. In the worst case scenario, credible sanctions might engender another form of agency loss: The dictator’s supporters might be encouraged to collude with a challenger to overthrow the leader (Egorov and Sonin, 2011; Boix and Svoboda, 2013).

Existing studies on the sanction dilemmas have characterized the solution to the trade off as a binary choice between sanction and no sanction, and focused on the conditions that lead a dictator to pick one option over the other. Hollyer and Wantchekon (2014) argue that making credible commitment to sanction rent-seeking activities is a function of the regime’s ideological base. Credible sanctions take away a high-powered incentive with which the regime entices individuals to enter bureaucratic careers; however, when the regime’s pool of bureaucratic recruits includes a small but ideologically zealous minority—and an apathetic or hostile majority, the autocratic leader can call on these zealots to fill in the gap. In other words, the presence of zealots engenders a condition where the dictator can retain loyalty without rent-seeking opportunities.

In contrast with Hollyer and Wantchekon (2014)’s argument, the literature on anti-corruption commissions, notably in Hong Kong and Singapore, points to the necessity of credible sanctions in the face of pervasive corruption (Lethbridge, 1985; Quah, 1995; Heilbrunn, 2004; Manion, 2009; de Speville, 2010). Where corruption is so widespread and generates so much public discontent, and where conditions restrict other tactics against mass protest such as repression, the regime has no choice but to tie its own hands and en-

act credible anti-corruption mechanisms. Though different in conclusion, these studies at a similar implication to Hollyer and Wantchekon (2014): Sanction only occurs when the mass protest threat is disproportionate to elite threat. Yet, these are not as much solutions to the sanction dilemma as scoped conditions in which the dilemma does not really exist. In contrast, where the risks are comparable, these studies all predict a non-sanction status quo.

Parallel to these literature, another strand of studies on sanction activities moves away almost entirely from the sanction dilemma. Instead, they frame these activities as strictly about elite politics, whereas reducing rent-seeking and deterring mass protest are related to an afterthought. This coup-proofing literature places emphasis on conditions that prompt dictators to sanction rival agents in the regime. Roessler (2011) argues, for example, that a sufficiently high level of coup risks would prompt the dictator to engage in a purge campaign to eliminate strong rivals from the pool of agents. In contrast, Sudduth (2017*b*; 2017*a*) presents a more nuanced sanction threshold. Because a weak opposition does not need to be purged and a strong opposition cannot be purged without repercussions, a dictator engages in coup-proofing measures only when an otherwise-strong opposition suffers a temporary setback to its strength. Offering another line of argument, Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2015) suggests that other than decreasing coup-risks, purges also improve the leader's survival by shrinking the size of the winning coalition and allowing him to distribute the same amount of private rewards to a smaller number of supporters. *Ceteris paribus*, the dictator is more likely to initiate a purge when he is unlikely to suffer from ill health of assassination attempts. Under this circumstance, the not-purged elites would be more certain of their rewards in the post-purge coalition, and would support his purge attempt rather than a coup by the would-be purged.

Despite also failing to provide a complete answer to the sanction dilemma, the coup-proofing literature nevertheless provides a number of important insights in the leader's choice set and calculations. Most notably, it suggests that there needs not be a regime-level binary choice between sanction and no sanction. Instead, the dictator can control or at least manipulate who receives sanctions and who does not. In complement of this insight, this literature and related studies also suggest that the dictator can acquire information with regard to who his supporters and challengers might be by observing elites' characteristics, behaviors, and revealed policy preferences. (Shih, 2008*b*; Gueorguiev and Schuler, 2016; Sudduth, 2017*b*).

Building on these insights, I present a framework of selective protection, an alternative strategy applicable outside the scoped conditions outlined in earlier research.

2.2 Selective protection

The rationale for selective protection comes from the dictator's need to secure the support of a group of bureaucrats in the regime, collectively referred to as his co-faction agents. Whereas all bureaucrats provide day-to-day policy implementation and public goods delivery in exchange for wages, co-faction agents provide an extra layer of goods to the dictator in the form of political loyalty. Without this loyalty, the leader is vulnerable to coup attempts by challengers. In return, they are promised the privilege to engage in rent-seeking activities unpunished.

Agents will continue to deliver public goods and implement policy so long as they are compensated in wages. For non-faction agents, rent-seeking goods are welcomed as an added benefit but are not required for their services. In contrast, because political loyalty is costly, co-faction agents only provide them conditional on whether they expect to continue receiving private rents. Where the expected sanction risk exceeds rent seeking payoffs, non-faction agents refrain from rent-seeking; co-faction agents, on the other hand, refrain from rent-seeking and supporting the dictator altogether.

Co-faction agents do not wait until they themselves get sanctioned to adjust their expectation of sanction risk, or to decide to provide or withhold loyalty. Instead, they form their expectation by observing other agents whom they believe to be co-faction, and thus also parties to the dictator's rents-for-loyalty bargain. As a consequence, a dictator who seeks to retain co-faction agents' loyalty does so by providing protection to those *perceived* as his factional allies.

2.3 Factional identity and *ex post* versus *ex ante* protection

Perceived and actual factional affiliation does not necessarily overlap. Unlike a democracy, political support in an authoritarian regime does not come with transparent party labels, and there are few opportunities for political actors to reveal and acquire information about political loyalty (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1996). Political actors under authoritarian regimes also have the incentive to conceal or lie about their factional affiliation (Wintrobe, 1998). As a result, even the dictators sometimes have difficulty knowing who his allies are (Shih, 2008*b*), let alone other co-faction agents, who often have no connection to one another except indirectly through the dictator (Nathan, 1973; Nathan and Tsai, 1995).

In this paper, the extent to which political actors' actual factional affiliation to the dictator (or the absence thereof) can be accurately inferred is called a regime's *factional identity*. Research on coup-proofing purges (e.g. Roessler, 2011; Sudduth, 2017*b*) assumes

that factional identity in authoritarian regimes is strong by default, such that the dictator can readily observe subtle, temporary changes in the balance of power between factions. In contrast, many others take weak factional identity as the starting point. Wintrobe (1998) declares that “the characteristic personality trait of dictators is paranoia,” hinting at the difficulty with which the leader monitors and enforces his followers’ loyalty. Others contend that elites in the winning coalition can flip side at crucial moment unilaterally, even as they professed loyalty to the dictator (Haber, 2006) or previously benefited from the dictator’s private goods (Acemoglu, Egorov and Sonin, 2006; Egorov and Sonin, 2011). Here, I argue that neither weak nor strong factional identity is inherent to authoritarian regimes. Rather, factional identity varies in strength across regimes, and even across different time periods within the same regime. In addition, whereas previous studies on costly-signaling (Shih, 2008*b*) or loyalty-competence trade-off (Prendergast and Topel, 1996; Glazer, 2002; Burkart, Panunzi and Shleifer, 2003) have discussed how actors can make *specific* connections transparent and non-malleable, I argue that the overall strength of factional identity is itself a variable.

Factional identity is strong when agents’ membership in the dictator’s faction is both transparent and non-malleable. Factional membership is transparent when there exist individual characteristics or traits that are highly correlated with one’s factional affiliation; and it is non-malleable when agents cannot unilaterally manipulate these traits to conceal or fabricate their factional membership. When both conditions are met, agents can use these traits to accurately distinguish co-faction from non-faction agents. Not only are the sets of perceived and actual co-faction agents close to indistinguishable, but political actors are also confident in their perception of factional membership. In contrast, where factional identity is weak, visible characteristics or traits are less indicative of factional affiliation. Political actors still attempt to infer one another’s membership, but are much less confident in their inferences.

Factional identity, through influencing the certainty of factional membership perception, in turn affects the way a dictator provides selective protection. At any point, a dictator has access to two strategies: He can either engage in *ex ante* protection by ensuring that perceived co-faction agents never become the target of an investigation in the first place, or engage in *ex post* protection, by intervening in ongoing investigations and ensure that investigated co-faction agents receive only lenient, or no punishment at all. Both forms of protection aim to reduce the cost of rent-seeking for co-faction agents compared to its expected benefits. However, *ex post* protection is costly, and is more visible. In providing *ex post* protection, the dictator pays an audience cost. In return, his act of protection is observable by all co-faction agents and has an immediate impact on their perceived sanction

risks, provided that they can confidently infer that this protection is extended to a fellow co-faction agents. *Ex ante* protection, on the other hand, is less costly; yet because an agent who's protected *ex ante* is observationally equivalent from one who does not engage in rent-seeking, or one whose rent-seeking activity has not been detected, it is less effective in influencing co-faction agents' perceived sanction risks. Thus, under strong factional identity, the dictator engages in high-cost high-reward *ex post* protection, whereas under weak factional identity, he prefers to keep his co-faction agents happy through *ex ante* protection.

- **Hypothesis 1:** When factional identity is strong, the dictator engages in *ex post* but not *ex ante* protection
- **Hypothesis 2:** When factional identity is weak, the dictator engages in *ex ante* but not *ex post* protection

3 Background

The Vietnamese and Chinese Communist Party offer an excellent comparison to test the paper's hypotheses. The two Parties were established in the early 1920s and rose to power through a series of revolutionary-civil wars, the Sino-Japanese and the Chinese Civil War in China, and the First and Second Indochina War in Vietnam. Both countries experienced economic stagnation under central-planned economies in the post-war period, before embarking on marketization reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. The two reforms followed a similar formula that involved, sequentially, the dismantling of agricultural collectives and state-owned enterprises, the acceptance of private enterprises, and a move toward an export-oriented economy (Kerkvliet, Chan and Unger, 1998).

In Vietnam as much as in China, economic liberalization took place without significant political reforms. The VCP and CCP's political and administrative institutions today still largely follow the same template of democratic centralism. At the very top, the Party leadership is nominally selected through two rounds of internal elections. Every five year, delegates in the VCP and CCP would hold a National Party Congress to elect a Central Committee, who in turn elects its members into core leadership positions, the Politburo (VCP) and Politburo Standing Committee (CCP). Members of these bodies assume the most important administrative positions in the government; the highest-ranking member and *de facto* regime leader, the General Party Secretary, holds control of the military through his concurrent seat as Secretary of the Central Military Commission. Down below, the Communist Parties controls all governmental organs through embedded Party cells. These organs

Table 1: Vietnam and China in indices

	China	Vietnam
2017 Freedom of the Press (0=least free, 100=most free)	14 (Not free)	20 (Not free)
2018 World Press Freedom Index (0=most free, 100=less free)	74.93 (rank 176/180)	78.92 (rank 177/180)
2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (0= most corrupt, 100=least corrupt)	33 (rank 117/180)	39 (rank 87/180)

and Party cells are organized in a quasi-federal arrangement, referred to in China as *tiao kuai* (“branch and lump”). A government organ in a given sector is answerable both vertically to the organ immediately above it in the same sector, as well as horizontally to the local government at the same administrative level. Similarly, Party bodies report both to their sectoral higher-ups as well as to local Party Committees of the district, province, or municipality in which they reside (Lieberthal, Lampton and Others, 1992). Outside the government, the regimes permit a limited degree of civil society, but required all mass organizations to be registered under a regime-controlled umbrella organization—the Vietnamese Fatherland Front and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (Thayer, 2010). Both Parties maintained tight control of the public sphere, and have been criticized by civil rights advocates for restriction of civil rights, censorship, and media (see Table 1).

Vietnam and China are even more compatible comparisons in that both countries are undergoing a period of intense anti-corruption efforts. China’s ongoing anti-corruption campaign could be traced back to November 2012, when the incumbent CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping vowed to “kill all tigers and flies alike” in his inauguration speech (Branigan, 2013). Similar to his Chinese counterpart, the incumbent VCP General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong also made setting up an “anti-corruption oven” that “would burn even wet firewood” his major policy priority (Vietnamnet, 2018). As it appeared, both anti-corruption campaigns have gone beyond mere rhetoric. According to official numbers, the campaign in China has netted more than 172,000 in 2013, 330,000 in 2015, and 527,000 individuals in 2017 (Wang, Zou and Wing, 2014; Wang, 2016; Xinhua, 2018). Two-and-a-half years after its campaign’s announcement, Vietnam has also disciplined more than 35,000 Party cadres and arrested several high-ranking officials, including an incumbent Politburo member, two provincial-level Party Secretaries, one deputy minister, and several military commanders (Nguoilambao, 2018; Vietnamnet, 2018). At the same time, both campaigns are criticized as veiled excuse for political in-fighting (Thayer, 2017a; Zhu and Zhang, 2017).

While similar in almost every other aspect, Vietnam and China diverge precisely in the paper’s explanatory variable of interest—factional identity. While factionalism is a common denominator in both regimes, historical developments led contemporary Chinese factions to form around highly visible geographic and professional ties, whereas factions in the VCP formed around invisible ties (Trinh, 2019). In China as well as Vietnam, the very first factional conflicts emerged took on a geographical character. For the VCP, the disintegration of the Communist movement’s central leadership in the 1920s, then based in Guangzhou, brought its members to open conflict, partly over the direction of the movement but more so over its leadership. The conflict led to the temporary dissolution of the movement in 1929 and the formation of two regional Communist Parties, an all-Northerner Communist Party of Indochina and a Communist Party of Annam in the South (Huỳnh, 1986). The two Parties would continue to attack each other while vying for the Comintern’s recognition as the legitimate Communist party in Vietnam (Nguyen, 1964; Vu, 2017; Duiker, 1996, p. 32) (Huỳnh, 1986, p. 120). In China, the first open conflict emerged in 1922, three years after the Party’s establishment, between a faction of Soviet-trained cadres and native cadres educated in China, including Li Davao and Chen Duxiu, two of the Party’s founding members (Saich and Yang, 1996). The Soviet faction, backed by the Comintern, forced the CCP to join the Kuomintang under the United Front framework (Schwartz, 1967, p.41); subsequently, they took over the Party’s leadership and sidelined native cadres despite protests from the latter.

Factions, when defined by geographical cleavages, have very strong identity. A Party cadre’s affiliation can be easily inferred by other cadres not only through his/her biographic record, but also visual traits, accents, or even his/her own name. However, strong factional identity only persisted in China. Following the struggle between native cadres and Soviet-trained associates was an era of revolutionary “mountaintops” isolated by geography. These mountaintops then evolved into semi-independent military-administrative apparatuses by the end of the Chinese Civil War, preserving the transparency and non-malleability of factional membership. In contrast, the division in the VCP was quickly suppressed not once but thrice. In 1930 and 1931, the French deployed military forces to suppress the Communist-backed Nghe-Tinh Soviet revolt, and arrested 1,000 to 1,300 VCP members including the entire VCP’s Central Committee and its first Party General Secretary (Duiker, 1996, p. 41). Another failed revolt, the Cochinchina Uprising in 1940, led to the arrest of another 2000-plus Party members and sympathizers and again wiped out the Party’s leadership in the south, including the second, third, and fourth VCP General Secretary (Chonchirdsin, 1997). The decimation of the Southern ranks left the VCP under the leadership of a group of northern elites who, during the entire First Indochina War, had few opportunities to cultivate separate power bases. The Southern faction would only re-emerge during the 1960s, with the

rise of Le Duan, the 6th VCP General Secretary and a Southern cadre, and the creation of extensive Communist infrastructure in South Vietnam (Trinh, 2019). However, it was again destroyed by an external threat, this time the joint US-South Vietnam military during the 1968 Tet Offensive. With at least 44,824 deaths Army (1969, No.124/TGi, file 1.103) and 40% of their political cadres killed or immobilized in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, the Southern Communists were no longer capable of launching operations of their own, and had to depend entirely on the North (Warner, 1977; Duiker, 1996, p. 303).

Due to these diverging pathways, contemporary factions in the CCP continue to be distinguished by strong factional identity based on geographic and professional backgrounds. Elites actively recruited from places where they worked and studied, forging patron-client relationships that can be reliably predicted based on the “three-sames”—same workplace, same hometown, and same education (Meyer, Shih and Lee, 2016). In contrast, these shared backgrounds are also salient in general Vietnamese culture, but do not play a similar role as a indicator of factional affiliation. Instead, elite conflicts in Vietnam are dominated by disagreements over ideology and policy, most notably along the reformist-versus-conservative and China-versus-US spectrums Vuving 2010; Malesky, Abrami and Zheng 2011; Thayer 2017*b*. The VCP today, in other words, constitutes a case of weak factional identity.

3.1 Political sanctions: The Central Commissions for Discipline Inspection

Bureaucrats in Vietnam and China are under the supervision of three main sanction institutions. First, they are subject to legal sanction by the regimes’ judiciary branch, which includes the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Prosecutorate. The Criminal Code in both countries defined a wide range of violations applicable specifically to government officials, such as treason, espionage, or dereliction of duty, as well as specific provisions for abuse-of-power and corruption violations (People’s Republic of China, 2011, chapter VIII)(Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2015, chapter XXIII). Second, each executive branch has a dedicated organ for the inspection of government officials: the Government Inspectorate in Vietnam, and the Ministry of Supervision in China.² Both organs are tasked with policy making and policy consultation with the Head of Government and other government offices in public administration and corruption control. In addition, they handle accusations and investigate violations related to public official malfeasance and corruption. However, neither organ holds the power to issue sanction, and can only forward cases to other

²In 2018, the Ministry of Supervision was dissolved and merged into the National Supervision Commission (which in turn had its operations merged into the CCDI)

relevant offices (People’s Republic of China, 1997; Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2005).

In practice, because the head of all ministry-level agencies and of the People’s Prosecutor and People’s Court at all levels are required to be Communist Party members, and because of strong *tiao-kuai* control of governmental organs, political sanctions are ultimately orchestrated through Party apparatuses. Party sanctions, though formally separate from government sanctions, take precedence over legal and government sanctions,³ and are coordinated at the very top by the Central Commissions for Discipline Inspection (CCDI-C and CCDI-V for short).

There are few major differences in the CCDI-C’s and CCDI-V’s organizational structure. Both organizations’ members are elected by the National Party Congress and approved by the Central Committee to serve a five-year term. These members then elect their own leader, who has traditionally been a member of the Party’s highest body, the Politburo in Vietnam (since 1991) and the Politburo Standing Committee in China (since 1978).⁴ The CCDIs are given mandate to inspect a wide range of violations that include ideological infractions, violations of democratic centralism and government socio-economic policies, moral and lifestyle offenses, as well as other offenses already governed by the Criminal Codes (Wedeman, 2004; Vietnam Communist Party, 2017)

Organizationally, the CCDI is divided into a central office and local Inspection Commissions (ICs) at every administrative level, from province down to district (Vietnam Communist Party, 2006, chapter 1). Local IC leaders are elected internally, and are subject to approval by corresponding and higher level Party Committees (Communist Party of China, 2012, Chapter VIII, Article 43) (Vietnam Communist Party, 2014, Article 24). The CCDI is in charged of supervising investigating all central-level officials; each local IC, on the other hand, supervises and investigates Party members in organs that rank equal to or directly below it, as well as Party organs that rank below it. A provincial-level IC, for example, can investigate members of the province’s Party Committee and other provincial-level Party offices (Vietnam Communist Party, 2009, chapter VII, article 32) (Communist Party of China, 2012, chapter VIII). CCDIs and their ICs do not possess the power to investigate and issue sanctions independently, however. When a local IC in China discovers a disciplinary violation, it must “report to the Party Committee at the corresponding level for approval” before starting a formal investigation. Afterwards, they also have to report to equal-rank Party committees on “the results of their handling of cases of special importance or complexity, as well as on the problems encountered” (Communist Party of China, 2012, chapter VIII,

³According to Huy Duc (2012), for example, a Central Committee member can only be prosecuted after the Party has “met and decided on the level of Party sanction”

⁴In China, this has become a formal requirement since the 15th National Congress in 1997

article 44). ⁵Similarly, in Vietnam, an IC at any level can issue lesser sanctions (warnings and reprimands) against Party cadres in organs below its levels and all sanctions to Party cadres in organs two levels below it. For sanctions against cadres in the same-level Party organs and major sanctions (dismissals and expulsion) against one-level-below cadres, it has to refer the case to the same-level Party Committee and to the upper-level IC for final decision (Vietnam Communist Party, 2009, chapter VII, article 36). The CCDI-V at the top can decide on lesser sanctions against central Party cadres, but not members of the Central Committee, Politburo, or the Secretariat; rather, sanctions against those are decided by the Politburo, and ultimately the Central Committee.

In fact, the *tiao kuai* control of local ICs goes far beyond the power to approve sanctions. Horizontally, local Party Committees in both Vietnam and China control the IC in its jurisdiction through the former's authority over the latter's membership. In Vietnam, local IC members are elected by the Party Committee at the same level; in addition, the elected members must be approved by the Party Committee directly above it. The same was the case in China until 2004, when the power to select local IC's membership is transferred to the IC directly above it. Even then, Party Committees at corresponding and superior level retain the authority to approve this selection. Vertically, upper-level ICs control their subordinate ICs through their authority to modify or overrule the latter's decisions (Communist Party of China, 2012, chapter VIII, article 45) (Vietnam Communist Party, 2017).

3.2 Central and local interference in political sanctions

The formal structure of Party control over the CCDIs and their ICs in Vietnam and China leaves them exposed to interference from political elites outside these organizations. Interference can occur through both formal and informal channels, and can originate from the regime's central leadership as well as from Party leaders in the localities.

At the very top of the leadership chain, the General Party Secretaries hold no direct power over Party sanction institutions.⁶ Instead, their influence is derived indirectly from their position as the first-among-equal in the Central Committee and the Politburo/Politburo Standing Committee. Through these bodies' formal power, they can then protect Party officials suspected for violations in two ways. First, there are stipulations that require both

⁵If the case involves a member of the local Party Committee's standing committee, it should report to both that Party Committee and then to the IC at the next higher level for approval."

⁶In Vietnam since 2013, the General Secretary also heads the Central Steering Committee on Anti-Corruption, a coordination body with no independent sanction capacity

CCDIs to seek the Politburo or Politburo Standing Committee’s approval before initiating an investigation against Central Committee members and above (e.g. Vietnam Communist Party, 2016).⁷ Second, even if an investigation has concluded, the CCDIs still require further approvals to issue sanctions if it involves a Central Committee member, or, specifically in Vietnam, if it leads to major sanctions against a non-Central Committee central-level cadre (Guo, 2014; Vietnam Communist Party, 2009, chapter VII, article 36).⁸ This effectively gives top leaders the power to collectively stop investigations and sanctions that they deem undesirable in their tracks, or at least delay them for considerable amount of time. CCDI investigators, expecting the extra burden they might face, would also be incentivized to propose minor sanctions even if the violation warrants more serious punishment (Guo, 2014).

Informally, the regime leaders, again through the Central Committee and the Politburo/Politburo Standing Committee, also have authority over CCDI personnel matters. In both Vietnam and China, the CCDI head is required to be a member of the Politburo/Politburo Standing Committee. Additionally, in Vietnam the Politburo determines the number of CCDI deputy secretaries and approves the elected members of all ICs immediately below the CCDI (Vietnam Communist Party, 2016, Article 31); In China, the Central Committee approves the CCDI’s standing committee, secretary, and deputy secretary (Communist Party of China, 2012, Chapter VIII, Article 45).

Below the Politburos and Central Committees, similar channels exist to bind local IC’s activities under local Party leaders’ influence. Local leaders, through their leadership of Party Committees, preside over the investigation of cases conducted by ICs immediately subordinate administrative levels. They have the power to approve investigations; to approve sanctions; and to modify, override, and veto sanction decisions made by these ICs. During an investigation—which requires many steps, from preliminary review to case opening, evidence collection, case hearing, sanction implementation, and appeal (Guo, 2014)—local Party leaders can also create delays by demanding and withholding approvals at every step. This, in fact, can allow investigated officials to destroy evidence and escape punishment. Beyond the power to interfere through formal channels, local Party leaders also hold informal influence over local IC activities. Again, much of this informal power comes from the Party Committees’ control over IC personnel. Local Party Committees have a say in approving IC staff, they are able to put their own subordinates in these positions. Prior to 2014, Vietnamese and Chinese Party codes also required that some IC committee members hold concurrent offices in equal-rank Party offices (Vietnam Communist Party, 2016, Article 31). Furthermore, IC

⁷This includes most ministerial and vice-ministerial positions, and all provincial Party Secretaries

⁸When the officials in question are members of the Politburo, or when the proposed sanction involves dismissal or expulsion, the Central Committee holds the final say on sanction decision, which it does through a closed vote (Vietnam Communist Party, 2016, Article 36)

and the CCDI staff are rotated on a five-year basis, and it is often the case that they will end up working in the same locality and/or with the same Party cadres they used to investigate. This creates a pressure for disciplinary inspectors to avoid “stirring the pot,” and prioritize local Party cadres’ goodwill over their responsibilities (Guo, 2014, p 611). Interviews of retired provincial officials in Vietnam are consistent with this tendency: Party cadres in the same province generally “look out for one another,” and Party committees and IC staff alike are reluctant to open new cases unless they receive clear instruction from the top.⁹

In recent years, both regimes’ CCDIs have undergone a number of reforms to its jurisdiction and organization. Since 2013 and 2014, CCDI-C has reduced its involvement from 125 to 14 issues and consolidated its departments and offices, in effect withdrawing its involvement from most disciplinary matters to focus on corruption and clean governance (Xinhua, 2014; Manion, 2016). Second, it has shifted a number of authorities, such as the authority to approve an investigation and to nominate IC heads and deputy heads from local Party Committees to superior ICs.¹⁰ Third, ICs leaders also shed concurrent duties in other organs in a move to limit conflicts-of-interests (Beijing News, 2014). It is suggested that these reforms would have the effect of reducing some degrees of local interference in sanction outcomes (Manion, 2016). Local elites still have the final say in a sanction decision, but overall, they have less influence in the sanction process and fewer ways to influence the final outcome. At the same time, it could also mean a shift in the source of elite interference from local to central Party elites.

In the next sections, I examine how elite interference in political sanctions takes shape in Vietnam and China. In my hypotheses, I expect that there would be evidence of *ex post* selective protection in China, where factional identity is strong and visible ties are a reliable indicator of factional affiliation, and of *ex ante* protection in Vietnam, where factional identity is weaker. Consistent with my expectation, I find that while sanctions are no less likely to take place in provinces whose party secretaries have visible ties with the incumbent CCP General Secretary than in provinces without such ties, they take longer to conclude and result in more lenient sanctions than investigations in provinces without visible tie. In contrast, provinces with ties to the incumbent VCP General Secretary have fewer sanctions than provinces without such ties; yet these sanctions are no less severe than sanctions in provinces without ties.

⁹Interview HN-191002-01

¹⁰Local Party Committees retained the power to approve the final elected cadres

4 Empirical analysis

4.1 General approach

To examine the diverging manifestations of selective protection in Vietnam and China, I focus on the profiles of individuals targeted for investigations by the two CCDIs. While ex-ante and ex-post protection ultimately serves the same purpose—to communicate the dictator’s protection of those with perceived ties to him, they take place at different stages of the disciplinary investigation process and influence these profiles differently. Because ex ante protection aims to protect officials from being sanctioned in the first place, beneficiaries of this strategy will not end up among those investigated in the first place. On the other hand, ex post protection will manifest specifically *among those already investigated*, in the form of more lenient sanctions. Thus, even when without access to the full population of officials who seek rents, we can examining the extent and target of these selective protection strategies by identifying, statistically, who are underrepresented from the ranks of investigated officials, and who are given abnormally lenient punishments among them.

This section follows with a comparative empirical analysis of investigation targets in Vietnam and China, sequentially. For this analysis, I make two important modeling assumptions. First, with regard to ex ante protection, I assume that the incidence of investigations across localities in both countries is a function of four inputs: Latent rent-seeking level, which determines how frequently disciplinary violations occur; latent anti-corruption efforts, which determines how frequently such violations are detected; socio-economic performance, which influence a range of outcomes including rent-seeking incentives and disincentives, as well as policing and governance capacity; and finally ex ante protection. Holding the first three inputs constant, variations in exposed rent-seeking incidence then reflect variations in ex ante protection.

Similarly, I argue that once investigated, an individual’s sanction outcomes is a function of four inputs: The nature of the violation itself; the locality’s socio-economic performance; individual characteristics, which affect personal political clout and subjective judgment of the individual’s criminality (Holzer, Raphael and Stoll, 2006); and finally, *ex post* intervention. Again, I assume that holding the first three inputs constant, remaining variations in sanction outcomes reflect variations in *ex post* protection.

4.2 Ex-ante protection under weak factional identity: Vietnam analysis

4.2.1 Data

There is an emerging literature on disciplinary investigations in China and in particular on General Party Secretary Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign (Manion, 2016; Lu and Lorentzen, 2018). However, little research has been done on Vietnam—owing partly to the recency of its ongoing anti-corruption campaign, and partly to data unavailability. To make a China-Vietnam comparison of selective protection possible, I collect an original dataset of the CCDI-V’s disciplinary activities by developing a web scraper to retrieve all official releases ever published on its website since it first went online in June 2016. The scraper yields 1428 official releases between June 2016 and October 2018, which report on various activities conducted by the central as well as local ICs. To narrow down on political sanctions, I then categorize these releases by type of activity. First, I and two research assistants select a sub-sample of 10% of the original dataset and manually classify each article into one or a combination of up to four categories. Then, for each category, we identify a list of discriminatory words that are most associated with articles within the category, and then use keyword search to categorize the rest of the dataset. An article is selected into a category if it contains at least one of the discriminatory words in the corresponding list. The categories, definition, lists of discriminatory words and number of classified articles are shown in Table 7.

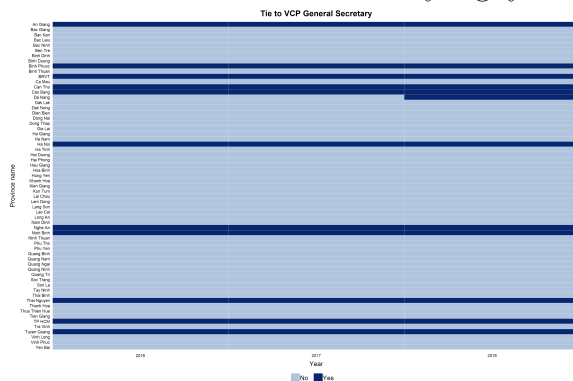
Table 2: Categorization rules for CCDI’s public releases

Categories	# of articles	Condition	Keywords
Sanction	477	Article reports on results of an investigation	<i>ky luat, khai tru, mien nhiem, khien trach, canh cao, kiem diem, khuyet diem, cach chuc, sai pham</i>
Inspection	702	Article reports on the commencement of an inspection (including routine inspections and inspections in response to a complaint)	<i>kiem tra, giam sat, lam viec voi, lam viec tai</i>
Meeting	308	Article reports on a press conference, a regular meeting, or visit by foreign delegates	<i>giao ban, hoi thao, hoi nghi, so ket, tong ket, hop, dai hoi</i>
Training	87	Article reports on training activity conducted by or for CCDI staff	<i>tap huan, boi duong, dao tao</i>

The analysis in this section focuses on articles in the Sanction category. From these articles, I identify the locations in which all disciplinary violations took place. I also identify the names of 537 investigated Party members mentioned in these articles, and collect information on their current position and workplace as found in the articles’ content. I also identify the level of the IC that issued the sanction, the sanction issued, and details on their violations. From the dataset, I derive two key measures of political protection. The first measure, *Case Count*, is aggregated at province level, and captures the number of investigations that result in one sanction or more in a province at a given period. If, indeed, that *ex ante* selective protection based on visible ties takes place in Vietnam, sanctions would occur at a lower rate in provinces whose leaders have visible ties to the regime leader than in provinces without such ties. The second measure captures *ex-post* selective protection, and is called *Sanction Level*. An official who has been found to have violated Party discipline is subject to four levels of Party sanctions, ranged from the least to the most serious: reprimand, warning, demotion, and Party expulsion (Vietnam Communist Party, 2016). In an alternative coding scheme, I also code sanction level as a dummy that indicates whether the official receives an immediately career-consequential sanction i.e. demotion or expulsion.

For data on visible ties, I develop another web scraper to extract information from the

Figure 1: Ties to VCP General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong



Vietnamese-language Wikipedia, as well as the official website of the VCP (www.dangcongsan.vn). This web scraper allows me to construct an original biographical dataset of more than 1700 Vietnamese elites, including all Politburo, Central Committee and Alternate Central Committee members from the first to the most recent (12th) Party Congress; all provincial Party Secretaries from the 10th to the 12th Party Congress (from 2006 to present), as well as the members of the National Assembly from 1946 to 2018. For each individual, I collect data on his/her name, gender, birthplace, religion, and ethnicity. Wherever available, I also record their career trajectory in the Party and government. Information on VCP cadres' career history is uneven across individuals: Profiles of Politburo members and more recent cadres tend to be very detailed, whereas older and lower-ranked officials often have missing details. To fill in missing details for these cadres, I look up mentions of their names and biographies in official newspapers of provinces in which they are/were located. All in all, this dataset includes the most up-to-date, most detailed, and most expansive records of Vietnamese elites using publicly accessible data.

Similar to existing research on CCP factional networks (Shih, 2008*a*; Meyer, Shih and Lee, 2016; Keller, 2016), I use biographical data of VCP leaders and provincial Party secretaries to derive a measure of indirect visible tie. An investigated official is coded to have visible tie to the General Party Secretary if the party secretary of the province in which the violation occurred (1) is born in the same province as General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, or (2) has worked at the same ministerial-level unit with him for at least a year. To avoid over-identifying ties, I do not include Central Committee career overlaps, since the General Secretary and all provincial party secretaries, by default, are included in the Central Committee. We also do not count university tie due to data constraints.

4.2.2 Models

To see whether provinces with visible ties to the General Secretary were selectively excluded from sanctions, I run the following model:

$$CaseCounts_{ij} = \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta}Tie_{ij} + \mathbf{ProvChars}_{ij}$$

In the model, *Tie* is a dummy indicator that takes the value of 1 if a province’s party secretary has visible tie to General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in a given year, while *ProvChars* is a control vector that accounts for variations in corruption level, anti-corruption efforts, and socio-economic performance in the same province-year period. In this vector, I control for the number of activities that were announced in the same province in a given year, as a proxy for both latent corruption level and/or anti-corruption efforts. This includes not only disciplinary inspections and sanctions, but also other routine activities such as non-disciplinary visits, trainings, and workshops. In addition, I control for variations in provinces’ socio-economic performance by including provincial GDP and population size, as well as central-to-local targeted transfers, expressed as share of total revenue. Targeted transfers include equalization grants and earmarked transfers, given to local governments whose expenditure needs are greater than their revenues (Malesky, 2009; Malesky, Abrami and Zheng, 2011); thus, they serve as a proxy for budgetary constraints, central government dependence, and to a lesser extent, poverty level. Also included is the aggregate score of the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) (Malesky et al., 2018), or, alternatively, the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) (CECODES et al., 2019), which further accounts for governance and/or anti-corruption capacity.

To test the second half of my prediction—that the VCP’s leaders will not engage in ex-post selective protection—I run another model using *Sanction Level* as the key dependent variable. The explanatory variable again is visible tie to General VCP Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. In addition, I include three control vectors to account for individual, provincial, and investigation variations:

$$P(y_{ijt} = m | x_{ijt}) = \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta}Tie_{jt} + \hat{\gamma}_1 \mathbf{InvChars}_{ijt} + \hat{\gamma}_1 \mathbf{IndChars}_{ijt} + \hat{\gamma}_2 \mathbf{ProvChars}_{jt}$$

In this model, individual controls include an indicator for the administrative level of the investigated official’s office where the violation occurred, and dummy for whether the official has left the position during which violation occurred. Provincial controls include

the variables used in the previous model, namely revenue, population, targeted transfer, and governance capacity measured by PCI and PAPI scores. Among investigation-specific controls, I include an indicator for the IC in charge’s administrative level, and an indicator for its designated seriousness of the violation based on the text of official release. According to the VCP’s Decision No. 30-QD/TW, an IC can assign three levels of seriousness to a violation, based on, among other things, the culprit’s intention and the violation’s political and economic consequence: “Of little seriousness” (*it nghiêm trong*, or no mention), Serious (*nghiêm trong*), very serious (*rat nghiêm trong*), and extremely serious (*dac biet nghiêm trong*). The specific criteria for these designations are in turn stipulated in the VCP’s Decision No. 102-QD/TW. . Finally, I control for idiosyncratic over-time variations and for differences in data coverage across years with year fixed effects.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for provincial socio-economic and governance variables

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Province mentions in sanction cases	189	2.59	2.80	0	13
Province mentions in all CCDI-V reports	189	8.68	8.82	0	65
Ties to General Secretary	189	0.18	0.39	0	1
2011 population (thousands)	189	1,394.29	1,188.85	299	7,521
Lagged GDP (billion VND)	180	65,693.42	114,134.60	5,518.10	778,158.00
Lagged targeted transfer (share of total revenue)	189	0.41	0.47	0.002	2.78
PCI score	189	61.53	3.34	52.99	70.69
Unweighted PAPI score	189	36.24	1.83	25.33	39.57

4.2.3 Ex-ante protection results

Overall, the results are consistent with the paper’s expectation. When it comes to ex-ante protection, provinces with visible ties to the VCP General Secretary experienced 0.96 to 1.31 fewer sanction cases than provinces without such ties every year. The results are statistically significant after controlling for the number of province mentions in all CCDI-V activities, as well as for provincial socio-economic differences. The estimates are also substantively significant, given that the mean number of sanctioned investigations are only 2.59 cases per year. Other than visible ties, there is also evidence of more sanction cases in provinces with higher CCDI-V activities, lower GDP, and lower targeted transfer as share of revenue.

For robustness checks, I replace the count of province mentions in all CCDI-V activities with mentions only in inspection announcements. I also use lagged revenue, expenditure and GDP per capita as alternative measures of provincial economic performance, both in place of and alongside GDP; substitute PCI and PAPI scores with individual sub-scores of

Table 4: Visible tie to General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong associated with lower number of sanction cases

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Number of mentions in CIC sanction announcements			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Tie to Nguyen Phu Trong	-1.31*** (0.37)	-1.13*** (0.36)	-0.96*** (0.35)	-0.97*** (0.36)
Province mentions in all reports	0.19*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)
Lagged GDP (logged)		-0.47** (0.23)	-0.91*** (0.29)	-0.78*** (0.29)
2011 population (logged)		0.18 (0.42)	0.29 (0.42)	0.23 (0.41)
Lagged targeted transfer (share of revenue)			-0.99*** (0.35)	-1.18*** (0.37)
PCI score				-0.10 (0.07)
Unweighted PAPI score				-0.02 (0.07)
factor(year)2017	0.59 (0.47)	0.52 (0.47)	0.42 (0.46)	0.72 (0.51)
factor(year)2018	-0.06 (0.38)	-0.08 (0.38)	-0.39 (0.38)	-0.06 (0.47)
Constant	0.96*** (0.27)	4.59** (2.20)	8.87*** (3.12)	14.48** (5.99)
Observations	189	180	180	180
R ²	0.41	0.41	0.42	0.43
Adjusted R ²	0.40	0.39	0.40	0.40

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

these indices; and include a measure of revenue sharing, measured as the share of a province's collected revenue that it is allowed to retain (and not remit to the center), both in place of and alongside targeted transfer share. It is suggested that provinces that retain less than 100% of their revenue has more bargaining power versus the center compared to provinces that are allowed to keep all of its collected revenue. In addition, because the center benefits from these provinces' good economic performance, they have an interest in encouraging investment, by either cracking down *or* encouraging corruption (Malesky, 2008). None of these modifications changes the statistical significance of visible ties to Trong.

To verify that this finding is attributable specifically to visible ties to the VCP General Secretary and not to a confound that happens to correlate with visible ties. I then perform a series of tests. First, I include a dummy indicator for Vietnam's two biggest cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. It has been suggested that the two cities, owing to their "special importance to the country" (Malesky, 2008), tend to attract national attention much more so than other provinces. It could therefore be the case that they also receive special scrutiny with regards to anti-corruption efforts, leading to higher number of sanctions. Furthermore, unlike other provinces, Hanoi's and Ho Chi Minh City's provincial party secretaries also hold a concurrent seat in the Politburo. As such, this dummy indicator can also capture their personal clout, which might be an alternative source of *ex ante* protection instead of visible ties. Second, to further explore the influence of provincial leaders' power bases, I also control for whether the province's Party Secretary holds a concurrent seat as the Chairman of the People's Council or the People's Committee in the province. These are the top seats of a province's legislative and executive branches, and are typically given to a Vice Party Secretary as a division of power arrangement. The fact that a Party Secretary holds a concurrent seat in either of these positions suggests a greater-than-usual concentration of power. Third, I include an indicator for Southern provinces—provinces that lie south of the 17th parallel and were under the Republic of Vietnam's control during the Vietnam War—to reflect the possibility that sanctions may simply reflect a regional rather than factional bias. I find that all these three variables are statistically significant, which suggest that there might be some truths to these concerns. Nevertheless, even with these variables, visible ties to the VCP General Secretary continue to be statistically significant.

I also perform three placebo tests to see whether the effect comes from visible ties to the regime leader himself and not just an artifact of ties to central leaders in general, or to another central elite with power over the regime's disciplinary effort. Specifically, I replace ties to Nguyen Phu Trong with ties to (1) the current Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, (2) the previous Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, who left office in 2016 after a failed bid to take over Nguyen Phu Trong's Party leadership (Vuving, 2017), and (3) Tran

Quoc Vuong, the Director of the CCDI-V during the data's time period. As it turns out, visible ties to none of these individuals are statistically significant explanation for variations in sanction cases.

4.2.4 Ex-post protection results

When it comes to the level of sanction, I find no evidence that visible tie to the incumbent General Party Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong explains variation in sanction severity. Instead, the main predictors of sanction outcomes are the seriousness of the violation, as well as the administrative level of the IC in charge. Lower level ICs are much less likely to give out severe warnings than higher level ICs. This is consistent with my prediction, as well as the general understanding of the division of power between local and central levels of the CCDI-V.

Again, I replace the original provincial-level controls with alternative measures, and include dummy indicators for the South, Hanoi and HCM City, and for provincial party secretaries' holding of concurrent Chairmanship in the People's Committee or the People's Council. In none of these model configuration do visible ties to the General Secretary become significant. Placebo tests that replace ties to Trong with ties to the current and previous Prime Ministers, and the Director of the CCDI-V also show no significant results of visible ties.

It is possible that the granular measure of sanction in Vietnam obscures the basic difference between a serious sanction and the lack thereof. Yet, even using a binary indicator of sanction, the paper finds no effect of visible tie to the General Party Secretary on sanction outcomes.

4.3 Selective protection under strong factional identity: China analysis

4.3.1 Data

To compare selective protection in China with that in Vietnam, I draw on several sources of data. First, I take advantage of official announcements of disciplinary sanctions conducted by the Chinese Communist Party as collected by *China File*, an online magazine owned by the Center on US-China Relations (ChinaFile, 2016). China File's data includes the records of 2447 individuals investigated until July 31, 2018 as part of General Party Secretary Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign. These investigations include party and

Table 5: Visible tie to Nguyen Phu Trong uncorrelated with sanction outcome

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Sanction level - odds ratio			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ties to Nguyen Phu Trong	1.102	1.333	1.602	1.619
Investigated office level (district)		0.288***	0.228***	0.211***
Investigated office level (province)		0.100***	0.061***	0.057***
Investigated office level (center)		1.402	0.051***	0.037***
Official left office		2.018***	1.666*	1.720**
IC level (district)			0.334	0.257
IC level (province)			0.219	0.178
IC level (center)			1.238	1.091
Violation consequence (serious)			1.959**	1.896**
Violation consequence (very serious)			16.819***	21.235***
Violation consequence (extremely serious)			49,043,201.000***	16,557,020.000***
Lagged GDP (logged)				1.635
2011 population (logged)				0.512
Lagged targeted transfer (share of revenue)				2.688
PCI score				1.018
Unweighted PAPI score				0.892
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	395	395	395	391

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6: Visible tie to Nguyen Phu Trong uncorrelated with sanction outcome - binary DV

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Probability of serious sanction			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ties to Nguyen Phu Trong	-0.087 (0.056)	-0.070 (0.054)	-0.014 (0.053)	-0.017 (0.067)
Investigated office level (district)	0.099 (0.065)	0.076 (0.062)	-0.052 (0.059)	0.029 (0.070)
Investigated office level (province)	-0.059 (0.063)	-0.017 (0.061)	-0.013 (0.056)	0.118* (0.070)
Investigated office level (center)		-0.298*** (0.070)	-0.293*** (0.071)	-0.309*** (0.072)
Official left office		-0.305*** (0.070)	-0.357*** (0.078)	-0.356*** (0.079)
IC level (district)		0.232* (0.130)	-0.450*** (0.163)	-0.444*** (0.167)
IC level (province)		0.045 (0.049)	0.013 (0.045)	0.012 (0.045)
IC level (center)			-0.463 (0.372)	-0.556 (0.374)
Violation consequence (serious)			-0.504 (0.374)	-0.571 (0.374)
Violation consequence (very serious)			-0.081 (0.394)	-0.143 (0.394)
Violation consequence (extremely serious)			0.042 (0.050)	0.034 (0.050)
Lagged GDP (logged)			0.479*** (0.089)	0.479*** (0.089)
2011 population (logged)			0.879** (0.367)	0.720* (0.372)
Lagged targeted transfer (share of revenue)				0.015 (0.079)
PCI score				0.069 (0.104)
Unweighted BANI				0.001*

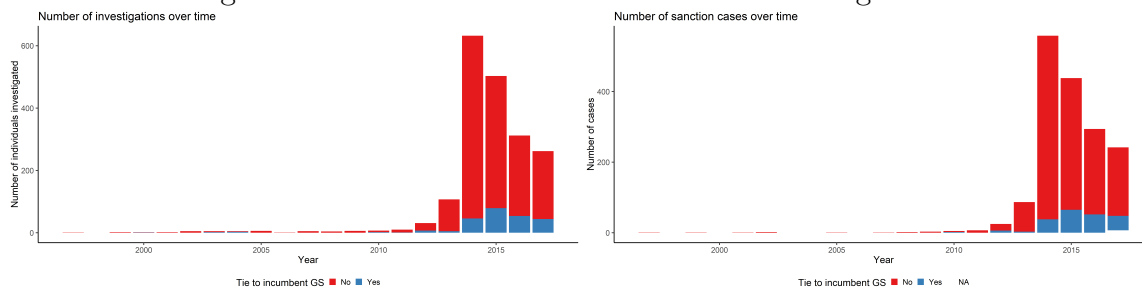
government officials, as well as employees of state-owned enterprises whose cases “have been reported publicly either by the CCDI, by a Chinese government organ such as a court or prosecutor’s office, or by one of the official media organizations that the CCDI lists on its website as media partners.” The dataset contains the name of the each investigated official, as well as his/her biographical details. These include year of birth, native province and city, last workplace and position at the time of investigation, the province in which the violation occurred. Information pertaining to the investigation, such as the start date, official description of the violation, as well as the date of Party expulsion, arrest, and judicial sentence are also included.

Admittedly, the 2447 individuals listed in this dataset represent a minute sample compared to the total number of investigations conducted. According to official statistics, the CCDI investigated 527,000 individuals in 2017 alone, including 443,000 Party members (Xinhua, 2018). However, unlike the million investigated individuals whose names remain unknown to the public, these cases have been featured in official media, and have garnered a certain level of public attention. As a result, offering political protection to these individuals are particularly costly: any overt interference in the investigation process would be observed not only by the elites, but also the mass. Thus, if selective protection is observed within this sample, it is expected that it would also occur elsewhere in the regime, where the cost is lower.

Using information from the data, I again derive two similar sets of measures for *ex ante* and *ex post* selective protection. Measures of *ex ante* protection include *Case Count* and *Individual Count*, which count the number of sanction cases and the number of individuals investigated in a province in a given year, respectively. While ChinaFile does not have an explicit indicator for each unique case, I derive it by following the URL provided for each individual, and mark those whose URLs are the identical as being sanctioned together in a common case. The majority of sanction cases involves only one single individual, but can involve as many as 43. In an alternative coding scheme, I also count the raw number of investigations for each province-year combination.

Measures of *ex post* protection also include two variables. The first variable, *Investigation Status*, indicates whether an investigation has completed and has resulted in sanction against an individual in the form of Party expulsion or judicial sentence by July 2018. The fact that an investigation did not result in either of these sanctions means that it ended with a lenient punishment such as a mere warning. These punishments are recorded in an individual’s Party record and could affect his/her future promotion, but carried no

Figure 2: Counts of cases and individuals investigated over time



immediate consequence to his/her current position. Alternatively, the investigation could still be ongoing, either because it was held back by the IC in charge and not forwarded to upper-level IC and Party Committee for sanction approval, or because the relevant Party Committee or IC have not approved the proposed sanction. In either case, this indicates that some degrees of interference have taken place to protect the investigated individual from sanction. The second variable, *Investigation Delays*, provides a more granular measure of the extent of ex-post political interference. This measure counts the number of days between the start of investigation and the date when the sanction was announced. For the most part, investigations in the dataset tend to conclude quickly: The median investigation length is 132 days, and 75% of investigations lasted no longer than 247 days. Nevertheless, there are also 47 extremely delayed investigations lasting more than a year. Investigation delays can eventually lead to a case being dropped. Even if it eventually resulted in sanction, the official whose investigation was delayed still enjoyed considerable benefits compared to those whose investigations proceeded without any interruption. Delaying an investigation allows the case to escape public scrutiny, allowing for a more lenient sanction. In addition, investigation delay also offered the individual the opportunity to destroy evidence or move assets associated with the violation to avoid confiscation.

Besides China File’s biographic data of investigations, I draw on Meyer, Shih and Lee (2015)’s biographical dataset of Chinese elites. The data include biographical information of more than 4500 individuals, including all Central Committee and Alternate Central Committee members from the first to the current (18th) Party Congress, provincial-level Standing Committee members from 1976 to 2015, directors and deputy directors of ministry-level offices, and high-ranking officers in the People’s Liberation Army from 1992 to 2015 (Lee, 2016). For each individual, the data records his/her birth year, gender, ethnicity, birthplace, education level attained and universities attended, as well as Party and government career trajectory since 1949.

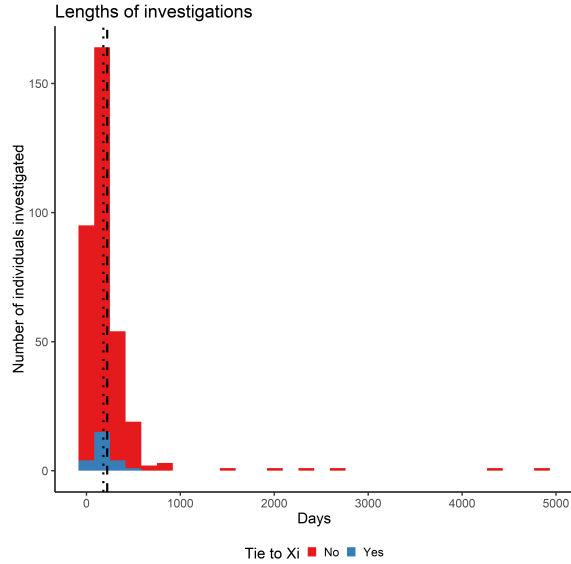
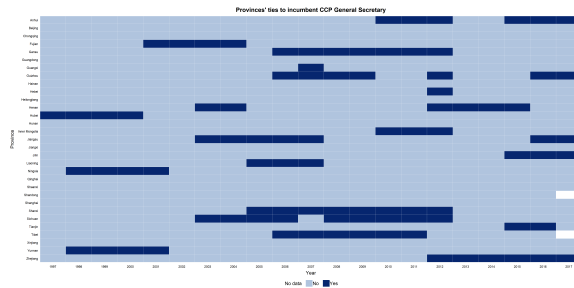


Figure 3: Lengths of investigations

Figure 4: Ties to incumbent CCP General Secretary



Using this data, I derive an indicator of visible connection with the incumbent CCP General Secretary. An individual is coded to have tie with the incumbent if the provincial party secretary where the violation occurred (1) was born in the same province with the General Secretary who is incumbent *when the investigation started* (*tongxiang*), (2) attended the same higher education institution (*tongxue*), or (3) worked in the same ministerial-level work unit at the same time with the incumbent for over one year (*tongye*). The definition is conventional in the Chinese factionalism literature (Shih, Shan and Liu, 2010). Similar to the Vietnam analysis, this variable denotes indirect visible tie between the regime leader and the provincial party secretaries, and not between the regime leader and the investigated individuals themselves.

4.3.2 Models

Altogether, I run three models, one to examine the effect of visible tie on the number of sanction cases, and two to examine its effect on investigation status and investigation delays. First, for sanction cases, I run the following model:

$$CaseCount_{ij} = \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta}Tie_{ij} + \hat{\gamma}ProvChars_{ij}$$

In this model, Tie_j is the explanatory variable of interest. It indicates whether the party secretary of the province in which the violation occurred has visible tie to the then-incumbent General Party Secretary. In addition to this variable, I control for provincial-varying, time-constant variations in latent corruption level and anti-corruption effort, as well as for provincial- and time-varying socio-economic characteristics. Unlike my original data on CCDI-V’s activity ChinaFile’s data does not measure the frequency of general inspections and disciplinary activities in a province. Thus, to account for latent corruption level and anti-corruption effort, I draw on Zhu (2017)’s survey data of corruption perception and corruption experience conducted in 2002 and 2008 and use the author’s corruption experience measure as proxy. As acknowledged by its original author, the measure has a number of drawback—for example, they are “largely influenced by respondents’ cultural backgrounds, identity, and social norms” Zhu (2017). Nevertheless, they outperform naive measures of “objective” corruption the relies on actual, published records on corruption cases or convictions. Such measures are shaped by *ex ante* protection, the very concept the study attempts to examine.

To proxy for variations in the economic capacity of provinces, which could affect both the frequency of rent-seeking violations and the local government’s ability to detect such violations, I use government revenue. I also control for a province’s population size, which again contribute to how frequently violations and by extension sanctions can occur. I also capture provinces’ dependence on and closeness to the central government, which can influence the former’s incentives to follow the latter’s instruction regardless of factional affiliation. To do so, I include central-to-local transfer as a share of the province’s revenue. Data on provincial revenue, population, and transfer are all collected from the CEIC China Premium Database (Euromonitor Institutional Investor, 2018). Finally, several authors (e.g. Manion, 2016) argue that Xi Jinping’s ongoing anti-corruption campaign marks an unprecedented turning point from previous anti-corruption efforts. If these arguments are true, the campaign could create a pressure for local ICs to step-up disciplinary efforts, hasten investigation, and increase the number of investigations and sanctions. To account for this possibility, I include a dummy

indicator for the period pre- and post- campaign, which started late 2012.

In the second model, I estimate $P(y_{ij} \hat{=} 1|x_{ij})$, the probability that the investigation against an individual i in province j had completed and had resulted in sanction, using a fixed-effects linear probability model. The model is as follows:

$$P(y_{ijk} \hat{=} 1|x_{ijk}) = \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta}Tie_j + \hat{\gamma}_1\mathbf{IndChars}_i + \hat{\gamma}_2\mathbf{ProvChars}_j + \hat{\gamma}_3\mathbf{InvChars}_k$$

Other than Tie_j , the model includes $\mathbf{IndChars}_i$, $\mathbf{ProvChars}_j$, $\mathbf{InvChars}_k$, three vectors of controls for the investigated individuals' personal idiosyncrasies, the provinces' socio-economic conditions, and the investigations' characteristics, respectively. Individual idiosyncrasies include the individual's age, gender, a dummy for whether the person is native to the province in which the violation occurred, and a dummy for whether he/she had left the position at which he/she committed the violation. To control for the personal clout of the investigated individual as well as for the seriousness of the case, I use the designation of "tiger" versus "fly" found in the China File dataset. An official is considered a "tiger" if he/she is ranked at or above deputy ministerial and/or deputy provincial level, or, if the individual is a military officer holding a rank of Major General and above (ChinaFile, 2016). Provincial controls include similar variables to the previous models. Finally, I include year fixed effects.

Finally, to test the effect of visible tie on investigation delay, I use a Cox proportional hazard model as follows (Broström and Lindkvist, 2008; Andersen and Gill, 1982):

$$\begin{aligned} \lambda(t|\mathbf{X}_{ijk}) &= \lambda_0(t)e^{(\mathbf{X}_{ijk}\boldsymbol{\beta}')} \\ \mathbf{X}_{ijk}\boldsymbol{\beta}' &= \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta}Tie_j + \hat{\gamma}_1\mathbf{IndChars}_i + \hat{\gamma}_2\mathbf{ProvChars}_j + \hat{\gamma}_3\mathbf{InvChars}_k \end{aligned}$$

In this model, $\lambda(t|\mathbf{X}_{ijk})$ is the hazard at year t for individual i with covariate vector \mathbf{X}_{ijk} . The hazard denotes the probability that an investigated individual will be sanctioned at time t given that he/she has not been investigated so up to year $t - 1$. The baseline hazard for every individual is $\lambda_0(t)$, and is estimated non-parametrically, while the hazard ratio is expressed by $e^{(\mathbf{X}_{ijk}\boldsymbol{\beta}')}$. The variables that affect this hazard ratio is similar to the previous model.

4.3.3 Ex ante protection results

My analysis reveals no effect of visible ties to the incumbent General Secretary on either measure of ex ante protection. Instead, the number of cases and/or individuals sanctioned in a province are positively related to provincial revenue, corruption experience, as well as to central-local dependency as measured by central-to-local transfer's share of provincial revenue. These results show a marked divergence from the situation in Vietnam, in which provinces whose party secretaries are tied to the General Secretary experienced much fewer sanctions than those without. This is consistent with the paper's hypothesis, which is that *ex ante* protection would take place under weak, but not strong factional identity.

Table 7: Visible tie to incumbent GS uncorrelated with number of cases or sanctions

	Dependent variable:					
	(1)	Case count		(4)	Sanction count	
Province's tie to incumbent PS	-1.281 (1.489)	-1.869 (1.571)	-1.966 (1.594)	-1.184 (1.767)	-1.903 (1.862)	-1.974 (1.897)
Corruption experience	47.113*** (11.334)	40.282** (12.518)	40.476*** (12.569)	52.542*** (13.178)	44.148*** (14.068)	44.333*** (14.120)
Anti-corruption campaign	11.675*** (1.185)	10.628*** (1.154)	10.223*** (1.260)	13.014*** (1.375)	11.746*** (1.307)	11.454*** (1.446)
Revenue (logged)		2.196** (1.114)	2.772* (1.475)		2.669** (1.326)	3.059* (1.820)
Population (logged)		0.626 (1.598)	0.572 (1.569)		0.786 (1.833)	0.755 (1.797)
Transfer from Center (share of revenue)			0.672 (1.090)			0.468 (1.316)
Constant	-6.061*** (1.935)	-33.610*** (11.164)	-40.830** (18.118)	-6.743*** (2.250)	-40.320*** (13.769)	-45.231** (22.633)
Observations	153	153	152	153	153	152
R ²	0.279	0.309	0.306	0.263	0.297	0.294
Adjusted R ²	0.264	0.285	0.277	0.249	0.273	0.265
Residual Std. Error	8.421 (df = 149)	8.301 (df = 147)	8.351 (df = 145)	9.743 (df = 149)	9.581 (df = 147)	9.644 (df = 145)
F Statistic	19.187*** (df = 3; 149)	13.118*** (df = 5; 147)	10.645*** (df = 6; 145)	17.760*** (df = 3; 149)	12.441*** (df = 5; 147)	10.065*** (df = 6; 145)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

I perform a series of robustness check, both to ensure that the lack of association is not a consequence of model misspecification and to bring the analysis in line with previous tests on the Vietnam data. Specifically, I substitute provincial revenues with alternative measures of economic performance, including government expenditure, GDP, and GDP per capita. I also replace these controls with their one-year lags, as well as using their growth rates instead of logged RMB figures. For an alternative measure of central-local dependency, I include a measure of bureaucratic integration, as originally found in Sheng (2007).¹¹ This variable captures the extent to which local party officials' "future career prospects or prior career trajectories" are integrated with the central government. I also include a dummy indicators for China's two biggest cities, Beijing and Shanghai, to account for their unique

¹¹The original data only has measures until 2005. Here, I use the 2008 updated measure as updated as found in Zhu (2017).

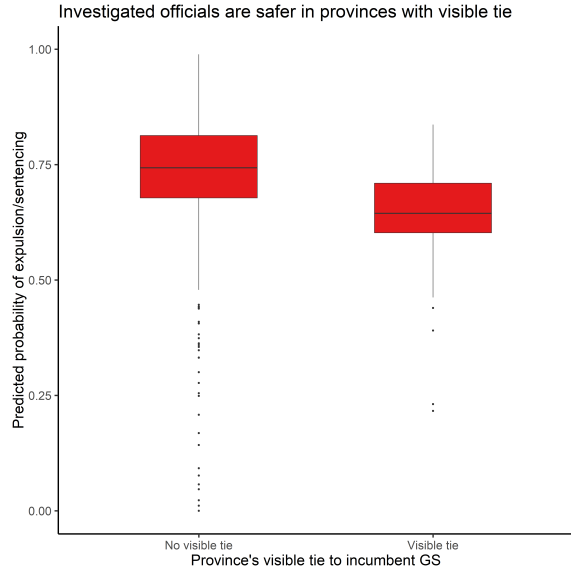


Figure 5: Predicted probabilities of sanctions for individuals in Xi-affiliated vs. unaffiliated provinces

size, influence, and the political standings of their local Party Secretaries. Alternatively, I include a dummy indicator for whether the provincial party secretary is also a member of the CCP Politburo. None of these modifications changes the statistical insignificance of visible ties to the incumbent General Secretary.

4.3.4 Ex post protection results

Whereas there is no evidence of ex ante protection among provinces with visible ties to the CCP General Secretary, I find strong evidence of ex post protection in the CCP. With regard to investigation status, investigations in a province whose party secretary has visible tie to Xi are on average 6.9 to 11.2 percentage points less likely to result in sanctions. This effect size is comparable in size, if not larger than individual characteristics such as “tiger” (5.4 to 7.2 percentage points effect size) or native official status (9.1 to 10.2 percentage point effect size).

Figure 2 plots the predicted probabilities of sanctions of investigated individuals in provinces with versus without visible ties to the incumbent General Secretary. In provinces without ties, the median probability is slightly above 0.75 percent, whereas in provinces with visible ties, the median individual is less than 60% likely to be sanctioned.

When it comes to investigation speed, I observe a similar outcome. The hazard ratio

Table 8: Visible tie to Xi Jinping associated with lower likelihood of expulsion/sentencing - linear probability models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Probability of sentence/expulsion			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Province's ties to incumbent GS	-0.068** (0.033)	-0.112*** (0.038)	-0.095** (0.040)	0.090* (0.052)
Tiger		0.069** (0.034)	0.074** (0.036)	0.126*** (0.037)
Male		0.045 (0.053)	0.009 (0.056)	0.018 (0.052)
Age		0.006*** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)
Native official		0.094*** (0.028)	0.101*** (0.032)	0.097*** (0.032)
Retired		-0.037 (0.038)	-0.060 (0.043)	-0.050 (0.041)
Corruption experience			0.007 (0.205)	-22.797*** (5.221)
Revenue (logged)			-0.156*** (0.059)	0.402 (0.275)
Population (logged)			0.063 (0.039)	-1.041 (0.653)
Transfer from Center (share of revenue)			-0.122** (0.054)	-0.061 (0.221)
Constant	0.691*** (0.011)	0.271** (0.131)	1.130** (0.538)	2.955 (4.313)
Year FE	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	1,908	1,367	1,238	1,245
R ²	0.002	0.023	0.087	0.187
Adjusted R ²	0.002	0.019	0.067	0.152
Residual Std. Error	0.465 (df = 1906)	0.444 (df = 1360)	0.435 (df = 1210)	0.414 (df = 1193)
F Statistic	4.567** (df = 1; 1906)	5.443*** (df = 6; 1360)	4.282*** (df = 27; 1210)	5.370*** (df = 51; 1193)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

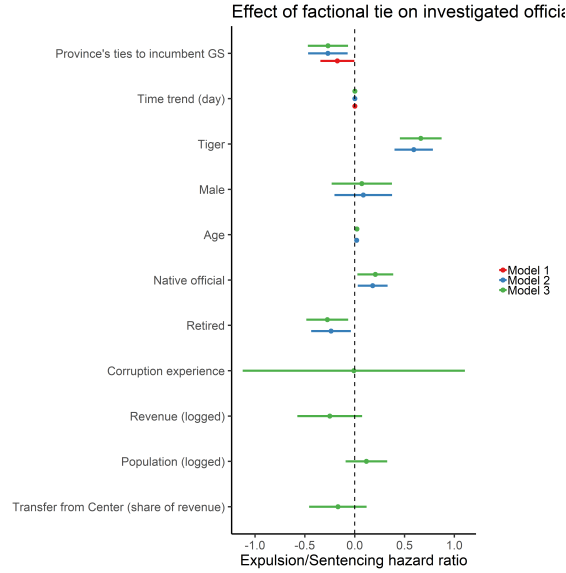


Figure 6: Predicted probabilities of sanctions for individuals in Xi-affiliated vs. unaffiliated provinces

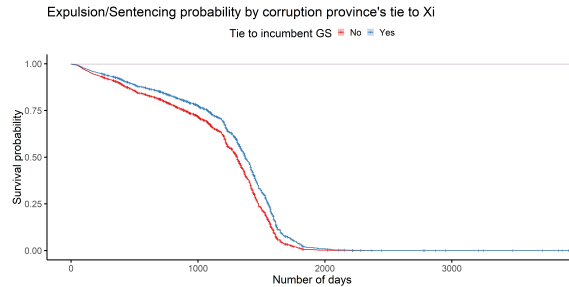


Figure 7: Predicted survival for individuals in provinces with versus without visible ties to Xi

of visible ties to the incumbent General Secretary ranges from -0.174 to -0.269, which means that investigated officials in provinces with visible ties are 15.9 to 23.6% less likely to be sanctioned at any point during the data’s time period, holding other variables constant. The difference in sanction risk translates into a substantial difference in investigation delays. As seen in Figure 6, individuals in provinces with tie to the incumbent leader have longer predicted “survival” than those in provinces without such ties. The gap between two groups can be quite large—it takes, for example, around 40 more days, or 3 months, for the visible tie group to reach 50% survival rate.

Table 9: Visible tie to incumbent GS associated with longer investigations

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Expulsion/Sentence log hazard ratio		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Province's ties to incumbent GS	-0.174** (0.087)	-0.269*** (0.101)	-0.268*** (0.103)
Time trend (day)	0.002*** (0.0001)	0.002*** (0.0001)	0.002*** (0.0001)
Tiger		0.592*** (0.098)	0.663*** (0.107)
Male		0.086 (0.148)	0.071 (0.154)
Age		0.020*** (0.006)	0.023*** (0.007)
Native official		0.181** (0.076)	0.207** (0.092)
Retired		-0.237** (0.102)	-0.275** (0.107)
Corruption experience			-0.009 (0.569)
Revenue (logged)			-0.250 (0.166)
Population (logged)			0.118 (0.106)
Transfer from Center (share of revenue)			-0.168 (0.147)
Observations	1,908	1,367	1,238
R ²	0.372	0.405	0.422
Max. Possible R ²	1.000	1.000	1.000
Log Likelihood	-8,311.043	-5,938.077	-5,241.870
Wald Test	555.680*** (df = 2)	430.370*** (df = 7)	424.930*** (df = 11)
LR Test	886.430*** (df = 2)	708.680*** (df = 7)	677.977*** (df = 11)
Score (Logrank) Test	351.326*** (df = 2)	340.120*** (df = 7)	365.381*** (df = 11)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

For our robustness checks, I first test for the validity of the proportional hazard assumptions, per Grambsch and Therneau (1994). A violation of this assumption suggests that an explanatory variable’s effect size does not stay constant, but varies as a function of time. Such a violation, if not accounted for, can lead to biased estimate of the violated variable’s true effect, as well as to an overall decrease in the model’s power. As it appears, all our variables except for Tiger vs. Fly status and investigated date, do not violate the assumption. The fact that these two variables violate the assumption is unsurprising, especially in light of the ongoing anti-corruption campaign since 2012. It is likely that the campaign, which is aimed to target “both the tigers and flies”, lead to higher hazards among tigers than before. In addition, the campaign’s intensity might mean that cases investigated during the campaign are proceeded faster than before it. To account for this, I interact both variables with a dummy indicator for the campaign. The modified regressions’ results are consistent with my expectations: The interaction effects of both variables with the dummy are positive. At the same time, including these variables do not diminish the statistical significance of visible ties to the incumbent General Secretary.

As with the paper’s previous analyses, I also perform robustness checks against model misspecifications by substituting provincial-level controls with alternative measures, and by including additional controls such as Beijing-Shanghai dummy and the Politburo dummy. None of the modifications changes the significance of visible ties. In addition to these tests, I also examine whether the observed *ex post* protection effect is specifically attributable to the regime leader himself, and not simply to any elite connections. For that purpose, we test whether visible ties to the incumbent Premier, the second most powerful elite in the regime, as well as ties to the previous General Party Secretary and ties to the then-incumbent Director of the CCDI-C have any impact on sanction likelihood. In all of these cases, we find no evidence of any difference. In addition, visible ties to these leaders also have no effect whatsoever on investigation delays using our Cox proportional hazard models. This further supports my argument that selective protection is tied to the regime leader’s incentive to simultaneously keep the bureaucrats under control while ensuring the support of his co-faction agents. Other elites who either have no power to influence the sanctioning process or no need for a winning coalition, do not engage in selective protection.

5 Conclusion

The paper adds a twist to the understanding of the political motives behind anti-corruption efforts in Vietnam and China, and more generally in authoritarian regimes. First, while previous studies such as Lu and Lorentzen (2018) and Zhu (2017) have focused only

on the presence versus absence of adverse disciplinary consequences, I show that political calculations are present both leading up to and following disciplinary activities. Second, China’s and Vietnam’s ongoing anti-corruption campaigns have attracted both praises of their meritocracy (Manion, 2016) and suspicions that they are factionally motivated (Stratfor, 2016; Thayer, 2017*a*). The two views, in light of this paper, are not as contradictory as they appear. Corruption investigations can indeed serve to address agency loss; at the same time, so long as the dual threat to authoritarian survival remains, elite political calculations will also operate alongside principal-agent concerns, and manifest in sanctions against some individuals and protection for others.

To an authoritarian leader, corruption is a double-edged sword: It is a valuable carrot to recruit crucial political support for his survival, yet also a potential reason for his downfall. Selective protection provides a solution to manage this tool. It allows the dictator to simultaneously rein in the majority of agents and put a limit on rent-seeking activities, while still ensuring the loyalty of a co-faction minority whose allegiance is essential to avoid elite coups. In addition, it is also not a one-size-fits all solution, but can be customized to fit the specific political contexts of a regime—in this case, the strength of factional identity. Despite its uses, selective protection is still an imperfect solution at best. There remains much to research on the side effects of *ex ante* and *ex post* selective protection on the level and pattern of corruption in a regime. This is especially relevant, given that selective protection can be seen both as a tool to limit the extent of corruption, and a means to redistribute rent seeking behaviors from one set of actors to another. Along that line, future studies can examine the effect of these two forms of selective protection on public perception of corruption, regime legitimacy, and, in light of the debate on whether corruption “greases” or sands the wheels of development (Leys, 1965; Leff, 1964; Mauro, 1995), the effect of corruption on growth.

My paper also sheds light into the variations in informal elite behaviors, in particular factionalist behaviors. Much of the literature on elite factions has so far focused on China (Nathan, 1973; Pye, 1980; Dittmer, 1995; Shih, 2008*a*), yet there is evidence that elite informal networks exist elsewhere, both in the authoritarian and democratic world (Lee and Oh, 1968; Belloni and Beller, 1978; Cox and Rosenbluth, 1993; Golden and Chang, 2001). In addition, it also builds upon an extensive literature on clientelism, elite networks, and political identity (Posner, 2005; Stokes et al., 2013). In particular, studies on elite networks are dominated by two separate interpretations of networks, one based on ideological affinity and cooperative behaviors such as co-sponsorship networks (Fowler, 2006), and one based on shared political experiences (Keller, 2016; Francois, Trebbi and Xiao, 2016; Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017). My paper argues that these interpretations are not antagonistic to one

another; rather, these forms of networks can be summarized under the unifying framework of factional identity. This, in turn, can pave the way for a much wider, more generalizable agenda on the effect of network characteristics on political outcomes.

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