

Corruption monitoring and the supply of politicians in China

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Abstract

Monitoring institutions are usually perceived as efficient instruments for improving governance. This article evaluates the link between corruption monitoring and the supply of politicians in nondemocracies. Using China as a case, I show that corruption monitoring pushes capable young elites away from seeking government positions. This effect may be driven by two possible mechanisms: economic returns and career prospects. Specifically, corruption investigations may reduce the expected economic returns for government officials, undermining capable young elite's willingness and efforts to become government officials. In addition, corruption investigations may indicate that there are potential uncertainties and risks involved when taking on a political career, which reduce capable young elites' desire to pursue a political career. The empirical analysis confirms these two mechanisms and provides unique evidence for the unintended negative impact of corruption monitoring institutions.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Human capital is a crucial resource for a government to function well. A professionalized and capable bureaucracy is the mark of the modern state (Weber, 1978). The quality of political leaders impacts economic performance and the provision of public goods (Grossman & Hanlon, 2014). A wide range of literature examines who chooses to become a politician in electoral politics (e.g., Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011; Fisman, Harmon, Kamenica, & Munk, 2015). However, there is a paucity of research on the supply of politicians in nondemocracies.

Nondemocracies have unique logics and a variety of distinct mechanisms that contribute to the supply of politicians. For instance, nondemocracies are less inclusive than democracies when it comes to recruiting elites. Nondemocracies also tend to select less competent elites to fill political positions (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011; Bó, Ernesto, Folke, Persson, & Rickne, 2017).

Corruption monitoring institutions may play an important role in the supply of politicians. Institutions with poor accountability have a lower opportunity cost of corruption, which allows rampant corruption and shirking (Platteau & Gaspard, 2003) and motivates businessmen to run for office to further their business interests (Gehlbach, Sonin, & Zhuravskaya, 2010). Corrupted politicians even attract low-quality politicians to enter the government (Caselli & Morelli, 2004; Klašnja, Little, & Tucker, 2018). In contrast, the monitoring institution is an efficient instrument for reducing corruption and for improving government performance (Chen & Kung, 2019; Li, Pang, & Yiping, 2019). A rich literature documents the positive effects of corruption monitoring institutions. However, the link between monitoring corruption and the supply of politicians in nondemocracies is under-investigated.

To help fill this gap, this article employs China as a case to examine the political consequence of corruption monitoring. As the largest authoritarian regime, China provides a proper setting for examining this issue. In China's one-party system, politicians are mainly selected from a limited pool of public employees. To become a national leader, a prospective elite needs to enter a political career path at a young age and climb the administration ladder from the bottom (Landry, Lü, & Duan, 2018; Li & Walder, 2001). It is for this reason that the supply of public employees at the entry level is fundamental for the quality of future politicians. Moreover, limited rules or tools are available, or are used, to restrain the malfeasance of bureaucrats in China. Government officials have various rent-seeking opportunities as the scope of market reform has enlarged since the 1990s (Wedeman, 2012). However, to counteract this growth in corruption, the Chinese government has initiated several rounds of anticorruption campaigns to curb the spread of corruption, with the strongest being the Anti-corruption Campaign started in 2013.

I combine three waves of Chinese College Student Survey (CCSS) and corruption investigation data to examine the supply of potential politicians at the entry level. I demonstrate that corruption monitoring may fail to increase the supply of capable political candidates. Instead, the increase in corruption investigation pushes capable young elites away from seeking government positions. The results are robust and consistent under different specifications.

Specifically, I argue that this effect may be driven by two possible mechanisms: economic returns and career prospects. First, capable young elites have better prospects for economic returns in the private sector and thus they incur a high opportunity cost if they serve in government. Corruption investigations may reduce the expected economic returns for government officials, undermining capable young elite's willingness and efforts to become government officials. The empirical results show that capable young elites expect a higher level of income, which lowers their likelihood of seeking a political career. Second, corruption investigations may signal the uncertainties and risks of a political career, which weakens capable young elites' expectations about their political career prospects. The empirical results demonstrate that the downfall of government leaders rather than bureaucrats reduces the likelihood that capable young elites compete for government jobs. This reduction effect is more pronounced in areas with a prosperous market economy.

2 | CORRUPTION INVESTIGATION AND THE SUPPLY OF POLITICIANS

In nondemocracies, corruption investigation may shape the supply of potential politicians through two possible channels: *economic returns* and *career prospects*.

First, the economic return mechanism assumes that material interests shape the supply of capable politicians. Individuals with high ability can obtain more opportunities in private sectors and thus have a high opportunity cost if they choose to serve in government (Caselli & Morelli, 2004). Hence, if the salary increases for politicians, the quality of politicians will also increase (Ferraz & Finan, 2009). In contrast, the reduction of salary would disproportionately induce skilled politicians to exit public offices and enter the private sector (Keane & Merlo, 2010).

However, some studies doubt the positive role of pecuniary return in attracting capable elites in democracies. Pursuing a political career is self-selective. Higher salaries may reduce the ability threshold at which potential political candidates tend to run for public office (Fisman et al., 2015; Mattozzi & Merlo, 2008). For instance, Fisman et al. (2015) present that high salaries lower the quality of elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Similarly, Poutvaara and Takalo (2007) show that the rise of material reward may reduce the average candidate quality when the campaigning costs are quite high.

These mixed results may be due to the heterogeneity of institutional contexts. Political accountability in nondemocracies is inherently weak. Nondemocracies tend to suffer from pervasive corruption. The pecuniary return of public offices thus includes both wages and rents. Rent extraction increases the supply of politician (Fisman, Schulz, & Vig, 2014). In contrast, corruption investigations reveal the enforcement of monitoring institutions, which may diminish the predicted rent-seeking opportunities of politicians and lower their pecuniary return. This could explain why corruption investigations could reduce the willingness of capable elites to serve in nondemocracies.

Despite pecuniary return, nonpecuniary concerns are also important determinants of the supply of capable politicians. Notably, career prospects play a prominent role in the supply of politicians. In the ambition theory, Schlesinger (1966) argues that politicians have ambitions to move upward and so they act in the present in ways that make them stronger candidates for the official positions they hope to serve in the future. For instance, career ambitions compel individuals to run for office or engage in legislative activities in the United States (Høyland, Hobolt, & Hix, 2019; Lawless, 2012). And it has been shown that in Brazil, ambitious legislators strategically use parties to advance their career (Desposato, 2006).

Career prospects may motivate young elites to serve in public office. In authoritarian regimes, the selection of good politicians matters for political stability and regime resilience (Acemoglu, Egorov, & Sonin, 2010). Authoritarian regimes have strong incentives to recruit capable political candidates. In China's context, political selection at the subnational level tends to be merit-based (Li & Zhou, 2005; Lü & Landry, 2014). Hence, capable young elites have a better chance to enter government and advance their careers. Young elites are attracted by the political power and the prestige of public office. The example of the career development of alumni politicians and the high social status of government officials contributes to motivating young elites to pursue a political career (Liu & Wang, 2017).

However, political ambition is not stable. Individuals adjust their career choices in response to macro political and economic changes. Corruption investigations, especially the investigation

of government leaders, may shift young elites' expectations about their career prospects. Authoritarian regimes have intense interjurisdiction political competition (Lü & Landry, 2014). This power competition may drive the anticorruption efforts. Authoritarian leaders may utilize anticorruption campaigns to target rivals' power in response to fierce power competition (Zhu & Zhang, 2017).

Rule of law is generally weak in authoritarian regimes. The anticorruption effort may indicate serious political purges as well as power struggles. This increases the uncertainties and risks of a political career, which may undermine the young elites' political ambition.

3 | MONITORING CORRUPTION AND ELITE RECRUITMENT IN CHINA

China has a long history of meritocracy. The government uses civil service exams and merit-based promotion to recruit officials (Elman, 2013). In contemporary China, the civil service exam is the primary channel for citizens entering government. The Chinese government sought to improve civil service performance by introducing more competitive selection processes (Burns & Wang, 2010). The National Civil Service Examination (NCSE) was initiated in the 1990s. The government gradually expanded the application of the civil service exam system to different levels of government. Since the *Civil Service Law* of 2006, all entry-level political positions have to be recruited from a pool of people who have taken the civil service exam. Both central and local governments have adopted the civil service exam to recruit bureaucrats (Ko & Han, 2013). The introduction of NCSE provided an opportunity for millions of young people to compete for public positions at the entry-level, thereby institutionalizing government recruitment process (Liu, 2019).

In China, government employees are better paid and enjoy better nonpecuniary benefits than nongovernment employees (Huang, 2014; Li, Meng, Shi, & Binzhen, 2014). Government officials also have various rent-seeking opportunities as the scope of market reform has enlarged (Wedeman, 2012). Moreover, holding government positions has high social esteem and brings glory to families and clans (Liu & Wang, 2017).

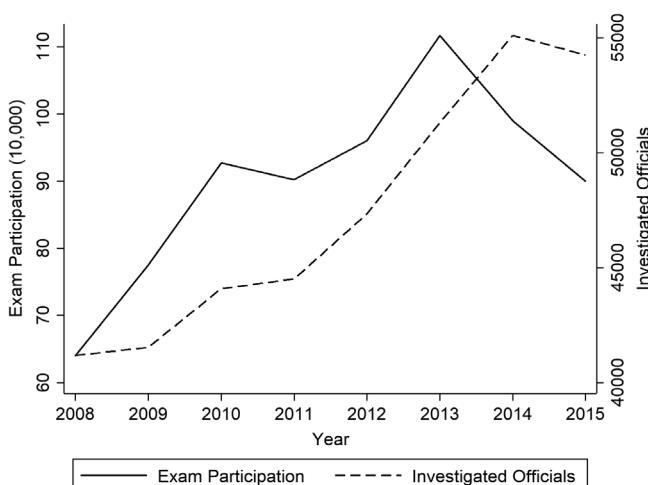


FIGURE 1 Investigated officials and civil service exam participants

Young elites have a high desire to compete for government positions. Figure 1 depicts the trend of NCSE participants and investigated officials. In 2008, about 0.64 million citizens participated in the NCSE. The number increased by 71.9% and reached 1.1 million in 2013. After the start of Anti-corruption Campaign in 2013, the increased interest in participating in the NCSE changed. In 2015, the number of NCSE participants sharply decreased to 0.9 million.¹ Before the Anti-corruption Campaign, the NCSE recruitment rate (the available government job positions divided by the NCSE participants) was about 1.69% in 2011. Due to the decline of NCSE participants, the recruitment rate increased to 2.5% in 2015. Competition for government positions became less fierce.

Moreover, the number of civil service exam participants varies across provinces. Figure A1 depicts the distribution of civil service exam participants. In general, citizens living in less developed areas such as western provinces were more enthusiastic about competing for government positions.

China has strengthened anticorruption efforts in recent years. Routine anticorruption enforcement has not worked to institutionalize the relevance of law and curb pervasive corruption. This is what led to China initiating the widespread Anti-corruption Campaign in 2013. As Figure 1 shows, the number of investigated officials increased by 8.07% from 2008 to 2011 and increased by 14.60% between 2012 and 2015.² And 120 senior officials at provincial-level or above were investigated between 2012 and 2017. A much larger number of officials were punished by internal party disciplines. For instance, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced the Eight-Point Regulation issued in December 2012 to constrain officials' behavior. These regulations were aimed at banning bribes and luxury consumption by government officials, and reducing ceremonies, banquets, and meetings. About 0.26 million government officials were sanctioned for violating the Eight-Point Regulation in the period between 2012 and 2017.³

However, Figure 1 only presents the general trends. It is still unclear whether corruption investigation contributes to the decline of civil service exam participants in China. The variation of anticorruption efforts across provinces and years allows me to investigate the consequence of corruption investigation on the supply of potential politicians at entry level.

4 | DATA AND VARIABLE

4.1 | Data

In this article, I mainly employ the three waves of the CCSS from 2010, 2013, and 2015. The CCSS was conducted by the China Data Center at Tsinghua University. The data set provides rich information on students' individual characteristics, family background, academic performance, and career preference, allowing me to investigate the nexus of corruption monitoring and the supply of political candidates.

The CCSS utilized stratified random sampling to collect the samples. One hundred colleges were drawn at random from China's 2,305 colleges. Next, stratifying variables were used to sample colleges from the 100 colleges according to college location (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, northeastern China, eastern China, central China, and western China) and college type (elite and nonelite) (Li, Meng, Shi, & Binzen, 2012). Undergraduate students in a graduating class were randomly selected from each college. In the analysis, samples are weighted to represent the population.

4.2 | Variable

The key dependent variable is the supply of politicians. Two variables are used to capture the supply of potential politicians. First, I construct the government career preference dummy to capture students' willingness to enter government. The CCSS asked students about their ideal workplaces including government and party branches, social organizations, public institutions, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), foreign enterprises, and private enterprises. If a student prefers to work in government and party branches, the government career preference is coded as 1, otherwise it is coded as 0. Second, I use whether respondents took the civil service exam to identify their actual behaviors of competing for government positions. Taking civil service exam is coded as 1, otherwise 0.

The key independent variable is corruption monitoring. The article mainly utilizes investigated officials per capita to proxy corruption monitoring. The investigated officials per capita refers to the number of investigated officials in each province divided by the number of public employees in that province. Provincial annual procuratorate reports provide the number of investigated officials in the past year. The number of public employees was collected from the *China Statistical Yearbook*. I then matched investigated officials per capita with students' home provinces. In the sample, 61.30% of students attend college in their home provinces. Students' family networks are embedded in local political and economic contexts. Hence, they may perceive governments' anticorruption efforts through kinship networks.

One concern is that the number of corruption investigations may reflect corruption level rather than the strength of corruption monitoring. China has a limited checks and balances system set up to restrain the malfeasance of bureaucrats. Corruption is pervasive and its growth can be substantial (Manion, 2004). Yet I show that corruption investigations are more likely to demonstrate the government's anticorruption effort in Figure A2.

I use the College Entrance Examination (CEE) score to identify ability. Educational attainment is widely used to measure the quality of political candidates (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2011; Bó et al., 2017; Ferraz & Finan, 2009; Galasso & Nannicini, 2011). In China, CEE scores are almost the only criteria used for determining college admissions. Senior high-school students devote great efforts to improve their scores. CEE scores are essentially effective measures of student ability (Li et al., 2012). Students need to take the exam in their home province. The maximum score is 750 in nearly all provinces. Exam contents vary in different provinces and in different years. To make the CEE score comparable, the CEE score is normalized by provinces and years.

Furthermore, I control for a series of covariants in the analysis. For instance, political connection plays an important role in political selection (Landry et al., 2018; Shih, Adolph, & Liu, 2012). For entry-level political positions, family background is a critical source of political connection. In China, the children of government officials have a higher possibility of entering an elite college, of enjoying wage premiums, and they have a higher possibility of being recruited into government (Li et al., 2012; Liu, 2019; Yang & Chen, 2016). Individuals are viewed to have a political connection if at least one of the parents is a senior government or enterprise leader.⁴ I also control for parent Communist Party member dummy, parental educational levels and annual income to capture parental social economic status.

Elite colleges are a crucial source of future politicians because elite college students may be more likely to choose a political career (Liu & Wang, 2017). The elite college dummy is also controlled. In China, elite colleges are commonly referred to as the Project-211 universities, and they account for about 4.8% of total colleges.

Students' demographic characteristics matter for the supply of politicians. I control for gender, age, and rural household registration status (*hukou*). In addition, individual ideological position is a crucial determinant of serving in government. I use students Communist Party membership to capture the influence of ideological position. In the Chinese political system, political elites tend to transform from technocrats to economic regulators with the legal and economic discipline background (Li, 2008). Students in the social science majors tend to have a higher chance for entering government. The social science major dummy is thus controlled.⁵ College academic performance is an important indicator of students who attempt to enter graduate school and find jobs. I use college grade rank to capture their academic performance.⁶

Economic development and corruption are closely linked. Corruption can hinder economic development by lowering investment, by reducing human capital, and by discounting government spending (Mauro, 1995; Wei, 1999). Economic development creates various rent-seeking opportunities. Thus, I employ provincial GDP per capita to capture the influence of economic development. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table A1.

5 | EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The article mainly investigates whether corruption investigations attract or alienate capable young elites. I first use a binary logistical model to check if corruption investigation directly shapes the supply of potential politicians.

Table 1 reports the baseline results. Columns 1 and 4 show the baseline results including only investigated officials per capita and province and year dummies. The coefficients on investigated officials per capita are positive but insignificant. After adding demographic and family background controls in Columns 2 and 5, the coefficients on investigated officials per capita are still insignificant. In Columns 3 and 6, I further incorporate GDP per capita to proxy for local economic development. The coefficients on investigated officials per capita have no salient effects on government career preference or civil service exam participation.

Overall, Table 1 reveals that the enforcement of corruption monitoring has no direct consequence on the supply of politicians across different specifications. The results provide evidence that monitoring institution in nondemocracies may be limited to promote the supply of politicians.

I then investigate whether the consequence of corruption investigation is conditional on an individual's ability. The following model is the main specification of the study:

$$\log\left(\frac{p_{ijt}}{1-P_{ijt}}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 M_{jt-1} \times A_{ijt} + \alpha_2 M_{jt-1} + \alpha_3 A_{ijt} + \alpha_4 X_{ijt} + \alpha_5 X_{jt-1} + \gamma_j + \delta_t$$

where i indicates individual, j denotes province, and t refers to year. p_{ijt} is the probability that individual i prefers a political career or participates the civil service exam. M_{jt-1} is monitoring corruption, which is investigated officials per capita at province j in the previous year. A_{ijt} captures individual i 's ability. X_{ijt} is the vector of individual i 's demographic characteristics. X_{jt-1} is provincial covariant. γ_j is a set of province fixed effects. δ_t captures year fixed effects. To reduce the heteroscedasticity of disturbance, robust standard error is clustered at college level. All regressions are weighted to represent the population.

In Table 2, Column 1 depicts the baseline results. The coefficient for the interaction term is negative and significant at 5% level. After adding demographic controls in Column 2, the

TABLE 1 Monitoring corruption and the supply of politicians

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Government career preference | | | Civil service exam | | |
| Investigated officials per capita (t-1) | 0.026 (0.022) | 0.027 (0.019) | 0.025 (0.017) | 0.007 (0.018) | -0.013 (0.018) | -0.011 (0.017) |
| Ability | | 0.002 (0.081) | 0.002 (0.081) | | 0.047 (0.090) | 0.047 (0.090) |
| Age | | 0.030 (0.048) | 0.031 (0.048) | | 0.111** (0.044) | 0.111** (0.044) |
| Male | | 0.616*** (0.139) | 0.614*** (0.139) | | 0.036 (0.211) | 0.038 (0.210) |
| Party member | | 0.520*** (0.112) | 0.519*** (0.112) | | 0.552*** (0.154) | 0.553*** (0.152) |
| Rural Hukou | | -0.055 (0.119) | -0.056 (0.119) | | -0.190** (0.084) | -0.189** (0.085) |
| Elite college | | -0.866* (0.524) | -0.868* (0.526) | | -0.156 (0.416) | -0.155 (0.415) |
| College grade rank | | 0.008 (0.053) | 0.007 (0.053) | | -0.105** (0.049) | -0.105** (0.049) |
| Social science major | | 0.727*** (0.185) | 0.727*** (0.185) | | 0.881*** (0.248) | 0.880*** (0.249) |
| Parent education | | 0.092 (0.173) | 0.092 (0.173) | | 0.215* (0.129) | 0.217* (0.127) |
| Parent party member | | 0.478*** (0.117) | 0.477*** (0.117) | | 0.615*** (0.174) | 0.617*** (0.175) |
| Parent income (logged) | | -0.003 (0.018) | -0.003 (0.018) | | 0.027 (0.023) | 0.027 (0.023) |
| Political connection | | 0.469* (0.268) | 0.469* (0.268) | | 0.239 (0.187) | 0.239 (0.188) |
| GDP per capita (logged) (t-1) | | | -0.289 (0.925) | | | 0.432 (1.602) |
| Year dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Province dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Observations | 10,537 | 6,078 | 6,078 | 10,572 | 5,813 | 5,813 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.096 | 0.174 | 0.175 | 0.073 | 0.144 | 0.144 |

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at college level are in parentheses. Estimates of constant are not reported. All regressions are weighted to represent the population.

*p < .1.; **p < .05.; ***p < .01.

TABLE 2 Monitoring corruption, ability, and the supply of politicians

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Government career preference | | | Civil service exam | | |
| Investigated officials per capita (t-1) × Ability | -0.012** (0.005) | -0.015** (0.006) | -0.015** (0.006) | -0.020*** (0.004) | -0.024*** (0.006) | -0.024*** (0.006) |
| Investigated officials per capita (t-1) | 0.019 (0.021) | 0.017 (0.019) | 0.015 (0.017) | -0.007 (0.019) | -0.025 (0.017) | -0.023 (0.016) |
| Ability | 0.374** (0.150) | 0.486*** (0.185) | 0.488*** (0.187) | 0.640*** (0.178) | 0.756*** (0.230) | 0.753*** (0.232) |
| Age | | 0.030 (0.048) | 0.030 (0.048) | | 0.116*** (0.043) | 0.116*** (0.043) |
| Male | | 0.621*** (0.137) | 0.619*** (0.137) | | 0.037 (0.210) | 0.038 (0.209) |
| Party member | | 0.521*** (0.115) | 0.520*** (0.115) | | 0.567*** (0.156) | 0.568*** (0.153) |
| Rural Hukou | | -0.047 (0.118) | -0.048 (0.119) | | -0.177** (0.082) | -0.176** (0.083) |
| Elite college | | -0.880* (0.520) | -0.882* (0.522) | | -0.157 (0.411) | -0.157 (0.410) |
| College grade rank | | 0.006 (0.053) | 0.006 (0.053) | | -0.110** (0.049) | -0.110** (0.049) |
| Social science major | | 0.719*** (0.181) | 0.719*** (0.180) | | 0.874*** (0.242) | 0.873*** (0.242) |
| Parent education | | 0.089 (0.179) | 0.090 (0.179) | | 0.220* (0.127) | 0.221* (0.124) |
| Parent party member | | 0.480*** (0.117) | 0.478*** (0.117) | | 0.624*** (0.171) | 0.625*** (0.173) |
| Parent income (logged) | | -0.004 (0.019) | -0.004 (0.018) | | 0.028 (0.023) | 0.027 (0.023) |
| Political connection | | 0.466* (0.262) | 0.466* (0.262) | | 0.214 (0.191) | 0.214 (0.192) |
| GDP per capita (logged) (t-1) | | | -0.366 (0.930) | | | 0.367 (1.630) |
| Year dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Province dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| N | 9,432 | 6,078 | 6,078 | 9,456 | 5,813 | 5,813 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.102 | 0.176 | 0.176 | 0.081 | 0.147 | 0.147 |

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at college level are in parentheses. Estimates of constant are not reported. All regressions are weighted to represent the population.

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

magnitude of coefficient becomes larger and significant at 5% level. Column 3 adds both demographic controls and provincial GDP per capita. The result is consistent and similar. The enforcement of corruption monitoring evidently reduces capable young elites' willingness to serve in government.

Participating in the civil service exam reveals students' actual behavior when it comes to seeking a political career. Columns 4 to 6 of Table 2 estimate the conditional effect of monitoring corruption on the probability of participating in the civil service exam. Column 4 presents the baseline results. The estimated coefficient for the interaction term is negative and significant at 1% level. I incorporate demographic controls in Column 5, the coefficient of the interaction term is still negative and significant at 1% level. After adding all controls in Column 6, the magnitude of the coefficient is similar and significant. The results indicate that the enforcement of corruption monitoring decreases the likelihood of capable young elites to take the civil service exam. Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that monitoring corruption can reduce the supply of capable young elites who opt to serve in government. The results are robust using different dependent variables and various specifications.

To facilitate interpretation, Figure 2 shows the average marginal effect of corruption investigation on the supply of potential politicians at different levels of innate ability. Figure 2a uses the estimated results in Column 3 in Table 2 and demonstrates that the average marginal effect of corruption monitoring on political career preference decreases as the ability increases. Figure 2b adopts the estimated results in Column 6 in Table 2, and shows that average marginal effect of corruption monitoring on the likelihood of taking civil service exam decreases as the

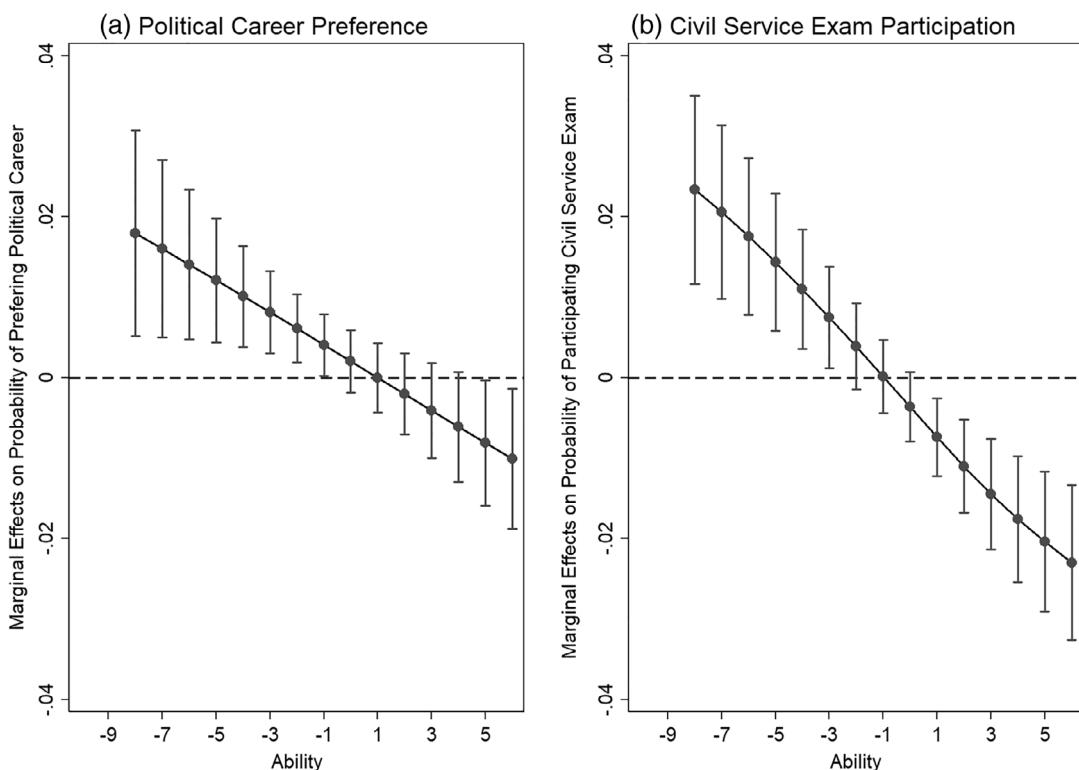


FIGURE 2 Monitoring corruption, ability on the supply of politicians (average marginal effect)

ability increases. Additionally, the magnitude of marginal effect on civil service exam participation is larger than that of political career preference at the same ability level.

Despite the main results, Tables 1 and 2 suggest that several individual characteristics have a significant impact on the supply of politicians. Male students have a stronger tendency to serve in government than female students, yet they have no salient difference in taking the civil service exam. Students' Communist Party membership is a strong predictor of the supply of politicians: party members are more likely to prefer a political career and are more likely to take the civil service exam. Similarly, if students have at least one parent who is party member, they have a higher likelihood of preferring a political career and of competing for government positions. Students in social science majors have a higher probability of choosing a political career and of taking the civil service exam. Political connection has a positive effect on the likelihood of selecting a political career, yet it has no salient consequence on the chance that someone takes the civil service exam.

6 | ROBUSTNESS CHECK

In this section, I conduct several robustness checks to confirm the main results. The regression results of the robustness checks are shown in the Appendix.

First, I employ alternative empirical specifications. The main results adopt a binary logistic model. Though logistic models may estimate the Conditional Expectation Function (CEF) for binary outcomes more closely, that matters little when it comes to estimating marginal effects. Binary logistic models obtain lower estimation efficiency than linear models do when the prior distribution of probability is moderate (Angrist & Pischke, 2008). The estimation results by a linear probability model is less complicated and is easier to interpret. Thus, I replicate the main results using linear probability models in Table A2. The results reveal that the coefficients of interaction term of investigated officials per capita and ability are negative and significant across all specifications. Both linear and nonlinear models draw consistent and similar conclusions.

Multiplicative interaction models raise concerns such as nonlinear interaction effects and excessive extrapolation, I follow Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Yiqing (2019) in using a binning estimator to address the issue. Figure A3a presents that corruption monitoring only has a significant and positive effect on political career preference for individuals with a low level of ability. Figure A3b demonstrates that corruption monitoring has a significant reducing effect on individuals with medium or high levels of ability taking the civil service exam. The results confirm that corruption monitoring may reduce the number of capable young elites who compete for government positions.

Furthermore, Figure A3 implies that most respondents have a nominalized CEE score within the range [-3,3]. One concern is that the main results may be driven by extreme values of ability, which could be misleading and biased. To mitigate this concern, I restrict the analysis for respondents whose ability lies within the range [-3,3]. In Table A3, the estimated results are consistent with the main findings. Figure A4a indicates that corruption monitoring only significantly attracts individuals with low ability to prefer a political career; Figure A4b reveals that corruption monitoring significantly reduces the likelihood of individuals with medium and high innate ability to compete for government positions. Both figures demonstrate that corruption monitoring fails to attract capable young elites to work in government. Instead, it pushes them away from seeking government positions.

Corruption monitoring is not exogenous. Observed and unobserved confounders may shape corruption monitoring and government career preference at the same time. For instance, market activities such as the mining of coal and minerals, a real estate boom, or road construction can shape official corruption in China (Feng, Gao, & Zhang, 2018). These factors could also affect an individual's career opportunities and choices (Hong & Yang, 2020). To mitigate the concern, main results are replicated by controlling more macro covariants. Table A4 demonstrates the new results after adding covariants including oil, coal, minerals, road construction, real estate added value, and the proportion of private employment. The analysis confirms that corruption monitoring evidently reduces the chance that capable young elites pursue a political career. The development of private economies and the real estate boom weaken young people's willingness and attempts to work in government, yet rich coal reserves significantly motivate young people to prefer government jobs and take civil service exams.

In addition, the instrumental variable method is adopted to address the endogeneity concern. I constructed an instrument variable using British-leased territory in late imperial China. The section B.4 in the Appendix discusses reasons for using the instrument variable. Table A5 presents the estimation results. Panel B shows the first stage results: British-leased territory is positively and significantly related to investigated officials per capita at 1% level. Panel A demonstrates the second stage estimation results. Column 1 implies that corruption monitoring has no direct effect on government career preference. Similarly, Column 2 shows that corruption monitoring significantly reduces the likelihood of individuals taking the civil service exam. Both Columns 1 and 3 show that the enforcement of corruption monitoring fails to increase the supply of government employees. Columns 2 and 4 in Table A5 examine the conditional effect of corruption monitoring on the supply of potential politicians. The estimated results in Columns 2 and 4 confirm that corruption monitoring tends to reduce capable young elites' willingness and efforts to enter government. The main results are robust and consistent using the instrumental variable method.

Finally, as a robustness check, standard errors are clustered at the provincial level. In the main analysis, I cluster standard errors at the college level to deal with potential heteroskedasticity and serial autocorrelation for students in the same college. However, I cannot rule out serial autocorrelation within home province clusters. To allay this concern, I replicate the main results by clustering standard errors at provincial level in Tables A6-A9. In general, the results are consistent with those in Tables 1–4. The Appendix discusses the estimated results in detail (see section B.5). Figure A5 shows the marginal effect plots for results clustering at provincial level, which are consistent with those in Figures 2 and A4.

7 | MECHANISM

In this section, I test two mechanisms discussed in the theoretical section: *economic returns* and *career prospects*.

7.1 | Economic returns

First, I examine whether economic return explains why corruption monitoring can reduce the supply of capable young elites for the government. The economic return mechanism assumes that capable young elites have higher expected incomes and opportunity costs. In the survey

questionnaire, there is a question that asks respondents for their ideal monthly salary. I use the logarithmic ideal salary to capture the expected income. In Table 3, Column 1 presents the baseline result and estimates whether capable young elites have higher expected salaries. It shows that the coefficient of ability is positive and significant at 5% level. After adding demographic and provincial controls in Column 2, the results remain significant. College grade rank is positively linked to the predicted salaries. It confirms that students with better academic performance and ability tend to demand higher salaries.

I then investigate whether high salary expectations motivate individuals to serve in the government. In Columns 3 and 4 of Table 3, the full sample analysis shows that ideal salary significantly reduces students' likelihood of taking civil service exam. It implies that when individuals have high salary expectations they are less likely to seek positions in the public sector.

Due to data limitations, the data for respondents' expected salary in the government are unavailable. Yet those preferring a political career are more likely to link their expected salaries to earnings in the government. In Columns 5 and 6 of Table 3, I conduct a subgroup analysis by only including individuals preferring government jobs. Column 5 presents baseline results and shows that ideal salary evidently reduces their chance of taking the civil service exam. After adding more controls in Column 6, the results remain robust and consistent. The magnitude of the coefficient for ideal salary in Column 5 is two times larger than that in Column 3. Similarly, the magnitude of the coefficient for ideal salary in Column 6 is two times larger than that in Column 4. The results reveal that ideal salary is more likely to reduce the chance of taking the civil service exam among those preferring a political career. They are more sensitive to the change of salary in government. This evidence provides support for the economic return mechanism.

Individuals make career choices between market and public sectors. The wage differences between the two sectors may shape their career choices. In Figure A6, I plot the comparison of wages in public sectors and average wage in all sectors in China. Before 2012, the wage in public sectors was larger than the average national wage. Yet the gap sharply diminished. Civil servants earned less than the national average between 2012 and 2014, when a sweeping anticorruption campaign took effect.

Furthermore, I collected wage information in each province and divided the sample into two subgroups: low government wages and high government wages. In China, regions have great disparities, so wages may not be comparable across provinces. Thus, a low government wage group refers to areas where government wage is equal or below the local average wage ($wage\ ratio \leq 1$). It implies that government jobs are less attractive in terms of wage. In contrast, a high wage group refers to provinces where government wages are above the local average wage ($wage\ ratio > 1$).

In Table A10, I replicate the main results in Table 2 in the two groups. Columns 1 and 2 reveal the full sample results. Column 2 demonstrates that corruption monitoring evidently reduces capable young elites' likelihood to prefer a political career in low government wage provinces. Yet the effect is not salient in the high government wage group as shown in Column 3. Similarly, Column 5 demonstrates that monitoring corruption significantly reduces the number of capable young elites competing for government positions in low government wage areas. Yet the reduction effect disappears in areas with high government wages. To facilitate interpretation, Figure A7 plots the coefficients of interaction terms among different groups. Under the enforcement of corruption monitoring, capable young elites may turn to seek more lucrative positions in market sectors when the local government wage is below the average. These results

TABLE 3 Mechanism I: economic returns

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | DV: Ideal salary | | DV: Civil service exam | | | |
| | Full sample | | | Prefer government career | | |
| Ideal salary (logged) | | | -0.181** (0.079) | -0.274*** (0.089) | -0.408*** (0.133) | -0.717*** (0.214) |
| Ability | 0.051** (0.024) | 0.051* (0.028) | | 0.061 (0.090) | | 0.170 (0.114) |
| Age | | -0.013 (0.013) | | 0.089* (0.047) | | 0.150 (0.103) |
| Male | | 0.340*** (0.044) | | 0.273 (0.215) | | 0.742** (0.313) |
| Party member | | 0.019 (0.030) | | 0.591*** (0.145) | | 0.641*** (0.230) |
| Rural Hukou | | -0.011 (0.033) | | -0.171* (0.093) | | -0.737*** (0.279) |
| Elite college | | 0.108** (0.050) | | -0.144 (0.454) | | -0.333 (0.556) |
| College grade rank | | 0.046*** (0.015) | | -0.117** (0.051) | | -0.187*** (0.069) |
| Social science major | | 0.024 (0.037) | | 1.012*** (0.248) | | 1.068*** (0.230) |
| Parent education | | 0.011 (0.062) | | 0.125 (0.132) | | 0.300 (0.459) |
| Parent party member | | 0.058** (0.024) | | 0.721*** (0.150) | | 0.822*** (0.312) |
| Parent income (logged) | | 0.012 (0.008) | | 0.012 (0.021) | | 0.023 (0.060) |
| Political connection | | -0.014 (0.058) | | 0.254 (0.208) | | 0.301 (0.413) |
| GDP per capita (logged) (t-1) | | -0.567 (0.348) | | 1.184 (1.494) | | 0.826 (2.946) |
| Year dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Province dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Observations | 9,272 | 5,891 | 8,886 | 5,010 | 1,415 | 821 |
| <i>R</i> ² | 0.078 | 0.120 | | 0.096 | 0.175 | 0.207 |
| Pseudo <i>R</i> ² | | | | | | 0.293 |

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at college level are in parentheses. Estimates of constant are not reported. All regressions are weighted to represent the population.

p* < .1.; *p* < .05.; ****p* < .01.

provide strong evidence that economic returns could explain why corruption monitoring pushes capable young elites away from seeking government positions.

7.2 | Career prospects

The career prospect mechanism implies that political power and the prestige of public office induce young people to pursue positions in government. However, nondemocracies have a comparatively weak rule of law and opaque judicial procedures. Corruption investigations may involve power struggles and political purges. Investigations of officials, especially senior officials, may signal the serious uncertainties and risks of a political career, which can then undermine the supply of capable young elites for the government.

To test the mechanism, I use the Anti-Corruption Campaign launched in 2013 as a policy shock. China initiates periodic anticorruption campaigns, but the anticorruption campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s failed to curb widespread corruption (Manion, 2004). However, Manion (2016) shows that the Anti-Corruption Campaign launched in 2013 differs notably from previous efforts. It significantly decreased bureaucrats' corruption opportunities and reduced obstacles to anticorruption enforcement. It is a sincere effort to cut down on pervasive corruption (Lu & Lorentzen, 2016). The Anti-Corruption Campaign launched in 2013 thus constitutes a salient shock for corruption investigations.

If the career prospect mechanism holds true, we may predict that the investigations of senior officials have a more evident effect on the supply of capable political candidates. The majority of investigated officials are grass-root bureaucrats. Instead of using investigated officials per capita, I use the number of investigated leaders at vice county-division rank (*xianchuji*) and above to proxy the strength of corruption monitoring. During the three waves of the survey, the maximum number of investigated leaders among provinces was 297, while the minimum number was 6. On average, provinces investigated more government leaders after the Anti-Corruption Campaign launched in 2013.

The survey data cover three periods (2010, 2013, and 2015), which allow me to employ the difference-in-difference (DID) method to estimate whether the investigated leaders shape individual career choices. I divide respondents into two subgroups: elite college students and nonelite college students. As the CEE grade is nearly the only determinant for most of the students who enter elite colleges, elite college enrollment can be another proxy of ability. Table 4 presents the subgroup analysis using the DID method. Columns 1 to 3 estimate whether investigations of government leaders change elite college students' likelihood of taking the civil service exam. Column 1 is the baseline result, showing that the coefficient of interaction term is negative and significant at 5% level. After controlling for demographic covariants in Column 2 and adding full controls in Column 3, the results are similar and consistent. After the Anti-Corruption Campaign, the investigation of government leaders significantly reduces the probability of elite college students taking the civil service exam.

Moreover, Columns 4 to 6 in Table 4 examine whether the investigation of government leaders shifts the behavior of nonelite college students. Column 4 reveals that corruption investigation has no significant consequence on the probability of nonelite college students taking the civil service exam. The coefficient of interaction term remains insignificant after adding demographic and full controls in Columns 5 and 6. The results suggest that the investigation of government leaders fails to change nonelite college students' likelihood of seeking government positions.

TABLE 4 Mechanism II: career prospects

| DV: Participate civil service exam | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Elite college | | Nonelite college | | | |
| Investigated leaders (t-1) × post | -0.004** (0.002) | -0.007*** (0.002) | -0.005** (0.002) | -0.003 (0.003) | -0.005 (0.003) | -0.005 (0.003) |
| Investigated leaders (t-1) | -0.001 (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.002 (0.002) | -0.000 (0.002) | 0.000 (0.002) | 0.000 (0.002) |
| Post | 0.417 (0.439) | 0.875** (0.418) | -0.929 (0.913) | 0.704 (0.814) | 0.721 (0.832) | 0.899 (1.394) |
| Age | | 0.162*** (0.053) | 0.158*** (0.052) | | 0.100*** (0.035) | 0.099*** (0.035) |
| Male | | -0.558*** (0.108) | -0.551*** (0.110) | | -0.034 (0.192) | -0.035 (0.189) |
| Party member | | 0.613*** (0.172) | 0.607*** (0.172) | | 0.591*** (0.143) | 0.590*** (0.141) |
| Rural Hukou | | -0.355*** (0.110) | -0.353*** (0.109) | | -0.227*** (0.073) | -0.228*** (0.075) |
| College grade rank | | -0.102** (0.042) | -0.099** (0.042) | | -0.087* (0.052) | -0.087* (0.052) |
| Social science major | | 0.867*** (0.117) | 0.877*** (0.115) | | 0.853*** (0.194) | 0.854*** (0.194) |
| Parent education | | -0.091 (0.213) | -0.082 (0.215) | | 0.147 (0.124) | 0.145 (0.120) |
| Parent party member | | 0.241* (0.134) | 0.244* (0.132) | | 0.547*** (0.143) | 0.547*** (0.144) |
| Parent income (logged) | | -0.012 (0.026) | -0.012 (0.026) | | 0.022 (0.021) | 0.022 (0.021) |
| Political connection | | 0.260 (0.254) | 0.254 (0.255) | | 0.229 (0.165) | 0.230 (0.167) |
| GDP per capita (logged) (t-1) | | | 2.318** (1.129) | | | -0.252 (1.593) |
| Year dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Province dummies | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| N | 3,711 | 2,285 | 2,285 | 6,800 | 3,888 | 3,888 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.087 | 0.146 | 0.148 | 0.059 | 0.120 | 0.120 |

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at college level are in parentheses. Estimates of constant are not reported.

*p < .1.; **p < .05.; ***p < .01.

Furthermore, I use similar specifications to examine the effect of investigations of government officials in Table A11. Column 1 reveals that investigations of government bureaucrats reduces elite college students' chances of taking civil service exam. Yet the reduction effect is

not significant after adding more controls in Columns 2 and 3. The results reveal that the investigation of government leaders rather than bureaucrats reduces the likelihood of capable young elites to compete for government positions. The downfall of government leaders is more likely to signal the great uncertainties and risks of a political career, which could shift capable young elites' expectation about political career prospects. In contrast, as shown in Columns 4 to 6, investigations of government officials actually promotes nonelite college students' chances of taking the civil service exam. The downfall of grassroots bureaucrats may imply more vacant government positions and employment opportunities, which may attract nonelite college students.

Finally, Table A4 shows that the proportion of private employment reduces individuals' likelihood of selecting a political career. The development of private economies may provide more career opportunities and platforms. To further test the career prospect mechanism, I divide the sample into two groups: low level and high level of private economy. Low level of private economy refers to areas where the proportion of private employment is below the national median value (0.62). High level of private economy refers to provinces where the proportion of private employment is above the national median value. The subgroup analysis in Columns 3 and 4 of Table A12 shows that corruption monitoring has a greater reduction effect for capable young elites competing for government jobs in areas with high development level of private economy. The prosperity of market sectors provides more alternative career opportunities. Corruption monitoring is more likely to push young elites in those areas to select a career in the market sector.

In sum, the analysis shows that investigations of government leaders and bureaucrats have heterogeneous effects among elite and nonelite college students. The downfall of government leaders rather than bureaucrats reduces the number of elite college students competing for government jobs. This effect is more evident in areas with a prosperous market economy. The results provide evidence that career prospects can be an important mechanism shaping young elites' career choices.

8 | CONCLUSION

The article examines the impacts of corruption monitoring on the supply of potential politicians in China. Corruption monitoring is an efficient tool for improving government efficiency and performance, yet I demonstrate that monitoring corruption may reduce the quality of the political candidate pool. The enforcement of monitoring corruption may reduce capable young elites' willingness and efforts to select a political career.

In authoritarian regimes, the enforcement of monitoring corruption may have a trade-off: the anticorruption effort may constrain the behaviors of government officials, while at the same time it may reduce the supply of capable elites at the entry level. It is these entry-level government employees who become the politicians of the future. It is possible that nondemocracies will need a period of time to establish strong monitoring institutions and to shape stable and proper expectations of potential political candidates for government positions. Moreover, loyalty and competence are two key criteria for those government employees who do become politicians. Due to data limitations, I only investigated the competence dimension in the supply of candidates for government positions. It is possible that the enforcement of monitoring institutions can attract young elites with high public service motivation. I leave this question to be explored in future research.

The study contributes to the political selection literature in China. Recent studies have focused mostly on political selection among government officials and examined the demand side of political selection. Scholars have investigated the role of performance and political connection in government officials' career advancement (e.g., Landry et al., 2018; Li & Zhou, 2005; Shih et al., 2012). However, politicians are mainly selected from a limited pool of public employees in China. Serving in government is self-selected. The pool of public employees matters for the competence of future politicians. Few studies investigate the supply of potential politicians at the entry level. College students constitute the main source of new government employees. I show that monitoring institutions may shape the supply of capable politicians in the future.

Furthermore, this article examines the links between corruption monitoring and the supply of potential politicians. Entering government is not equal to becoming a politician. Only a very small proportion of civil servants become leaders in the political system. Yet capable young civil servants are critical candidates for future politicians. To become a national leader, a prospective elite needs to be well educated and start a political career path at a young age. For instance, the political bureaus of the 19th CPC Central Committee are a group of 25 politicians who rule China. On average, they entered government at the age of 23.2. Sixty-four percent of them hold degrees from elite colleges, and 32% of them obtained their undergraduate degrees from elite colleges. They have worked in government for more than 30 years. This shows that China has historically relied upon the young elite to climb the ladder and become the politicians of their day. This model confronts great challenges as the market economy expands and it may impact the quality of China's future politicians.

Thus, the article provides evidence for the potential risks of the political candidate pool in China's political system. However, the competition for government positions is still fierce in China. The recruitment rate of China's civil service exam is lower than any Ivy League university and Chinese bureaucrats even report greater meritocracy than U.S. federal employees (Boittin, Distelhorst, & Fukuyama, 2017). Though the investigation of corruption may push capable young elites away from seeking government positions, governments still have a large candidate pool from which they can select bureaucrats. Future research may examine whether anticorruption efforts lower the quality of politicians in the long run.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The NCSE participants data are collected from Sina Education: Available from edu.sina.com.cn/official/2017-10-18/doc-ifymvuyt3948469.shtml.

² The total number of investigated officials is collected from the annual report of the Supreme People's Procuratorate in China.

³ Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) website: Available from www.ccdi.gov.cn/yaowen/201712/t20171204_151067.html.

- ⁴ The survey does not distinguish government or enterprises' leaders. Senior government and enterprise leaders are in the same category.
- ⁵ Social science dummy is 1 if students' disciplines are law, sociology, economics, political science, or public administration, otherwise coded as 0.
- ⁶ The college grade rank has five categories. It shows students' relative position in related majors. The rank has five categories: top 5% (5), top 5–20% (4), top 20–50% (3), 50–80% (2), and bottom 20% (1).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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