

Power concentration and bottom-up information flow: Evidence from Chinese municipal congresses

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Abstract

Power concentration may impede bottom-up information flow. This article argues that strong ruling party control may facilitate the power concentration of ruling elites, which breeds reticence and impedes bottom-up information flow. Using Chinese municipal congresses as a case, I establish that strong ruling party control significantly reduces the number of policy proposals, suggestions, and criticisms from legislators. The reduction effect of ruling party control on upward information is more salient when party leaders are expected to gain power in the future. Further analysis rules out alternative mechanisms: leadership style, composition of legislators, and local grievance.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Authoritarian regimes face a “dictator’s dilemma” regarding information collection. Making credible commitments not to punish those who bring bad news is difficult for leaders, but when repressive institutions suppress dissent and criticism, leaders are less aware of their real support (Wintrobe, 2000, p. 335). Legislative institutions could partially solve this problem by providing an institutional channel for legislators to safely offer suggestions and criticism without threatening political stability (Gandhi, 2008), and thus perhaps affect major policy decisions (Williamson & Magaloni, 2020).

Authoritarian ruling parties, however, have incentives to tightly control legislatures, but doing so is costly. Legislatures do not consistently serve the interests of authoritarian rule. In particular, they could serve as a platform for regime opponents (Schuler & Malesky, 2014); in addition, legislative processes can be quite contentious (Tanner, 1995) and can yield outcomes counter to the ruler’s policy preferences (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). As a result, authoritarian ruling

parties adopt various strategies to maintain tight party control over legislatures; for instance, they can control the composition of delegates (Malesky & Schuler, 2010), constrain views on sensitive issues (Truex, 2016), coopt legislative leaders into the top Communist party organizations (Nelson & White, 1982), and decide the realm of legislative power and structure agendas in congresses.

Previous researchers mainly examine how and why ruling parties control legislatures, yet few evaluate the political consequences of that control on legislative politics. In this study I identify a new form of party control over legislatures and evaluate its political consequences. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains a strong grip on executive and legislative power, Chinese local congresses provide an illustrative case of party control of legislatures. To strengthen party leadership over the local congress, local party secretaries serve concurrently as the chairpersons of the local congresses. The dual appointment exhibits subnational variation across time and place, allowing me to evaluate its consequences for legislative activities.

Assessing authoritarian legislative activities poses a considerable challenge because of the secrecy of authoritarian institutions (Gandhi et al., 2020). Most studies of authoritarian legislatures analyze functions and operations of the national congresses (e.g., Lü et al., 2020; Noble, 2020; Schuler, 2020; Truex, 2014), but local congresses are more vibrant and play a vital role in local politics (Manion, 2015). The role of local congresses in local politics is explored in a rising body of literature (Cho, 2008; Hou, 2019; Xia, 2007), but this study, deviating from prior studies, is among the first attempts to capture legislative activities at municipal congresses. I compiled a novel dataset that includes detailed information on legislative leadership and activities in prefectures between 2002 and 2012.

I argue that strong ruling parties may confront a trade-off in their attempts to tightly control legislatures. The ruling party uses dual appointment to strengthen ruling party control, but doing so impedes bottom-up information coming from legislators. Empirical results demonstrate that dual appointment significantly reduces the number of policy proposals from legislators. This correlation may be driven by the power concentration of party leaders. Dual appointment can empower local party leaders and enable them to influence personnel appointments, breeding reticence among legislators. The reduction effect of dual appointment on upward information is more salient when party leaders are expected to gain power in the future. Further analysis rules out alternative mechanisms, such as leadership style, composition of legislators, and local grievance.

In this study I demonstrate that the functions of authoritarian legislatures may be conditional on internal power dynamics. Authoritarian legislatures can serve as information channels for rulers to collect information about the strength of public preferences (Malesky & Schuler, 2011; Truex, 2016). Local congresses can tap local knowledge and information for party and government agents from below (Manion, 2015). Increasing numbers of studies suggest that legislative activities within authoritarian regimes exhibit substantial variation across space and time; so stakeholders like ruling coalitions and the masses could change legislative outcomes (Lü et al., 2020; Malesky & Schuler, 2010). This study demonstrates that dual appointment of legislative leaders could shape the behaviors of legislators, who become less likely to tap local knowledge from below. The power arrangements of legislatures may alter the role of information gathering in authoritarian legislatures.

This study contributes to the literature on ruling party controls in legislatures. Although ruling party control over legislatures is common in both democracies and nondemocracies, legislators in the former are motivated by reelection concerns (Laver et al., 1996); and the lure of public office drives the formation of legislative parties and coalitions (Cox, 2006). Ruling party

control in authoritarian legislatures, however, has distinct features: they are politically subservient to the ruling party or the executive, and the party decides the boundaries of legislative power (Gandhi et al., 2020). Legislators' behaviors are more likely to be constrained by political leadership than citizens' preferences. Party leaders confront weak institutional checks and power constraints. In this study I evaluate the political consequences of strong ruling party control in China, which may facilitate the personalization of power within parties and enhance the power concentration of party leaders, possibly exerting negative consequences on governance.

2 | POWER CONCENTRATION AND UPWARD INFORMATION

Authoritarian legislatures usually perform the key function of information collecting. Authoritarian regimes confront the information problem to accurately identify public preferences and potential opposition. Citizens have strong incentives to engage in preference falsification or self-censorship because of the fear of censorship and punishment (Jiang & Yang, 2016; Shen & Truex, 2021). To deal with the information problem, legislatures allow autocrats to gather information about public preferences. Legislatures at national and local levels offer a formal and peaceful channel to identify public dissatisfaction before an uprising occurs (Cho, 2008) and to reveal information about the strength of public preferences (Malesky & Schuler, 2011; Manion, 2015). Rulers can thus learn citizen preferences and respond accordingly, reducing the likelihood of collective action (Truex, 2016).

Prior studies provide valuable insights on the information collection dynamics of legislatures. To extend this line of research, I investigate the trade-off between party control and information provision. Authoritarian regimes confront challenges in employing legislatures to gather information and maintain ruling party control at the same time. Openness is essential for information provision, yet the free flow of information may undermine ruling party control and expose government problems. Thus, ruling parties have incentives to control legislatures and keep representation within bounds.

In this study I argue that strong ruling party may exert tight control on legislatures via dual appointment, but the practice may undermine upward information flow from legislators. Authoritarian regimes face a trade-off between political control and bureaucratic incentives: under strong political control lower-tier bureaucrats have weak incentives to provide necessary information to higher level officials (Egorov et al., 2009). In other words strong political control may lower the quality of bottom-up information provision by making subordinate political actors less willing to voice their preferences and opinions.

In particular, strengthened coercive power may mitigate the informational function of authoritarian legislatures. In general, previous studies demonstrate that the monopoly on legitimate coercion may undermine the provision of information from below (Hooghe et al., 2001; Marks et al., 1996), that dominant political power may breed political reticence (Shen & Truex, 2021), and that politically focal times and locations may encourage individuals to engage in extreme political self-censorship (Chang & Manion, 2021). Those studies are mainly designed to examine bottom-up inflow in democracies or to investigate how coercive power fuels self-censorship among citizens in nondemocracies, but the way coercive power shapes the behaviors of legislators in authoritarian legislatures remains unclear. Serving as bridges between rulers and citizens, legislators tap local knowledge from below (Manion, 2015). An investigation of their motivation and behavior may help open the black box of authoritarian institutions.

In authoritarian legislatures, legislators also confront strong coercive power from ruling parties. They are seldom autonomous from executive power and ruling parties and are reluctant

to represent constituency interests. In China's context, legislators may represent citizens and express their grievances but only "within bounds" (Truex, 2016). The majority of them are selected from government officials, economic elites, and professionals (Manion, 2015; O'Brien, 1990; Truex, 2020) who are motivated by career promotions, business interests, and legal protection instead of representation (Blaydes, 2010; Gandhi et al., 2020; Malesky & Schuler, 2011).¹ Specifically, the career prospects of government bureaucrats in legislatures are controlled by local party organizations. Economic elites seek legislative positions to gain economic returns and secure their property rights (Hou, 2019; Truex, 2014), and most professionals like professors and physicians work in public institutions and are restrained from expressing their personal views. Party-nominated legislators are generally less likely to submit policy bills or suggestions than legislators nominated through other channels in Chinese local congresses (Huang & Chen, 2015).

Dual appointment may weaken legislators' incentives to submit policy proposals and tap local knowledge. In China's political system party secretaries are top party chiefs with considerable control over personnel management and promotion as well as influence in the private sector. The joint appointment of local party and legislative power strengthens the political power of party secretaries and allows them to intervene in legislative politics. They directly control the nomination and approval of personnel appointments in all procedures. All appointments of local government leaders should be approved on paper by the local congress, but the party standing committee selecting and nominating these candidates and party secretaries have the final say in promotions.

Legislators rely on party secretaries to further their career development, to gain political support, to obtain government funding, and to secure their property rights. After perceiving the rising political dominance of party secretaries, legislators fear potential punishment when they express criticism. They have more incentives to please rather than offend the dominant leader. Consequently, these legislators may hide their real views and become less likely to reflect local grievances and engage in legislative supervision. They may be restrained from tapping local information for party leaders.

Furthermore, dual appointed party secretaries can directly read proposals from legislators; in fact, dealing with these proposals is one of the key tasks of local congresses. After annual conferences, all suggestions are compiled and submitted to the chairs of local congresses, who check detailed contents and main themes of suggestions.² Proposals comprise written advice and include legislators' names and affiliations. Legislators working in governments are more cautious about providing this written advice, which is not only recorded but also signals to the public that they have opinions on certain aspects of government and party work. Harsh suggestions or criticism may directly offend dual appointed party secretaries. Cautious about criticism, suggestions, and oversight, the legislators may be concerned that policy proposals or criticism may offend party leaders and that their career development may be negatively impacted.

3 | BACKGROUND

The China case offers a valuable opportunity to examine how the ruling party manipulates legislative institutions and whether party control of legislatures shapes authoritarian politics. In China, the party exercises strong control of legislatures. For instance, at the national level the CCP directly controls about 70%–75% of the seats in the National People's Congress (NPC); "democratic parties" under the control of the CCP and unaffiliated deputies hold the remaining seats (Manion, 2015; O'Brien, 1990; Truex, 2020). At the local level party control is the top priority

for the operation of the local congress. The party selectively mobilizes votes for preferred candidates while strategically manipulating electoral rules (Wang, 2017), yet local congresses supervise governments, the courts, and the procuracies more actively than the NPC (Cho, 2008; Xia, 2007). The performance of local congressional legislators and the operation of local congresses exhibit considerable regional variation (Chen, 2020). In sum, the power constraints of local legislatures may be heterogeneous across space and time as well as conditional on their composition.

One typical party strategy for controlling congresses is the dual appointment. After the political turmoil in 1989, the party strengthened its control to maintain political stability. In 1990 Jiang Zemin, then the top party leader, asserted that the people's congress was the institution led by the party and that only under party leadership could people's congresses function well.³ At the provincial level the number of party secretaries serving as chairpersons of people's congresses has grown since 1992 (Xia, 2007, p. 3). In 1997 the dual appointment of the party secretary and congress chairman existed in only seven provinces, but by 2002 the central party committee required that all provincial party secretaries should hold the chairs of the congresses except for members of the Political Bureau. Thus, since 2003 party secretaries have been the chairmen of congresses in approximately 24 provinces, that is, 77.42% of all provincial units in mainland China.

At the city level social unrest may motivate the ruling party to adopt dual appointment. Compared with party secretaries, single mandate chairmen have dense local networks, likely to be captured by local interests. Party secretaries, however, fall under the "target responsibility system." Both social stability and economic performance are key indicators in their assessments. Direct control of local congresses allows party secretaries to have better control of local politics for their own political power. Table A2 in the Appendix shows that cities are more likely to adopt dual appointment after experiencing more social unrest in the previous year. When local cities experience more social unrest, the ruling party at the provincial level may adopt dual appointment to strengthen the power of city party secretaries and enhance party control over the society.

The dual appointment of party secretaries and chairmen of congresses may enhance the power concentration of local party leaders. In the reform era Deng Xiaoping pointed out the impropriety of overconcentration of power because it hinders the recognition of collective wisdom and leads to arbitrary rule (Deng, 1994, p. 321). When party secretaries serve as chairs of local congresses, they simultaneously acquire executive, party, and legislative power, centralizing political authority in the hands of top party chiefs. They may have more power in cadre management, budget allocation, and policy agenda setting. Local legislatures may be less likely to constrain power. Moreover, information collecting is a crucial function of local congresses, which in China operate in an institutional context of executive-led governance so they can tap local knowledge and information for party and government agents (Manion, 2015). Representatives of the local congress may hesitate to express criticism and their policy preferences when the party exerts strong control of legislatures.

4 | RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 | Data and variable

I select the municipal (or prefecture) people's congress as a typical case. The liveliest congresses appear in the localities in China (Manion, 2015, p. 16). Prefectures lie between provinces and counties, and prefecture governments are a critical component of China's multilevel government system. Moreover, prefectures are the lowest political units that systematically record annual

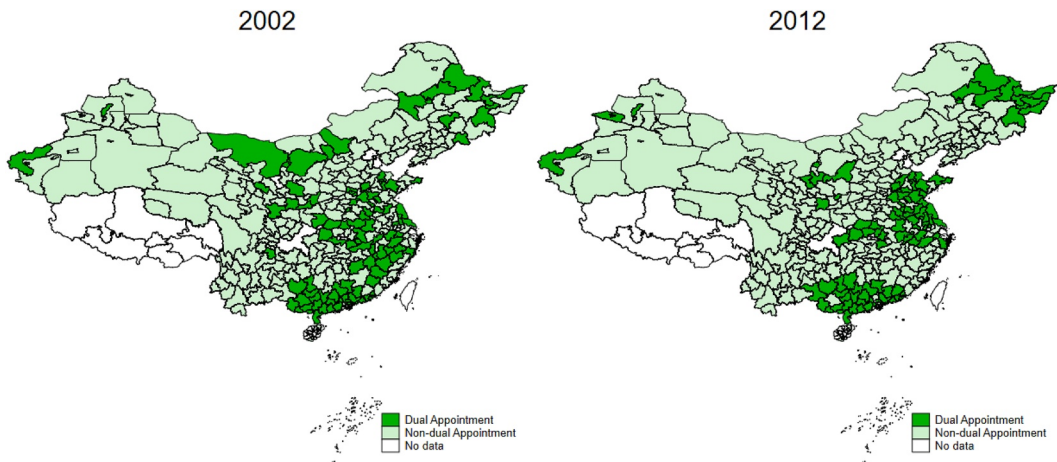


FIGURE 1 Distribution of dual appointment in 2002 and 2012.

legislative activities in publicly available yearbooks, which makes possible the capture of institutional variations of subnational legislatures across space and time.

In this study I collect from multiple sources detailed biographical information on chairmen of municipal congresses and identify various legislative activities from 2002 to 2012. Figure A1 shows an example of the manner in which the biographical information for one chairman was collected from party organizational materials. Legislative variables come from each city's annual yearbook. To date, I have successfully collected policy proposal information from 2440 city yearbooks in 11 years. Figure A2 shows an example of how to identify legislative variables in one such yearbook.

The key independent variable in this study is the dual appointment of the city party secretary and the local congressional chairman. From 2002 to 2012, Chinese cities experienced waves of institutional change. The change in power configurations was usually initiated by provincial governments, and the cities in a province gradually adopted the policy. The dual appointment dummy is equal to 1 when a city's party secretary holds the chairmanship of the local congress at year t , otherwise 0.

Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of dual appointment in 2002 and 2012, which exhibits evident spatial variation. In Figure A3 in the Appendix I plot the trend of the dual appointment of the party secretary and chairman of MPCs (municipal people's congresses). On average, 38.15% of the chairmanships were held by party secretaries between 2002 and 2012. Beginning in 2002 more party secretaries became the chairmen of local congresses, the percentage gradually increasing from 31.48% to 43.56% in 2009. The trend then reversed after 2009, and the proportion of dual appointments fell; in fact, only 30.77% of prefectures had dual appointments of party secretaries and chairmen of congresses by 2012, the lowest point. The percentage declined by 12.79% over the previous 3 years.

To identify the informational role of legislatures, I use the total number of policy proposals from legislators, the majority submitted at the annual conference of the local congress. On average, legislators submitted 171 policy bills, suggestions, and criticisms. Two types of policy proposals come from legislators. First, the bill (*yi an*) is more formal and has a higher threshold for collective action, which requires 10 or more legislators' signatures; congressional leaders control the agenda and can reject the proposals (Manion, 2014). The second type comprises criticism, suggestions, and comments (*piping, jianyi, yijian*). This type has a lower threshold and

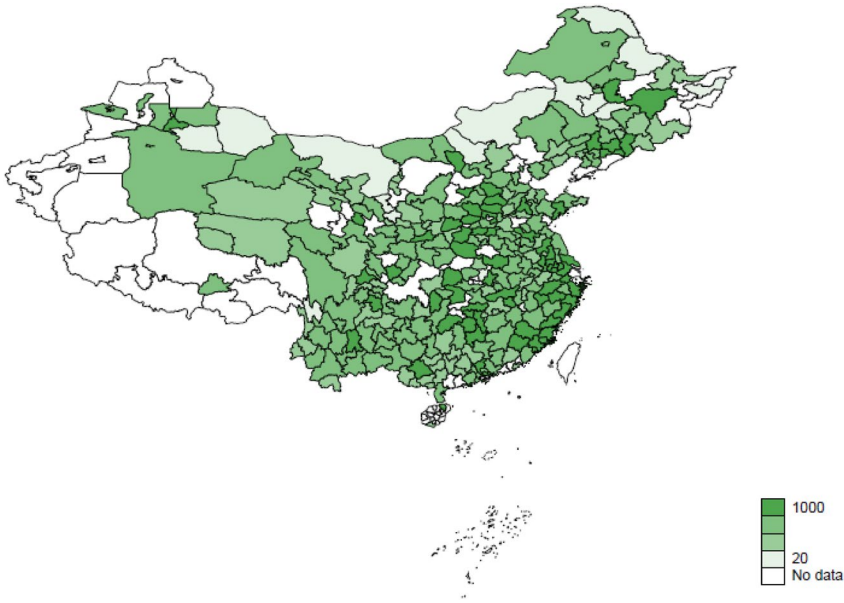


FIGURE 2 Average number of proposals between 2002 and 2012.

can be submitted individually and both during and after the annual congresses. Most yearbooks report the total number of bills, criticisms, suggestions, and comments together. Moreover, the number of bills accounts for only a small proportion of policy proposals from legislators, most of whom submit suggestions, criticism, and comments, the total number of which reflects mainly the supply side of the information flow from legislators. In this study I use policy proposals to indicate collective bills as well as comments, suggestions, and criticism. Figure 2 shows the geographic distribution of the average number of policy bills, suggestions, and criticisms between 2002 and 2012.

Beside the main variables I control a series of covariants. Chairmen's attributes may shape the power concentration and outcome variables. I control for chairmen's age, tenure, gender, ethnicity, education, and home city. City indicators including population, fiscal revenue, GDP per capita, political calendar, and protests are included in the analysis. Section A1 introduces data sources and coding rules in detail.

5 | EMPIRICAL RESULTS

5.1 | Main results

I employ the two-way fixed effects model to test the main argument. The following model is the main specification:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Dual_{it} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 I_{it} + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{it} is the outcome variable for city i in year t . $Dual_{it}$ is the dual appointment dummy, which captures whether a party secretary in city i holds the chair of the people's congress in year t ; X_{it} is a set of city controls. I_{it} is a vector of chairmen's individual characteristics. γ_i captures city fixed effects, and δ_t captures year fixed effect.

TABLE 1 Dual appointment and legislators' policy proposals

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Proposals			Proposals per capita		
Dual appointment	-9.461*	-22.991***	-22.555***	-0.028*	-0.063***	-0.062***
	(5.389)	(6.547)	(6.469)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Individual controls		Y	Y		Y	Y
City controls			Y			Y
City FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	2438	2287	2286	2230	2093	2092
R ²	0.032	0.058	0.062	0.024	0.046	0.049

Note: Robust standard errors are clustered at the city level. Individual controls include age, gender, ethnic, education, and home city. City controls include population (logged), fiscal revenue (logged), GDP per capita (logged), political cycle, and protest.

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

First, I test the effects of dual appointment on policy proposals. Table 1 shows the estimated results. In column (1), the baseline results show that dual appointment has a negative and significant effect on the total proposals. After adding chairmen's individual characteristics in column (2), the results are similar. In column (3), both individual and city characteristics are included. The estimated coefficient of dual appointment is -22.555 and significant, demonstrating that dual appointment accompanies a reduction of nearly 23 policy proposals submitted by legislators. As a robustness check, Table A3 replicates the main results using logged proposal as the outcome variable. The estimated coefficient of dual appointment is -0.124 and significant, as shown in column (3), demonstrating that dual appointment reduces the submission of proposals by 12.4%.

The number of delegates matters for the submission of policy proposals. I use the number of proposals divided by the number of legislators attending the annual conference as an alternative dependent. Columns (4) to (6) in Table 1 present estimated results, which confirm that legislators tend to submit fewer proposals when party secretaries directly control the congresses.

5.2 | Robustness check

In this section, I conduct several robustness checks to test the validity of the main results.

First, missing data may bias estimated results. Some variables have missing values due to data availability. For instance, in Table 1 the estimated coefficients of dual appointment increase from -9.461 to -22.555 after adding leaders' characteristics, and more than 150 observations are dropped in column (2). To mitigate this concern, Table A5 shows results by adding controls one by one. Furthermore, I employed the Amelia II developed by King et al. (2001) to generate multiple-imputed datasets and estimated main results. Table A6 relies on multiple-imputed data and shows that dual appointment has a negative and significant impact on proposals.

Second, in the year of political turnover, new party secretaries may not attend annual conferences when delegates submit most of the policy proposals; therefore they may not directly exert influence on delegates. Thus, I use 1-year lagged dual appointment to mitigate this concern. In Table A7, the results show that 1-year lagged dual appointment has a negative and significant impact on both proposals and proposal per capita.

Moreover, dual appointment is less likely to be adopted in ethnic autonomous prefectures and vice-provincial cities. In ethnic autonomous prefectures, the posts of party secretaries are normally held by Han, while the chairmen of congresses are members of ethnic minorities. The divergent institutions in ethnic autonomous prefectures may alter the results. Vice-provincial cities, which are usually capital cities of provinces, have unique political status, and obtain more political and fiscal resources, may not be comparable with other cities. To mitigate these concerns, all ethnic autonomous prefectures are removed from the analysis in Table A8. The results remain consistent and robust as shown in columns (1) to (6). The estimated results after excluding vice-provincial cities in the analysis appear in Table A9. The results indicate that dual appointment has a negative and significant impact on both number of proposals and proposals per capita.

Another concern is that provincial governments could decide dual appointment at municipal congresses. To mitigate this concern, I replicate the main results in Table A10 by clustering standard errors at the provincial level. Column (1) shows the baseline results without controls. The estimated coefficient is insignificant. After adding leaders and city characteristics in columns (2) and (3), the estimated coefficients of dual appointment are negative and significant, confirming that dual appointment evidently reduces proposals. As a robustness check, I control provincial fixed effect in column (4), the results are consistent. Columns (5) to (8) show similar results using proposal per capita as another outcome variable.

To provide microlevel evidence, I rely on an individual-level delegate data to assess the main results.⁴ I extracted a subsample of 797 municipal delegates from the survey and identified their affiliated municipal congresses. These delegates were from four municipal congresses, and the data derive from a cross-sectional survey conducted between 2007 and 2009. Section B6 presents estimated results in detail, showing that dual appointment has negative and significant impact on the submission of suggestions and criticism yet has no evident impact on the submission of bills. The main results are driven by the declining submission of suggestions, criticism, and comments.

6 | MECHANISM AND ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The main results demonstrate that dual appointment can dampen bottom-up information flow from legislators. I explore several possible mechanisms that may explain the results.

6.1 | Power concentration

Party leaders may become more powerful after holding chairmanships of local congresses, resulting in changes legislators' behaviors. I employ personnel appointments in congresses and party leaders' career prospects to test this mechanism.

First, dual appointments could enhance top party leaders' power over the appointment and removal of state officials. Under dual appointment, party secretaries take part in all procedures involved in cadre appointment: from candidate recommendation to congress election. It allows party secretaries to effectively appoint preferred candidates as state officials and strengthens the power of party secretaries over personnel.

In particular, the appointment and removal of officials follows several procedures, Figure A4 illustrating the primary ones. These procedures imply that the party is the key actor in the first four procedures: democratic recommendation, appraisal, deliberation, and discussion and decision. As chief party leaders party secretaries are influential and pivotal in the four procedures.

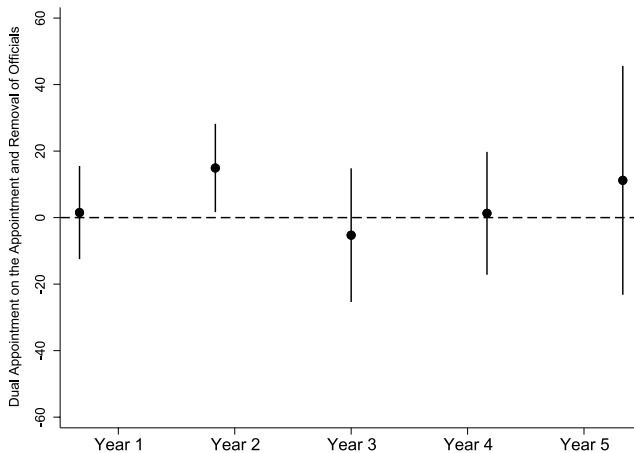


FIGURE 3 Dual appointment and appointment and removal of officials. The figure plots the estimated coefficients of dual appointment on the number of appointed and removed state officials across the tenure year under 95% confidence intervals. See Columns (1)–(5) in Table A13.

In the fifth procedure the vote of the local congresses on the recommended candidates tends to be ceremonial; however, under some circumstances, party-recommended candidates fail to secure the necessary votes in the local congresses and are hence ineligible for legal appointment. Although losses by party-nominated candidates are rare, the failure to be elected in local congresses could weaken the authority of party committees and signal the unpopularity of candidates, who cannot win support even in a highly controlled election.

The dual appointment of party secretaries and chairmen of local congresses could strengthen party control over the appointment and removal of state officials. When party secretaries directly hold the chairs of local congresses, they take part in all the procedures involved in the appointment and removal of state officials. Even in the voting procedures of local congresses, they could coordinate members of standing committees in local congresses and pass their preferred candidates. Thus the dual appointment empowers party secretaries and makes them more influential in cadre management.

I test whether dual appointment increases party secretaries' influence on personnel appointments. The total number of prefectural level state officials is stable because of staffing restrictions (*bianzhi*), especially for senior state officials. That party leaders will appoint or remove a large number of state officials every year is unlikely. The influence of double mandate chairmen may vary across tenure years. In the sample, 56.36% of the party-secretary chairmen stay in office for one or 2 years; their average tenure is 2.56 years. The full term of chairmen in congresses is 5 years, so I test the consequences of power concentration in each tenure year.

In Table A13 I estimate how dual appointment shapes personnel appointments by tenure years. A detailed discussion of the main results appears in Section C1 in the Appendix. The outcome variable is the number of appointments and removals of state officials in each tenure year in municipal congresses. City yearbooks usually contain a section called Appointment and Removal, showing personnel changes in government, the courts, and the procuratorate. The number of appointments and removals of state officials captures the total number of officials who left current positions and the newly appointed.

To facilitate interpretation, I plot the estimated coefficients of power concentration in Figure 3. It shows that double appointment chairmen appoint or remove significantly more state

officials in their second year of office. New dual appointment chairmen may need additional time to consolidate power, so they may not be involved in all conferences and sessions of local congresses during their first year in office. In the second year, they may have stronger control over cadre appointments and become more likely to appoint officials and build their patronage networks. The average tenure of double mandate chairmen is less than 3 years. To avoid unexpected trouble and problems, party leaders avoid appointing officials before leaving office. For instance, if they promote officials before leaving office, they cannot effectively control them; and any misbehavior would damage their reputations or careers after they leave office. In addition, incoming leaders would be blamed for these appointments.

Furthermore, I use leaders' career prospects to provide more supporting evidence on the power concentration mechanism. The essence of power concentration is that leaders gain more formal and informal power at the same political rank, possibly altering local delegates' behaviors and preferences. In China's political system leaders at the same political rank may have divergent informal power and career prospects, the latter referring to officials' future promotion prospects. In particular, not all leaders have the same likelihood of promotion. Because of age restrictions for promotions, younger leaders gain an advantage in career advancements (Kou & Tsai, 2014; Landry et al., 2018), the party tending to advance younger officials and to restrict the promotion of aging ones (Kou & Tsai, 2014). If leaders are much younger than colleagues in equivalent positions, they will gain a great advantage in the race for promotion and are expected to be powerful in the future; so we may expect that younger party leaders gain more potential power than their older counterparts.

Legislators comprehend the career prospects of party secretaries and have incentives to build patronage ties with them or avoid offending them. Such ties between patrons and clients are usually built through work ties in the same areas (Jia et al., 2015). When a patron has better career prospects, the client could have a greater chance of continuous promotion. If party secretaries are expected to move to higher positions, they may bring more opportunities for career advancements to local officials, who make up a large number of legislators. After perceiving better career prospects for legislative leaders, they may actively cater to those leaders rather than offend them. Consequently, legislators may be less likely to submit policy suggestions, criticism, and comments when dual appointment chairmen have better career prospects.

An observable and easy-to-interpret indicator of career prospect is age. City party and government leaders are ineligible for promotion after age 57. In the sample, the average age of double mandate chairmen is 51.79. Between 1994 and 2011 city party secretaries and mayors had an average age of 50.5 and a median age of 51 (Xi et al., 2018). If a city official is 50 or below, she or he could be younger than more than half of the city leaders and gain a competitive advantage. In contrast, party leaders confront intense competition and have lower promotion probability when they are older than 50 (Li & Yu, 2022). Thus, I use whether a leader is 50 or younger to capture their career prospects.

Table 2 shows how the impact of dual appointment on policy proposals may be conditional on leaders' career prospects. Columns (1) and (3) indicate that the interaction term of power concentration and age 50 or younger is negative and significant. Columns (4) to (6) present similar results using proposals per capita as an alternative measurement. The results imply that legislators are less likely to submit proposals when party secretaries control congresses and have better career prospects.

As noted above, a large proportion of legislators comprises local officials in government, SOEs (State-owned enterprises), and party organs. Party secretaries have considerable say in their career advancements. When they are younger, they gain an advantage in political

TABLE 2 Dual appointment, career prospect and legislators' policy proposal

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Proposal			Proposal per capita		
Dual appointment × age <50	-22.446** (9.474)	-23.925** (9.665)	-23.440** (9.685)	-0.074** (0.029)	-0.083*** (0.029)	-0.083*** (0.030)
Dual appointment	-9.185 (5.952)	-21.351*** (6.797)	-20.824*** (6.700)	-0.028* (0.016)	-0.055*** (0.017)	-0.054*** (0.016)
Age <50	24.086*** (8.649)	21.695** (8.747)	22.086** (8.715)	0.078*** (0.027)	0.079*** (0.027)	0.081*** (0.027)
Individual controls		Y	Y		Y	Y
City controls			Y			Y
City FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>N</i>	2325	2287	2286	2123	2093	2092
<i>R</i> ²	0.036	0.060	0.064	0.030	0.049	0.052

Note: Robust standard errors are clustered at city level. Individual controls include gender, ethnic, education, and home city. City controls include population (logged), fiscal revenue (logged), GDP per capita (logged), political cycle, and protest.

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

competition and have better chances of promotion. Legislators, especially those working in party and governments, may be more reluctant to offer policy suggestions, comments, or even criticism. Thus, they are less likely to submit policy proposals in congresses controlled by party secretaries.

Furthermore, the results show that being a young single mandate chairman has a positive and significant impact on the submission of proposals. The implication is that such chairmen may motivate legislators to submit more proposals, suggestions, and criticism. The single mandate congressional chairmanship, a role with limited career prospects, is usually the last stop in the career of the politician who holds it. She or he is likely to retire after the current position. Thus, young single mandate congressional chairmen have weaker formal and informal power compared with young dual appointed party secretaries, supporting the power concentration mechanism. Compared with older chairmen, young single mandate congressional chairmen have longer tenure. They may be more energetic and enthusiastic about congressional works and even attempt to gain more influence through formal legislative institutions. Older single mandate chairmen are close to retirement age and may prefer retiring peacefully instead of offending embedded local interests. This may also explain why legislative activities stagnate under older single mandate chairmen.

Taken together, these results suggest that the reduction effect of dual appointment on upward information flow may be driven by power concentration. Dual appointment may empower local party leaders and enable their influence in personnel appointments of state officials. The consequence of dual appointment is more evident when leaders have better career prospects.

6.2 | Alternative mechanisms

6.2.1 | Leadership style

Party secretaries' personalities rather than power concentration may shape the behavior of legislators. Strong authoritarian leaders face weak power constraints and tend to have coercive leaderships (Landa & Tyson, 2017). More than half the party leaders in China appear to have an assertive, autocratic leadership style, involving preference for centralized decision-making and effective execution (Jiang & Luo, 2021). Dual appointed chairmen may be more assertive than single mandate chairmen and less unwilling to hear a range of views. The reduction effect of dual appointment may be driven by individual characteristics rather than power concentration.

However, leaders' personalities and leadership styles are unobservable. To deal with the issue, I conduct a placebo test using retired party secretaries. In the sample 4.5% of chairmen are retired party secretaries, who typically worked as chairmen where they were party secretaries. Holding congress chairs allowed them to bypass the age limits and remain in the political arena longer. For instance, Figure A5 in the Appendix shows an illustrative case. Liu Yupu was the party secretary and chairman of the congress in Shenzhen between 2008 and 2010. After retiring from the position of party secretary in April 2010, he continued to hold the congressional chairmanship until 2013. In this scenario, the power concentration variable in Shenzhen was coded 1 in 2008 and 2009 and 0 between 2010 and 2012.

Table 3 shows the consequences of retired party secretaries on upward flow of information from legislators. I restrict the sample to all single mandate chairmen in local congresses, excluding current dual appointment chairmen. The results in columns (1) to (3) show that retired party secretaries have no significant effect on the total number of proposals.

Compared with other single mandate chairmen, they bear no salient consequences on legislators' submission of policy proposals. Columns (4) to (6) confirm that the dual appointment effect disappears when party secretaries leave their position as chief party leaders. The results imply that the consequences of dual appointment may not be driven by party leaders' personalities or leadership styles.

TABLE 3 Retired Party Secretaries and policy proposals

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Proposal			Proposal per capita		
Retired party secretaries	2.627 (10.625)	11.190 (11.802)	11.911 (12.097)	-0.011 (0.024)	0.006 (0.027)	0.008 (0.027)
Individual controls		Y	Y		Y	Y
City controls			Y			Y
City FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>N</i>	1457	1317	1317	1339	1212	1212
<i>R</i> ²	0.028	0.069	0.074	0.021	0.063	0.071

Note: The analysis uses the non-party secretary sample. Robust standard errors are clustered at the city level. Individual controls include age, gender, ethnic, education, and home city. City controls include population (logged), fiscal revenue (logged), GDP per capita (logged), political cycle and protest.

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

TABLE 4 Dual appointment and local grievance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Petitions (logged)			Protest		
Dual appointment	0.017 (0.053)	-0.023 (0.068)	-0.025 (0.069)	-0.045 (0.163)	0.106 (0.211)	0.116 (0.201)
Individual controls		Y	Y		Y	Y
City controls			Y			Y
City FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>N</i>	1970	1837	1837	3581	3281	3280
<i>R</i> ²	0.301	0.317	0.318	0.081	0.089	0.113

Note: Robust standard errors are clustered at the city level. Individual controls include age, gender, ethnic, education, and home city. City controls include population (logged), fiscal revenue (logged), GDP per capita (logged), political cycle and protest. In column (6), city controls doesn't include protest.

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

6.2.2 | Local grievance

A rising literature shows that local social unrest motivates authoritarian leaders to respond to public demands or appeals (Chen et al., 2016; Distelhorst & Hou, 2017). In Chinese local congresses delegates tend to represent local interests and respond to their constituents, especially for popular elected township and county delegates (Manion, 2014). Delegates reflect upward local grievances and problems via proposals, suggestions and criticism. Dual appointment chairmen may improve local governance and evidently reduce mass grievances. Consequently, delegates submit fewer proposals, suggestions, and criticisms. The reduction effect of dual appointment may be driven by declining social grievance.

To test the local grievance mechanism, I collected the number of petitions in local congresses from each city's yearbook. Municipal congresses have an office (*xinfangban*) dedicated to accepting petitions from citizens. When they have grievances, they can come to the petition office to file a complaint and seek justice from local congresses, but these type of petitions reflect only parts of social grievance. I further employ social unrest as another indicator of local grievance. The city-level social unrest data came from Social Unrest in China dataset (Ong, 2015), a comprehensive compilation of protest data in China. Section A1 introduces the measurement of protests.

I evaluate the impact of dual appointment on local grievance in Table 4. Columns (1) to (3) indicate that dual appointment has no significant impact on the number of petitions in local congresses. Similarly, columns (4) to (6) demonstrate that the estimated coefficients of dual appointment are insignificant, that dual appointment has no evident effect on the rise of social unrest. These results show that dual appointment has no direct effect on local grievance; the reduction effect of dual appointment on upward information may not be driven by social grievance.

6.2.3 | Composition of legislators

The reduction effect of dual appointment may be driven by more “yes-men” delegates. As noted above, dual appointed party secretaries become more influential in personnel appointments.

TABLE 5 Composition of legislators

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Proposal			Proposal per capita		
Dual appointment × post	−3.488 (5.450)	−3.289 (5.670)	−2.744 (5.712)	−0.011 (0.016)	−0.009 (0.016)	−0.007 (0.016)
Individual controls		Y	Y		Y	Y
City controls			Y			Y
City FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>N</i>	2438	2287	2286	2230	2093	2092
<i>R</i> ²	0.030	0.040	0.044	0.021	0.029	0.033

Note: Robust standard errors are clustered at the city level. Individual controls include age, gender, ethnic, education, and home city. City controls include population (logged), fiscal revenue (logged), GDP per capita (logged), and protest.

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

Authoritarian ruling parties can alter the composition of delegates (Malesky & Schuler, 2010). That party secretaries change the composition of legislators and select more pliant legislators in the heavily controlled elections is likely. As a result, these loyal legislators may be less likely to submit suggestions, criticism, and comments in local congresses. The reduction effect of dual appointment may be driven by the changing composition of legislators.

I use the political cycle to capture the composition of legislators, which is stable within one political cycle. Political cycles in municipal congresses usually started in 2002, 2007, and 2012, when new legislators were elected. Within the 5-year term, the composition of legislators is stable, and the same group of legislators participates in legislative activities. Congressional chairs cannot replace legislators within a 5-year term so the only opportunity for political leaders to change the composition of legislators occurs at the beginning of new political cycle every 5 years.

Because of data limitation, whether leaders appoint more pliant legislators is not observable. If dual appointed chairs select more “yes-men” as delegates when a new political cycle begins, legislators can be expected to submit fewer policy proposals after the political cycle begins. To test this alternative mechanism, I use difference-in-differences estimation based on congressional chairs’ tenure and the two full observable political cycles occurring between 2002 and 2012. If congressional leaders are able to appoint more “yes-men” delegates, they should be at least in their second year of tenure in 2002 or 2007.⁵ I construct a $Post_{it}$ dummy, which is equal to 1 if a prefecture’s chair was appointed before political cycles (2002 or 2007) and continued to stay in office after political cycles, otherwise 0. For instance, if a chairman’s tenure occurred between 2001 and 2006, $Post_{it}$ is 1 between 2003 and 2006. I rely on the following equation to estimate the results:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Dual_{it} \times Post_{it} + \alpha_2 X_{it} + \alpha_3 I_{it} + \gamma_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

Table 5 shows estimated results. The interaction term of dual appointment and post is negative but insignificant across different specifications. The results demonstrate that legislators tend to submit fewer policy proposals after dual-appointed chairmen can exert influence in the composition of legislators, yet estimated results are not significant. Thus the reduction effect of dual appointment may not be driven by the composition of legislators.

As a robustness check, Table A14 in Appendix shows the estimated results using an alternative specification. The results show that the interaction of terms of dual appointment and post

are positive, indicating that the reduction effect of dual appointment is not driven by the changing composition of legislators. Due to data availability, I may not fully rule out the mechanism. Future research may explore the issue with better data and research design.

7 | CONCLUSION

This study focuses on local congresses in China, but it may have broad implications. Local congresses are an important institutional channel to transfer local information from citizens to local party and government agents (Manion, 2015). I demonstrate that the information gathering role of local congresses is not constant. The strengthened authority of legislative leaders may dampen the informational function of congresses. Delegates may conceal local grievances and become less likely to serve as bridges between rulers and citizens. As a result, the quality of bottom-up information may deteriorate, and bad news can be filtered, leaving leaders to rely on low-quality information to make decisions and promote policy implementation.

This study illustrates the potential consequences of power concentration. Dual appointment ensures that top party leaders control the appointment or removal of local officials, lawmaking, oversight of executive power, and other party and legislative resources. Power, which tends to be concentrated in the hands of a single leader, is bound by weak constraints. Geddes et al. (2018) show that the defining feature of personalism is concentrated power; top leaders have dominant discretion over power instruments like promotion and removal or punishment of officials. Dual appointment may facilitate power concentration and foster the cult of personality, which may be at the cost of inhibiting bottom-up information flow and then undermining the quality of policymaking.

This study has some limitations. Because of data availability, I examine only the effects of dual appointment on the number of policy proposals. Whether and how dual appointment alters contents and quality of policy proposals remains unclear. I leave these for future research.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Replication code and files are available in Harvard Dataverse at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/7FDZU8>.

ENDNOTES

¹ In terms of legal protection, one case is the Law on Congress Delegates in China, which indicates that legislators at the county level or above cannot be arrested without the approval of local congresses.

- ² Personal interview, HB2209.
- ³ Central Chinese Communist Party Literature Research Office, ed. "Selection of Important Documents since the Thirteenth Party Congress". Volume 2. Beijing: People's Press, 1991.
- ⁴ Melanie Manion partnered with RCCC for the surveys, and shares the survey data on her website: <http://sites.duke.edu/melaniamanion/data>. See Appendix A in Manion (2015) for more details on the sampling procedures and data collection.
- ⁵ If leaders began their tenure in 2002 or 2007, whether or not they can exert influence in the section of legislators cannot be confirmed.

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