

Bielefeld, Leonie; Mohr, Cathrin

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## Elite selection in an autocracy: The career costs of political ties

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**Elite Selection in an Autocracy: The Career  
Costs of Political Ties**

Leonie Bielefeld

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May 2023

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# Elite Selection in an Autocracy: The Career Costs of Political Ties\*

Leonie Bielefeld<sup>†</sup> & Cathrin Mohr<sup>‡</sup>

May 2023

## Abstract

We study the selection of the political elite in an autocratic state. Using detailed CV data on potential politicians in the German Democratic Republic, we track and quantify the position of individuals in the state hierarchy over time and exploit exogenous connections between individuals that were formed through imprisonment during the Nazi Era. We find asymmetric effects of being connected to the political elite: While being linked to the state's centre of power harms high-profile careers, they have positive effects on low-profile careers. An extensive analysis of potential mechanisms shows that the negative effect of being linked to the party leadership on individuals' probability to be part of the ruling elite is in line with anti-factionalism, whereas the positive effect on low-profile careers is in line with patronage.

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<sup>†</sup>Bielefeld (née Oberländer): University of Munich. Email: leonie.bielefeld@econ.lmu.de

<sup>‡</sup>Mohr: University of Bonn. Email: cmohr@uni-bonn.de

# 1 Introduction

In autocracies, a confined group of individuals wields substantial power over political decision-making. Unlike democracies, where leaders are elected through a transparent and participative process, autocracies are characterised by opaque selection mechanisms for the political elite. However, the composition of these political elites is of great importance, as has for example been verbalized by Stalin’s slogan that “cadres decide everything” (Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich, 1934, p. 767). Not only do they exert their policy preferences on the population without requiring citizens’ consent, but they also play a vital role in the stability and survival of the regime. Internal conflict among the political elite can render the regime vulnerable to overthrow.<sup>1</sup> Unraveling the factors behind the selection of these key actors is thus crucial for understanding the stability of autocracies and the well-being of citizens living in these regimes.

There are of course many potential factors that influence the elite selection in autocratic states. In this paper, we focus on the role of social connections between potential and existing members of the elite. Specifically, we ask how having a link to the political elite affects an individual’s probability to be chosen for becoming part of the elite themselves.

Personnel decisions in autocracies are subject to a trade-off: on the one hand, members of the elite want to engage in patronage by promoting their allies and friends to appealing positions within the state. On the other hand, the regime wants to prevent the formation of factions within the elite, as these pose a threat to the balance of power within the ruling class and in the most extreme case, might threaten the stability of the entire regime.

Studying the role of personal ties to the political elite empirically is associated with two main challenges. First, we usually only observe those individuals that did become part of a regime’s elite and not the entire set of potential elites. Second, people who are linked to each other might share other characteristics that could affect their (political) careers.

In this paper, we examine the selection of members of the political elite in the context of former Socialist East Germany (German Democratic Republic, GDR) after World War II. Building a rich, novel dataset based on individuals’ CVs, we follow the potential pool of talent for the political elite — German communists that had been politically active beforehand — from 1946 until 1962. We analyze the effect of individuals’ links to the GDR’s political elite on their probability to be selected into the political elite, national politics, or local politics.

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1. Estimates suggest that as much as two thirds of changes in autocratic governments are driven by internal opposition among the ruling elite (Svolik, 2012).

The links we consider have been formed in a natural experiment, namely through imprisonment in the same concentration camp during the Nazi era, before the GDR came into existence. These imprisonments did not follow a systematic set of rules within the sample we consider, i.e. important communist figures in the Weimar Republic, and we thus regard the links arising from them as quasi-exogenous. While links between individuals are pre-determined to the foundation of the GDR and are thus fixed over the sample period, we exploit within-individual variation in connectedness to the elite that occurs through turnover in the GDR's central party leadership. These personnel changes generate shocks in whether an individual is connected to the highest levels of government through a common camp history. Using this within-individual variation in connections to the political elite, we hold time-invariant characteristics of individuals constant and estimate how career developments differ in times with and without links to the political elite.

We find that being linked to a member of the GDR elite makes it less likely that an individual is part of the top tiers of the political system. We show that individuals are ranked lower in the political state hierarchy and are less likely to be part of the leading elite or in national politics. At the same time, it is more likely that they hold a position in local politics. We posit that these results can be explained by a policy against inner-party factions, preventing individuals that could potentially form a faction from holding power at the same time. The aversion to inner-party factions is common to communist and socialist regimes, such as the GDR. As links between the elite and local politicians do not threaten the regime's stability, patronage could take place at this level.

Our work relates to several strands of the literature. First, our work contributes to the literature studying the survival of autocratic regimes (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2000; Wintrobe, 2000; De Mesquita et al., 2005; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). Autocracies that are led by parties are more stable than other forms of autocracies (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, 2014), suggesting that parties offer a potential way for autocracies to increase chances of survival (Boix and Svolik, 2013). By examining a potential mechanism by which the party leadership of the GDR prevented potential instability, that is by averting the formation of factions in the elite, we add to our understanding of how autocratic parties increase regime stability.

Second, we relate to the literature on selection of politicians in autocratic regimes. Most closely related to our work are papers exploring the determinants of promotions into the national political elite in China (Li and Zhou, 2005; Persson and Zhuravskaya, 2016). Several papers have looked at the effect of connections for promotions in the context of provincial leaders in China: Jia, Kudamatsu, and Seim (2015) find that connected provincial leaders are more likely to be promoted. Fisman

et al. (2020) also focus on connections and control for the origin of such connections. Doing so, they find that connected provincial leaders are actually *less* likely to be promoted into the Chinese Politburo. Their findings are in line with the stylized fact that the Chinese central administration allocates members of the same faction to different administrative bodies (Francois, Trebbi, and Xiao, 2016). We contribute to this literature by looking at a broader set of potential politicians, exploring a wider range of positions to which individuals can be promoted, and by studying the rank within the hierarchy of political positions. In addition, we are able to draw on connections that were formed through a natural experiment, alleviating concerns about connections proxying individual characteristics that might affect their career prospects.<sup>2</sup>

Third, our paper is linked to the literature exploring natural experiments that lead to quasi-exogenous variation of connections between individuals. Battiston (2018) studies the role of social ties on earnings relying on networks that formed between 1909 and 1924 on immigrant ships to the US. Becker et al. (2021) study the effect of links with émigrés for the migration decision of Jewish scientists during the Nazi era. Costa and Kahn (2007) look at the effect of networks on survival in prisoner of war camps.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 gives an overview of the historical background, spanning all periods in German history that are relevant for our paper, i.e. the Weimar Republic, the Nazi era and the German Democratic Republic. Section 3 provides information about the data we use and our definition of links. Section 4 examines the effect of ties to the party elite on political careers in the GDR, Section 5 addresses potential threats to identification. Section 6 looks at the potential mechanisms and Section 7 concludes.

## 2 Historical Background

### 2.1 Communists in Germany before 1945

The Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was founded post-World War I, in 1918, amidst Germany’s transformation into a parliamentary democracy. The KPD, which marked the radical left of the German party spectrum, maintained significant electoral support, usually obtaining more than 10% of votes in national elections. The party was organized with an elaborate hierarchical structure, which encompassed many upper- and lower-level leadership positions at the national and sub-national

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2. There is also a literature on the role of links between individuals and promotions within bureaucracies, for example Xu (2018) and Colonnelli, Prem, and Teso (2020).

level. Central party actors were constantly redeployed, sent to different locations and assigned new positions, since the KPD aimed to prevent the emergence of inner-party factions (Weber and Herbst, 2008, p. 31).

After the Nazi party (NSDAP) took over power in Germany, an arson attack on the parliament building in February 1933 initiated a mass persecution of potential regime opponents. Among these opponents, the Nazis especially targeted communists, whom they regarded as a major threat to their power. The Nazis particularly focused on active members of the KPD, irrespective of their position in the party hierarchy (Osterloh and Wünschmann, 2017). Overall, around 60,000 communists were imprisoned in 1933/4 (Weber and Herbst, 2008, p. 16). The intensity and speed of persecution surprised even communist elites.

To manage the sudden masses of prisoners, the Nazis erected improvised concentration camps, for instance in vacant factory buildings and castles. Still, limited camp capacities posed a constraint on the number of inmates that could be interned in a respective camp (Osterloh and Wünschmann, 2017; Duhnke, 2018; Drobisch and Wieland, 2018). Decisions on whom to intern and in which camp were made by local Nazi leaders, who often took the mass persecution as an opportunity for personal retribution against communist individuals with whom they had interacted previously (Orth, 1999, p. 23).

By the end of the 1930s all of the early provisional camps, except for Dachau, were dissolved and replaced by a conceptualised system of concentration camps. Those were strategically placed in areas that are rich in natural resources, so that inmates could be exploited as laborers in the war economy and the construction sector. In the early 1940s death camps were established, forming a distinct and unprecedented type of concentration camp. Those were the centers of the genocide of the European Jews, Romani people and the mass murder of other groups, such as homosexual persons (Orth, 1999).

As a consequence of persecution, the Communist Party's remaining activities were forced to go underground or relocate to foreign countries, while another group, composed primarily of top-tier leaders, emigrated to Moscow. Apart from the mass wave of political persecution in the early days of Nazi rule, which aimed to manifest power, there were large-scale internments of communists during World War II to avoid subversion by opposition groups. In between these episodes, there were infrequent arrest waves (Osterloh and Wünschmann, 2017; Orth, 1999).

## **2.2 Former Communists during the Build-Up of the GDR**

After the end of World War II, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) assumed control in the East German occupation zone and initiated the

build-up of a socialist East German state. German Communists that had survived the Nazi regime returned from underground, from concentration camps or exile and took leading roles in the new administration (Schneider, 2013). Formerly active German Communists were extensively involved in the state-building process, which culminated in the formal establishment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949. This process was characterized by a continuity in political direction, without significant disruptions.

The GDR was governed by a single party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which was founded through a forced merger of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).<sup>3</sup> Within the SED, former KPD cadres maintained a dominant position, while former SPD members occupied a secondary position in the power hierarchy (Gieseke and Wentker, 2011).

The SED controlled every domain of (political) life in the GDR; it was impossible to distinguish between the state and the party. By acting as gatekeeper of all important positions within the state and by filling them with its cadres, the party governed state and society (Gieseke and Wentker, 2011; Wagner, 1998; Malycha, 2000). Over time, the SED institutionalized its complex personnel system by introducing a cadre *nomenklatura*, i.e. a set of rules that regulated the authority over the selection of personnel for various positions. The *nomenklatura* was introduced in a systematic fashion in 1949 and gradually expanded to encompass all lines of administration within the state, such as politicians, people working in the political administration, leading figures in the media sector and at universities, as well as managers of state owned enterprises.

Given that the new East German state and its government represented a complete break from the prior Nazi regime, it was necessary to fill all positions with newly appointed personnel, ideally with reliable and experienced communists. Those German Communists that were politically active before the Nazis took over power formed the natural pool of talent that the socialist regime could draw from, as these individuals were experienced working within communist party structures.

## 2.3 Important Political Positions in the GDR

The SED state was structured according to the highly hierarchical principle of “democratic centralism”, which stipulates that all decisions made by the central party leadership are binding and have to be implemented by the lower-level administrative bodies, i.e. the districts and the counties.

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3. The KPD and the SPD were the two left-wing parties of the Weimar Republic. The SPD was much more moderate than the KPD and was able to secure the largest share of votes out of all parties in all elections until 1932.



The most influential individual within the state was the First Secretary of the Central Committee. He was in charge of setting the agenda for each meeting of the most important political institution, the Politburo. The Politburo singularly decided on the political course and all key policy questions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a considerable portion of the Politburo's work consisted of high-stakes personnel decisions within the party and the state: For example in 1950, 23.5 percent of resolutions by the Politburo were concerned with cadre politics (Amos, 2003, p. 50). The size of the Politburo varied over time, ranging between 10 and 21 members and candidates between 1946 and 1962.

The Secretariat of the Central Committee served as a binding organ between the Politburo and specialized departments within the SED. It drafted resolutions for the Politburo and controlled the SED's political work. It was also tasked with cadre politics and oversaw the work of the cadre department, which had to "control and develop the leading cadre" (p. 99). The Secretariat consisted of 6 to 13 members.

The third important political organ within the GDR was the Central Committee. It was the leading organ of the SED and officially ratified the decisions of the Politburo. Its membership size varied between 50 and 110 members over the course of the GDR, with 34 to 60 candidates. Only members had an official vote, while candidates had an advisory say.

Note, that technically the Party Congress (*Parteitag*) of the SED elected the Central Committee and the Central Committee in turn elected members and candidates of the Politburo and the Secretariat. However, in reality the Politburo decided a priori who was chosen to become part of the Politburo, the Secretariat, and the Central Committee (p. 102).

## 2.4 Remembering Concentration Camps in the GDR

The attitude of the SED leadership towards former concentration camp internees was torn: On the one hand, former inmates and their experiences were heavily instrumentalized to cultivate and reinforce popular support for the newly founded state. The GDR was presented as a counterpoint to Nazi Germany and as being led by "anti-fascist heroes", who actively resisted Nazi rule (Epstein, 1999; Gieseke and Wentker, 2011; Keller, 1998).

On the other hand, former concentration camp internees were also met by suspicion within the political elite: Walter Ulbricht, the leading state figure in the GDR from 1950 to 1971, was very distrustful of former concentration camp inmates, due

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4. There is no evidence that (except after the turmoil of the Uprising of 1953) Soviet representatives were present during the weekly meetings of the Politburo, but members of the Politburo had to inform the Soviets about their work (Amos, 2003, p. 48).

to the close contacts and relationships between them that could only be partly controlled (Erler, 1998, p. 267).

The official, SED-led commemoration of the lives of communists that were persecuted in concentration camps was carried out within the Union of Persecuted of the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes, VVN).<sup>5</sup> The VVN contained individual camp committees, i.e. groups of former inmates of the respective camp. The Politburo and the Secretariat of the Central Committee viewed the VVN as a gathering place for critical voices, which ultimately led to its ordered dissolution in 1953.

Nevertheless, camp committees continued to exist and were incorporated into the new national remembrance association later on (Committee of antifascist members of the resistance, *Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer*) (Reuter and Hansel, 1997, pp. 18, 411).

There was strong solidarity between former camp inmates. The camp committees created an opportunity for individuals that have been interned in the same camp to connect, meet regularly, and exchange views (p. 411). When looking at the members of the camp committees, it is evident that important political figures of the GDR did in fact stay in contact with other former inmates of the same camp. For example, Karl Schirdewan, who was member of the Politburo and the Central Committee from 1953 to 1958, was a member of the Sachsenhausen committee. Edith Baumann, a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee from 1949 to 1953 and a candidate of the Politburo from 1958 to 1961, as well as Erich Mückenberger, a member of the Central Committee from 1950 to 1989, candidate and later member of the Politburo (1950/1958-1989), were both part of the Ravensbrück Committee.

## 3 Data

### 3.1 Biographical Data

We have compiled a novel, extensive dataset using the detailed curriculum vitae of more than 1,000 important communists that were active in the Weimar Republic, i.e. the German state that existed before the Nazis took over power. Our sample consists of the universe of central members of the KPD between 1918 and 1933 that survive until 1946, allowing us to study an ex-ante pool of potential politicians in the GDR, rather than only the ex-post realized political elite.

The CVs were published in the biographical handbook of German Communists

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5. The experience of other groups that were interned in concentration camps, such as Jews, Romani people or homosexuals, were largely ignored within the public debate of the GDR.

(Weber and Herbst, 2008)<sup>6</sup> and were made available online by the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*.<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that this handbook was written after the GDR ceased to exist, making it a trustworthy source without an ideological bias. We have web-scraped the CV texts and since they do not follow a consistent structure, have performed extensive data cleaning to conceptualize the individuals' career paths and camp histories. In addition, we have added further information, such as the dates of promotions, to the CVs of some individuals by relying on information published in a handbook on important people in the GDR (Mueller-Enbergs et al., 2010).

The dataset that we have constructed comprises a diverse range of information on the demographics and activities of individuals during the Weimar Republic, as well as their experiences during the Nazi regime, including internment in concentration camps. Furthermore, the curricula vitae include information on the individuals' career paths after World War II, including both those who pursued careers in the East German government and those who continued their careers in other countries. For each year, we know which professional and political positions individuals hold.

## 3.2 Political Positions within the State Hierarchy

### *Hierarchy Score*

To conceptualize the hierarchical structure of the East German government, we use internal records from the GDR's Ministry of Domestic Affairs. These records delineate the hierarchy of national politicians and key representatives of the GDR, ranking them according to their position in the political system of the GDR (Wagner, 1998). In total, 28 positions are listed, ranging from the First Secretary of the Central Committee, the highest office, to the vice chairperson of the district administration (*Räte der Bezirke*).<sup>8</sup> For the complete ranked list of positions, please refer to Appendix Table A.1. We use this internal hierarchy to assess for each individual and each year in our sample, which position they hold within the SED apparatus.

We translate every position in the hierarchy into a score and assign each individual the hierarchy score corresponding to the highest rank they hold in a given year.<sup>9</sup> To facilitate the interpretation of the results, we rescale the hierarchy score such that it ranges from 1 to 29, with 29 being the score of the most important position within the state hierarchy, 2 being the score of the least important position

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6. The handbook covers all *important* communists in this time. This includes elected communist politicians as well as local and national party leaders. For a detailed discussion of which positions are included in this book please refer to Appendix Section A.1.

7. For example CVs, see Appendix Section A.2.

8. Note that the internal hierarchy ranks national and district-level positions, but not county-level positions.

9. Note that an individual can hold multiple positions in a given year.

within the state hierarchy and 1 being the score for all other positions that are not listed in the official hierarchy.

### ***Important Leading Positions***

Apart from regarding an individual's position within the official state hierarchy in general, we look at whether individuals hold specific positions at the different levels of state administration.

First, we focus on national-level party leadership positions, defined as the top ten positions within the state hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> The lowest-rank position within this group is the candidates and members of the Central Committee, which held considerable power and influence, being members of one of the three leading organs in GDR politics. Thus, this measure captures the top-tier political elite of the GDR. By focusing on this group, we also capture members and candidates of the two remaining important political organs, that is the Politburo and Secretariat of the Central Committee, as well as individual positions such as the First Secretary of the Central Committee, that was the party leader and held the most powerful position in the state. He was responsible for setting the agenda of the leadership organs and had the right to intervene in their activities. We construct a dummy variable, *Leading*, indicating whether an individual is a part of this elite.

Second, we assess whether individuals are involved in national politics more broadly. In addition to members of the leading elite, we consider individuals that are part of the National Parliament, the State Council, Council of Ministers, and the State Planning Commission, as well as Ministers, State Secretaries, and Department Heads at the Central Committee. This variable thus captures a broader measure of participation within national politics and also includes individuals that do not hold any real decision-making power, but are still in prestigious positions within the GDR's political system.

### ***Local Positions***

Third, we look at positions at the local level by focusing on county politicians. These were responsible for executing orders locally and crucially, they provided information and reported to the upper-level leadership (Ammer, 1995). Despite not

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10. The top ten positions are: First Secretary of the Central Committee/Chairman of the State Council, Chairmen of the Council of Ministers, President of the National Parliament, members and candidates of the Politburo, Secretaries and members of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, President of the National Council of the National Front of the GDR, deputies of the Chairmen of the State Council, deputies of the Chairmen of the Council of Ministers, Chairmen of the block parties, and members and candidates of the Central Committee.

holding powerful or influential positions, these individuals were part of the official SED apparatus.

### 3.3 Links between Communists and Treatment

To capture links between potential GDR politicians, we draw on the detailed CV information and gather the location of camp internment for all individuals in our sample, that were imprisoned in a concentration camp during the Nazi regime. We assign those individuals, that have been interned in the same concentration camp a link to each other. This is a plausible approach given the ample historical evidence describing that former camp inmates that have been interned in the same camp met regularly after 1945 (see Section 2.4). These links are predetermined to the GDR and do not change throughout its existence.

In our analysis, we estimate the effect of being connected to the party leadership on an individual’s career path. A person is linked to the SED leadership, if someone that has been interned in the same concentration camp is in one of the top 10 positions according to the government’s internal ranking of positions, i.e. being part of the Central Committee or in a higher-ranked position. Turnover in the party leadership creates the variation that we exploit in a panel setting, i.e. whether someone is connected to the party leadership through their camp experience changes over the sample period.

Figure 1: Camp Background and Links

(a) Camp Experience

|   |            |           |
|---|------------|-----------|
|   | Camp       | Years     |
| A | Dachau     | 1934-1937 |
| B | Dachau     | 1935-1937 |
| C | Buchenwald | 1938-1939 |
| D | Buchenwald | 1940      |
| E | No Camp    |           |

(b) Resulting Camp Links

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | A | B | C | D | E |
| A | . | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| B | 1 | . | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| C | 0 | 0 | . | 1 | 0 |
| D | 0 | 0 | 1 | . | 0 |
| E | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | . |

Figure 1 illustrates how we calculate the camp links. Take for instance five individuals, A, B, C, D, and E and two camps, camp 1 (green) and camp 2 (purple). A and B have been in the camp Dachau in the same years. Hence, in our dataset A and B are linked to each other. C and D have been both in Buchenwald, but in different years. So they are, too linked to each other. E is not linked to anyone else, either because E has not been interned in a camp at all.

At some point during the sample period person B gets promoted and becomes member of the leading elite, e.g. by becoming a candidate of the Central Committee.

Figure 2: Treatment

|   | A | B | C | D | E | Linked to Leading <sub>t</sub> |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------------|
| A | . | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1                              |
| B | 1 | . | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0                              |
| C | 0 | 0 | . | 1 | 0 | 0                              |
| D | 0 | 0 | 1 | . | 0 | 0                              |
| E | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | . | 0                              |

In this case, A has a link to the political elite for as long as B remains part of the elite.

### 3.4 Summary Statistics

Summary statistics about the characteristics of individuals in our sample are presented in Table 1. We follow their careers from the year 1946 to 1962. Naturally, we limit our analysis to individuals that are still alive in 1946, the first year of the sample period, leaving us with a total of 1059 individuals.

Around one third of individuals in our sample was interned in a concentration camp during the Nazi regime (341 out of 1059). In 1946, individuals were approximately 50 years old on average. Few individuals in our sample are women (13.6 percent of those individuals that were not in a concentration camp, and 5.9 percent of those that were in a concentration camp). This reflects the fact, that most of the important active communists during the Weimar Republic — and beyond — were men. Conditional on having been interned in any camp, individuals were imprisoned for around 3.3 years. Approximately 87 percent of former camp inmates are linked to the SED leadership through camp internment at some point between 1946 and 1962.

The maximum position within the hierarchy, ranging from 1 as not holding a position within the set of important ranks as defined by the GDR’s Ministry of Domestic Affairs, to 29 as being the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, that individuals reach until 1962 is 2.3 for non-inmates and 2.8 for former inmates of concentration camps on average. The latter group is also more likely to be a leading politician (7 percent versus 4.9 percent), in national politics (10.6 versus 7.4 percent) and in local politics (24.0 versus 10.0 percent).

Looking at averages across the sample period, former camp inmates have a link to someone in the leading elite 60.5 percent of the time. Former inmates on average hold a rank of 2.0 in the hierarchy, non-inmates of 1.7 and inmates are more likely to be in a leading position (3.8 percent versus 2.6 percent), in national politics (5.6

Table 1: Summary Statistics

|   | Not in camp |        |        | In camp |        |       | Diff      |
|---|-------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-----------|
|   | Mean        | SD     | N      | Mean    | SD     | N     |           |
| <i>Panel A: All Individuals in Panel</i>  |             |        |        |         |        |       |           |
| Age in 1946                               | 49.864      | 8.648  | 718    | 49.490  | 7.548  | 341   | 0.373     |
| Lifetime after 1946                       | 23.288      | 13.358 | 673    | 23.854  | 12.520 | 336   | -0.566    |
| Female                                    | 0.136       | 0.344  | 718    | 0.059   | 0.235  | 341   | 0.078***  |
| Years in Camp                             | 0           | 0      | 718    | 3.296   | 2.687  | 341   | -3.296*** |
| Ever Link to Leading                      | 0           | 0      | 718    | 0.868   | 0.339  | 341   | -0.868*** |
| Maximum Hierarchy Position                | 2.266       | 4.922  | 718    | 2.804   | 5.523  | 341   | -0.538*   |
| Ever In Leading                           | 0.049       | 0.215  | 718    | 0.070   | 0.256  | 341   | -0.022    |
| Ever In National Politics                 | 0.074       | 0.262  | 718    | 0.106   | 0.308  | 341   | -0.032*   |
| Ever In Local Politics                    | 0.100       | 0.301  | 718    | 0.240   | 0.428  | 341   | 0.140***  |
| <i>Panel B: All Observations in Panel</i> |             |        |        |         |        |       |           |
| Link to Leading                           | 0           | 0      | 10,610 | 0.605   | 0.489  | 5,056 | -0.605*** |
| Hierarchy Position                        | 1.650       | 3.626  | 10,610 | 1.987   | 4.157  | 5,056 | -0.337*** |
| In Leading                                | 0.026       | 0.159  | 10,610 | 0.038   | 0.191  | 5,056 | -0.012*** |
| In National Politics                      | 0.038       | 0.190  | 10,610 | 0.056   | 0.231  | 5,056 | -0.019*** |
| In Local Politics                         | 0.041       | 0.199  | 10,610 | 0.088   | 0.283  | 5,056 | -0.047*** |

**Note** Data sources see text. Mean and standard deviation for individuals without and with camp background, respectively. Sample is limited to individuals that are still alive in 1946. The column Diff reports the difference in means between the two groups. \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* denote significance on the 10 percent, 5 per cent, and 1 percent level, respectively.

percent versus 3.8 percent), and in local politics (8.8 percent versus 4.1 percent) in a given year.

## 4 Links to the Political Elite and Career Paths

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the impact of having a link to the political elite on an individual's probability to be active in politics. Exploiting the panel structure of our dataset, we estimate the following Difference-in-Differences model that compares an individual's position within the GDR's state hierarchy when they are connected to the leading elite to their position when they are not:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta \cdot \text{LinkedToLeading}_{ijt} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + \sum_j \alpha_j \times \text{Year}_t \times \text{Camp}_j + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

$Y_{ijt}$  is either a dummy that equals 1 if individual  $i$  that has been interned in camp  $j$  during the Nazi regime is in position  $Y$  in year  $t$  or individual  $i$ 's position in the hierarchy in  $t$ . Our explanatory variable of interest,  $\text{LinkedToLeading}_{ijt}$  is a dummy that indicates whether  $i$  is linked to a member of the leading elite, i.e. an individual ranked at least as high as parts of the Central Committee (see Section

2.3). The individual-level variation in  $LinkedToLeading_{ijt}$  stems from fluctuations in the party’s leadership. Individuals are linked to the leading elite, if they have been interned in the same concentration camp as someone who is currently in the leading elite.

$\alpha_i$  and  $\alpha_t$  are individual and year fixed effects, respectively. Individual fixed effects capture individual-level characteristics that are constant over the sample period, such as the career path before 1933 or political talent. Year fixed effects account for all developments over time that apply equally to all individuals, such as a higher turnover in political positions in years with a party congress. The sum of  $\alpha_j \times Year_t \times Camp_j$  comprises linear time trends for each camp  $j$ . Controlling for camp-specific time trends allows the career trends of former inmates of different camps to differ. They for example capture distinct career paths that would emerge if the Nazis sent communists with certain characteristics to specific camps and these characteristics in turn affecting post-war career paths (in a linear fashion). As many individuals were interned in several camps, their individual camp-specific time trends will be the sum of all relevant time trends.

The coefficient of interest,  $\beta$ , thus captures how the career outcomes of individuals differ when connected to an individual in the leading elite, compared to when they are not connected, accounting for all general differences between individuals and across time as well as potential linear trends that are specific to former inmates of the different camps.

$\epsilon_{ijt}$  is the error term and clustered at the camp level. Since individuals could be interned in multiple camps, for clustering, we assign each individual to the concentration camp in which they were interned for the longest time. In Appendix Table C.1 we show that our results are robust to alternative cluster definitions and to implementing bootstrapped standard errors.

We limit our analysis to the years 1946 to 1962, covering the time period from the first to the fifth party congress (and ending before the sixth party congress), which can be interpreted as the GDR’s equivalent of legislative sessions. This was the defining period for the build-up of the GDR’s political system<sup>11</sup> and communists that had been active during the Weimar Republic played a crucial role in this process.<sup>12</sup>

Table 2 shows the results of estimating regression model 1. We find that an individual holds a lower position in the national state hierarchy when linked to the party leadership. On average, links to important politicians are associated with a

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11. At the sixth party congress, the SED program was adopted. Therefore, it can be assumed that the year 1962 marked a caesura, after which the party structure could be considered established.

12. In Appendix Table C.2 we present estimates extending the sample period to later years, up to 1989. Coefficients remain similar, but significance changes in some cases, when the sample is extended too far. As individuals die, the sample gets smaller over time.



Table 2: Links and Career Trajectories

|                            | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)      | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading          | -0.797**<br>(0.342)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017) | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| Individual FE              | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                    | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                      | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962           | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations               | 15,666                       | 15,666              | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.692                        | 0.669               | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

decrease in the hierarchy score by 0.797 points, which corresponds to a reduction of around 0.21 of a standard deviation (column 1, significant at 5 percent level).<sup>13</sup> Columns 2 to 4 examine whether individuals hold political positions in the SED leadership themselves, in national politics more generally, and local politics, respectively. We find a negative effect of being connected to the party leadership on an individual's probability to be part of the national leadership themselves; individuals are on average 4.1 percentage points less likely to also be in a leading position when linked to the elite (column 2, significant at 5 percent level). The career penalty of being linked to the party leadership extends to holding a position in national politics in general, as individuals are 5.1 percentage points less likely to be a politician at the national level (column 3, significant at 1 percent level). These results show that individuals hold lower positions in the national political hierarchy when they are linked to a politician in the leading elite.

When examining whether links to the party leadership also have an effect on being active in local-level politics, we find a positive effect; the coefficient estimate in column 4 indicates that individuals are on average 3.2 percentage points more likely to be a county-level politician when they are linked to the party leadership (significant at 10 percent level).

Taken together, the results in Table 2 indicate that individuals rank lower in the state hierarchy when linked to the party elite. As we control for individual fixed effects in all regressions, these estimates propose that individuals fare worse in their career when they have a link to the party elite – and not that individuals that ever have such a link have worse career outcomes per se.

To gain a better understanding of the career dynamics at play and the timing of

13. SD of hierarchy score  $\approx$  3.808.

the effects, we proceed by estimating an event-study framework:

$$Y_{ijt} = \sum_{\tau=-4}^4 \beta_{\tau} \cdot \text{LinkedToLeading}_{ijt} \times D_{\tau} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + \sum_j \alpha_j \times \text{Year}_t \times \text{Camp}_j + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad (2)$$

All variables and parameters are defined as before, except the treatment indicator is interacted with a set of dummies indicating the period relative to treatment. The dummies  $D_{-4}$  and  $D_4$  are defined as pooling all periods of at least 4 years before and after an individual got a link to a leading politician, respectively.<sup>14</sup> The period  $\tau = 0$  is defined as the first year during which an individual has a link to someone in the leading elite through internment in the same camp during the Nazi era. We omit the coefficient for the year before an individual gets a link, i.e. the period  $\tau = -1$ .

Figure 3 exhibits how career paths are realized over time. In panel (a) we show how the position in the hierarchy evolves for individuals before and after they get a link to the elite: Individuals do not exhibit distinct career patterns before they are linked, but start experiencing career penalties one year after they gain a link to the leading elite. Similar patterns emerge when considering an individual's probability to be in a leading position, or in national politics; there is no pre-trend, and individuals are less likely to be part of the leading circle and national politics starting in the year in which they get a link to the party leadership (panels b and c). The pattern for an individual's probability to be a local politician is a bit indefinite and does not exhibit a clear trend (panel d).

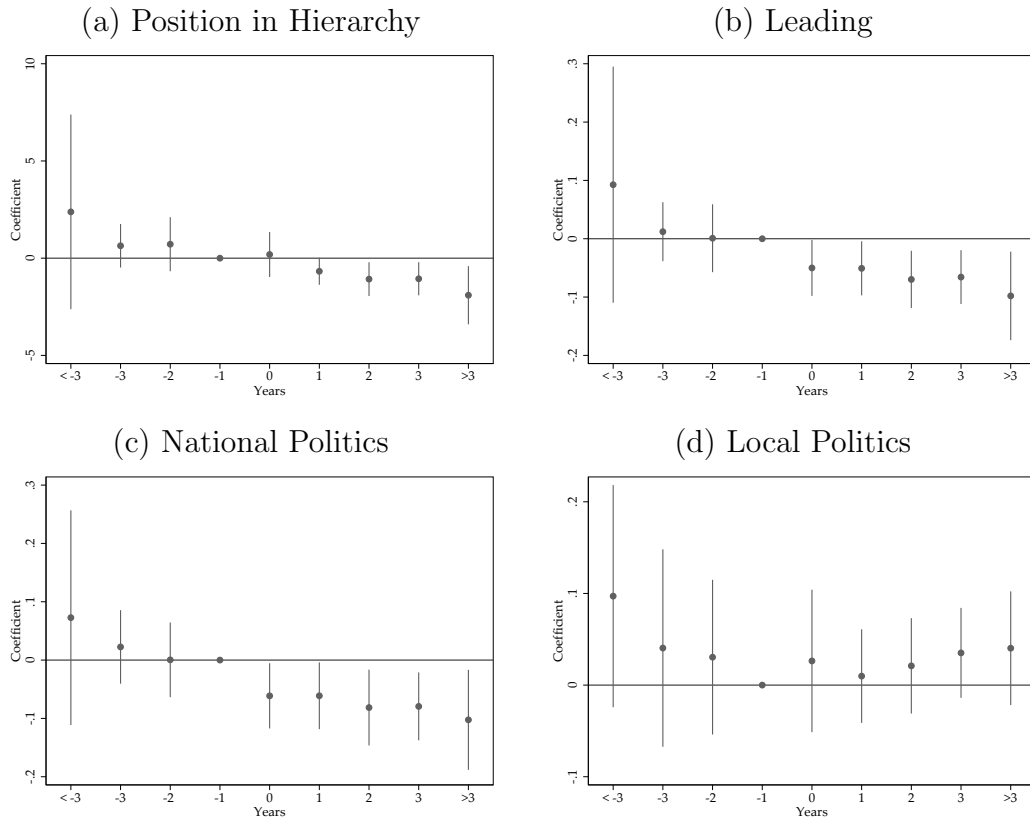
There are two underlying mechanisms potentially explaining why people place lower in the national hierarchy once they have a link to a leading politician: they might be demoted or they might no longer be promoted, but would have been in the counterfactual. To disentangle these explanations, we rerun equation 1, but as dependent variables, we consider a dummy indicating whether in a given year an individual moves down the hierarchy, i.e. is demoted, and a dummy indicating whether an individual moves up the hierarchy, i.e. is promoted. In each case, we restrict the sample to individuals that are not at the bottom or top of the hierarchy, i.e. individuals that *can* be demoted or promoted, respectively.

The results in Table 3 show that an individual's likelihood to be demoted does not increase when linked to the party's leading elite (column 1). Instead, it becomes less likely that an individual is promoted (column 3, significant at 5 percent level). To

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14. The timing when individuals get a link varies, and thus the number of available periods before and after getting a link differs across individuals.

Figure 3: Event Studies



**Note** The graph plots the coefficients and corresponding 95 percent confidence intervals resulting from estimating equation 2. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. The outcomes in panels b-d are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. The periods correspond to years since the emergence of a link to the party leadership.

control for the fact that the potential for demotions and promotions depends on the current position in the hierarchy, we additionally include an individual's hierarchy score in the previous year individually and its interaction with having a link to the leading elite (columns 2 and 4). Again, we do not find a statistically significant relationship between having a link to a leading politician and the probability of being demoted, but we find a negative and significant coefficient in the regression examining the probability to move up the state hierarchy. The likelihood to move up is lower for individuals that are ranked higher in the national hierarchy, which includes individuals that are closer to the leading elite of the GDR.

The finding that links to the party leadership are attached to career penalties, raises the question about the persistence of such career-costs. To shed light on this question, we examine whether an individual continues to rank lower in the state hierarchy once a link disappears. In particular, we add a dummy variable to

Table 3: Moving up and down the Hierarchy

|   | Moving Down      |                  | Moving Up           |                      |
|---|------------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
|   | (1)              | (2)              | (3)                 | (4)                  |
| Linked to Leading                                 | 0.069<br>(0.096) | 0.048<br>(0.155) | -0.014**<br>(0.006) | -0.015**<br>(0.007)  |
| Lagged Hierarchy Score                            |                  | 0.004<br>(0.002) |                     | -0.007***<br>(0.000) |
| Linked to Leading $\times$ Lagged Hierarchy Score |                  | 0.001<br>(0.005) |                     | -0.002<br>(0.001)    |
| Individual FE                                     | ✓                | ✓                | ✓                   | ✓                    |
| Year FE   | ✓                | ✓                | ✓                   | ✓                    |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp                        | ✓                | ✓                | ✓                   | ✓                    |
| Years   | 1946-1962        | 1946-1962        | 1946-1962           | 1946-1962            |
| Observations                                      | 681              | 681              | 15,643              | 15,643               |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                    | 0.311            | 0.312            | 0.127               | 0.160                |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1. Moving Down is a dummy indicating whether an individual moved down the hierarchy (column 1 and 2), Moving Up a dummy indicating whether an individual moved up the hierarchy (column 3 and 4). Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Models in columns 2 and 4 add the lagged hierarchy score (score in the year before) and the interaction of the lagged hierarchy score with Linked to Leading as explanatory variables. The samples are restricted to individuals that are not at the bottom of the hierarchy, i.e. at position 1, (column 1 and 2) or at the top of the hierarchy (column 3 and 4), i.e. at position 29, in year  $t - 1$ . Standard errors clustered at the camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

equation 1, that turns 1 if an individual had a link to the party leadership in the past, i.e. is no longer linked.

The results from this exercise are shown in Table 4. We only find a significant negative effect on an individual's position in the national hierarchy, the probability to be part of the leading elite, and to be active in national politics for as long as an individual is linked to the leading elite (columns 1 to 3, all significant at the 10 percent level). The respective coefficients on the indicator for links being gone are also negative, but smaller in magnitude and insignificant at conventional levels. The effects considering local-level political careers are now opposite in sign and the coefficient for the post-link period is borderline insignificant with a p-value of 0.104. This is consistent with a mechanism, where individuals with a link to the leadership are able to remain in their local-level political positions while they are linked to the political elite and are removed from these positions once their link is gone (column 4).

## 5 Robustness

The causal interpretation of our estimates from regression equation 1 relies on parallel career paths of the treatment and the control group in the absence of treatment. In our setting, the treatment group consists of individuals that have a link to the

Table 4: Effects once Link is gone

|                             | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)     | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading           | -2.454*<br>(1.237)           | -0.100*<br>(0.059) | -0.122*<br>(0.062)       | -0.023<br>(0.033)     |
| No longer linked to Leading | -1.888<br>(1.252)            | -0.067<br>(0.060)  | -0.080<br>(0.063)        | -0.062<br>(0.037)     |
| Individual FE               | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                     | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp  | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                       | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962          | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations                | 15,666                       | 15,666             | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.693                        | 0.669              | 0.653                    | 0.676                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1 with an additional indicator for whether an individual had a link to the party leadership in the past. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

leading elite, while the control group consists of individuals that do not have a link. In this section we explore potential threats to identification, i.e. address concerns that the career paths of the treatment and control group would not be comparable in absence of treatment.

Note that by including individual fixed effects in all of our regressions, we account for all individual characteristics affecting their career trajectories in a constant manner. For example, occupational backgrounds might have determined both in which concentration camp individuals were interned and for which political positions they were chosen in the GDR. Such general differences between individuals are accounted for by the inclusion of individual fixed effects. This also applies to all general, time-constant differences between former inmates and non-inmates.<sup>15</sup>

Another set of concerns is addressed by the inclusion of camp-specific linear year trends. These trends capture all (linear) differences in career paths between individuals that have been to different camps, such as the possibility that the importance of placing former internees of certain camps in prominent political positions for propaganda purposes may have decreased over time. In such a case, former inmates of particular camps would be less likely to become part of the leading elite as time progresses. The magnitude of this decrease could vary by camp, depending on its prominence, but will be captured by the camp-specific linear year trends that are included in all regressions.<sup>16</sup>

15. Appendix Table B.1 shows which covariates are associated with being linked to someone in the leading elite until 1962.

16. Note that we can not include camp-specific year fixed effects as our treatment is defined at the camp level.

To explain our results, the effect of an unobserved factor would need to vary over time, i.e. would need to differ between periods in which individuals have or do not have a link to the ruling elite. In particular, an underlying process driving the results would have to explain individuals moving down the hierarchy and becoming less likely to be within the leading elite or in national politics, exactly once they have a link to a leading politician (as shown in the event studies in Figure 3).

## 5.1 The Role of Shared Characteristics

We interpret our results as quantifying the effect of being linked to a member of the leading elite on career outcomes. However, if assignment to camps was contingent on individual characteristics, our coefficients might spuriously pick up the effect of having shared characteristics with individuals in the ruling elite, or they might pick up other, pre-existing links.<sup>17</sup> This would cast doubt on the exogeneity of our explanatory variable and as a consequence, whether being linked to the leading elite drives our results.

We approach this concern by constructing several alternative links based on a number of potential shared characteristics. We include any links that arise from having been exiled in the same country at the same time between 1933 and 1945, last known place of residency before the persecution of communists started in 1933, the position within the KPD in 1933, the year of birth, place of birth and the year in which individuals entered the KPD. For instance, when constructing networks based on having had the same profession in 1933, we group every person that has had the same job in early 1933 together and assign them links to each other. We then define for each of these alternative links a dummy that turns 1 if an individual is connected to the party leadership through a link from this specific origin. For example, the dummy for being linked to the party leadership through the 1933-job turns 1 if an individual had the same job in 1933 as someone in the party leadership.

If having a link to the leading elite is orthogonal to shared underlying characteristics with people in the party leadership, we expect that being linked to the leadership through camp internment is for instance uncorrelated with having had the same job in 1933 as someone from the party leadership. This approach allows us to examine whether we estimate the causal effect of having been in the same camp or whether our coefficient of interest for instance picks up the effect of having had the same profession before the Nazis took power.

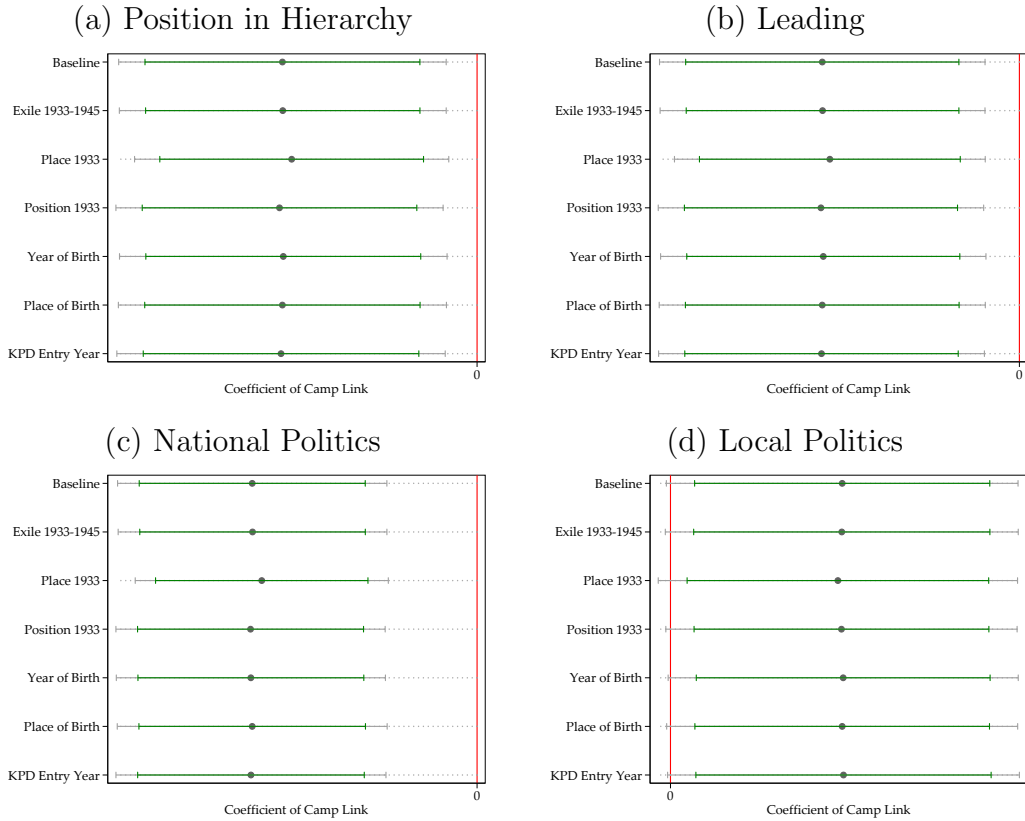
We one by one additionally control for each of these links to the leadership in our main regression. Each panel in Figure 4 shows the baseline coefficients from running

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17. See Appendix Figure B.1 for an analysis of selection into camps based on characteristics.

regression 1 for the four main outcomes we consider and below, how the coefficient of interest changes once we control for links to the party leadership that arise from other sources.<sup>18</sup> We find that our results remain very stable both in terms of magnitude and significance, which indicates that links to the party leaderships through camp internments are uncorrelated with other characteristics. This strengthens our claim that connections formed through concentration camps are exogenous conditional on individual fixed effects, and that our results can be interpreted in a causal fashion.

Figure 4: Controlling for other potential links



**Note** The graph shows the coefficients on the variable *LinkedToLeading* from estimating equation 1. We additionally control for links to leading politicians that occur through shared characteristics. “Baseline” displays the coefficient obtained from not controlling for other links, the remaining coefficients stem from models that additionally control for the respective alternative link. 95% and 90% confidence intervals are depicted in grey and green.

## 5.2 Adding Camp Inmate Year Fixed Effects

By construction of our treatment variable, only individuals that were interned in a camp can potentially have a link to the leading elite. Potentially, there could be differences in career paths between former camp inmates and non-inmates that

18. For coefficients on the variables measuring alternative links, see Appendix Table C.3.

unfold non-linearly over time and would thus bias our results. The presence of general year fixed effects and camp linear year-trends would not account for this possibility. To capture such potential differences, we additionally include a second set of year fixed effects, specific to all former camp inmates, in equation 1. Table 5 shows that the coefficients do not change in terms of magnitude or significance in any of the specifications. This indicates that the results are not driven by different career trajectories of communists that have been interned in a camp compared to communists that have not been interned in any camp.

Table 5: Controlling for Inmate-specific Year Fixed Effects

|                              | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)      | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading            | -0.806**<br>(0.345)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017) | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| Individual FE                | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                      | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Camp Inmate $\times$ Year FE | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp   | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                        | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962           | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations                 | 15,666                       | 15,666              | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>               | 0.691                        | 0.669               | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1, additionally controlling for camp inmate-specific year fixed effects, i.e. interaction terms between a dummy that turns 1 for all former camp inmates and the respective year dummies. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

### 5.3 The Role of Potential Outliers

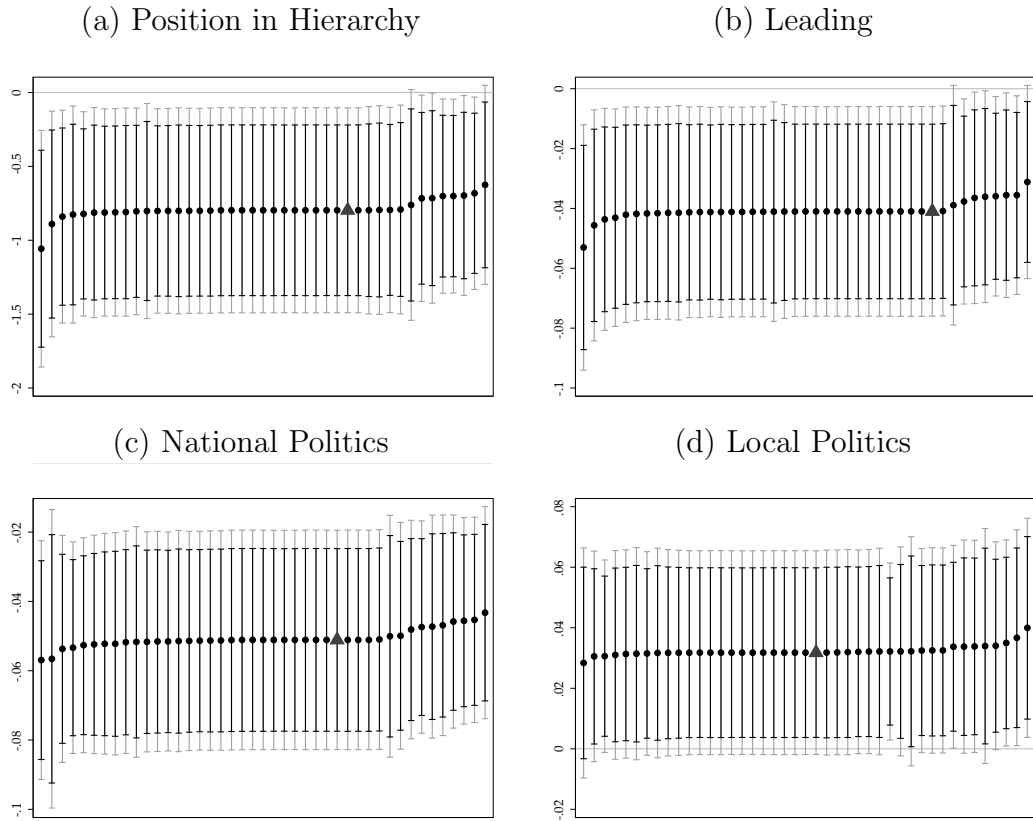
In the most extreme scenario, our results could be driven by outliers and solely apply to former inmates of one specific camp. Consider for instance the concentration camp Buchenwald: former inmates from this camp played a special role in the political sphere of the GDR and were renowned across the country. The experience of communists in Buchenwald were viewed as representative for the resistance of communism in general against the Nazi rule. The SED instrumentalized the history of Buchenwald to create a foundation myth, portraying the GDR as an anti-fascist model state. As there were tensions between former inmates from this camp specifically and those communists that emigrated to Moscow during the Nazi reign, it is perceivable that there was only a negative effect for individuals that have been to Buchenwald, and the Moscow elite attempting to keep this group of former inmates out of high-level positions. To check whether results are driven by non-linear trends specific to former inmates of Buchenwald, or any other camp in particular, we re-



run our main regression, each time excluding all individuals that have been to one specific camp from our sample.

Results are shown in Figure 5 and display the baseline coefficient with a triangle and all other coefficients, stemming from excluding inmates of a different camp at a time, with circles. Coefficients only change marginally in this exercise, and results remain significant, albeit in some instances significance drops from the 5 to the 10 percent level. Overall, these results show that the patterns we uncover arise across camps and are not driven by a single camp in particular.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 5: Excluding all Individuals that have been to certain Camp



**Note** The Graph plots the coefficients of estimating equation 1, leaving out all individuals from a different concentration camp in each iteration. The baseline coefficient is represented by a triangle and the coefficients from running regressions on the restricted samples are denoted by circles. 95 percent confidence intervals are shown in gray, 90 percent confidence intervals in black.

19. We perform a similar test by excluding all links that stem from a given camp by setting these links to zero. Naturally, we only perform this analysis for those camps, that are represented in the ruling elite until 1962. Results are shown in Appendix Figure C.1.

## 6 Mechanism

In the previous sections, we have shown that being linked to the leading elite affects individuals' career paths: individuals with links rank lower in the national state hierarchy, are less likely to be part of the leading elite or active in national politics, but are more likely to hold a position in county-level politics. As shown in the event studies, the timing of the effects is consistent with individuals experiencing career penalties once linked to the party leadership through their camp history. Next, we turn to the potential mechanisms that could explain these findings.

### 6.1 Fear of Factions at Elite Level

Historical evidence suggests that anti-factionalism explains the negative effect of having connections to the leading elite on an individual's prospects to hold high-level positions within the state hierarchy. A strict stance against factions is central to communist ideology: Building factions was considered one of the most severe offenses against party discipline and deemed a threat to the ruling party's unity and power, and by extension, to the stability of the regime (Gieseke and Wentker, 2011). The hostile stance against factionalism is also reflected in the party statute:<sup>20</sup>

“Every appearance of factions and formation of groups contradicts the nature of our Marxist-Leninist party and is not compatible with party membership.”

The fact that this quote was also included in the teaching books used at party schools — which trained potential future leaders of the GDR — demonstrates the centrality of this principle to state ideology. Measures against factions among the powerful elite were used to enforce party discipline (Ammer, 1995; Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1965).

Any group within the GDR could be suspected of forming a faction — even people meeting for a seemingly innocuous event such as a birthday party: In 1954, the party control commission investigated former members of the Socialist Worker Party — a left-wing, Marxist party that existed from 1931 to 1945 — because they met every year to celebrate birthdays (Mählert, 1998, pp. 451).

If individuals who have been interned in the same camp were considered a potential faction, anti-factionalism could explain why we find connection penalties for high-level careers. And indeed, people who have been to the same concentration camp were seen as belonging to the same group. This is highlighted by the following

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20. Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (1976)

summary of the plethora of groups that existed in 1946 within East Germany by a cadre secretary in Saxony:<sup>21</sup>

“There was the Moscow group, the Spanish group, the Buchenwalders, the Sachsenhauseners, the Mauthauseners, the Waldheimers and the Auschwitzers, [...]”

The listing of specific concentration camps strongly implies that former inmates of the same concentration camp were considered part of a unified group.

A competing theory could propose, that the negative effect of links to the leading elite is driven by having a personal tie to the elite. We perform an empirical plausibility check to distinguish between the two mechanisms. To do so, we exploit that factions would likely extend to all people who have been in the same camp, no matter the timing, since individuals could connect after internment, for example through the camp remembrance committees (see Section 2.4). In contrast, any mechanism that is based on personal links would result in links arising by having been in the same camp *at the same time* having a stronger effect than if two individuals are only connected by having been interned in the same camp.

Hence, we add a variable to equation 1 that captures whether an individual has a link to someone in the leading elite with whom they have been interned in the same camp at the same time. Table 6 shows that for national-level positions, our baseline coefficients remain unchanged and personal links do not lead to stronger career penalties for individuals (columns 1 to 3). The coefficient on the variable that captures links to someone who has been in the same camp, irrespective of the timing (our baseline coefficient), is negative and significant. However, the coefficient quantifying the additional effect of personal links, i.e. individuals having been in the same camp at the same time, is close to zero and insignificant. This shows, that the penalty for national-level careers is neither driven by, nor larger for links stemming from having overlapped in a concentration camp. Importantly, these results are in line with our interpretation regarding people interned in the same concentration being considered as part of the same faction. The party leadership thus seems to have prevented the career advancement of additional members of camp groups to thwart the existence of a faction within the elite.

To further support this claim, we exploit the fact that if the fear of factions explains the negative impact on career prospects for those linked to the elite, then individuals that were in a better position to build a faction should have been penalized more due to the larger risk they posed. Members of a camp committee, the institution that brought together former inmates of the same camp and allowed

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21. As quoted in Mählert (1996, p. 239).

Table 6: Effect by Overlap in Concentration Camp

|   | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)     | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading<br>(Same camp any time)       | -0.833*<br>(0.419)           | -0.043*<br>(0.022) | -0.060**<br>(0.023)      | 0.017<br>(0.017)      |
| Personal Link Leading<br>(Same camp, same time) | 0.058<br>(0.358)             | 0.004<br>(0.019)   | 0.015<br>(0.023)         | 0.025<br>(0.018)      |
| Individual FE                                   | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE   | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp                      | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years   | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962          | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations                                    | 15,666                       | 15,666             | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                  | 0.692                        | 0.669              | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1, additionally controlling for a dummy indicating that a link stems from having been interned in the same camp at the same time as someone from the party leadership. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

them to form links between one another, should therefore bear higher career costs of connections to the party elite.

While we do not know which individuals were members of camp committees, we can identify those who have been to camps for which such a committee exists. We distinguish between individuals who have been to camps with a committee and those who have not and rerun equation 1 to determine the differential effects of the presence of a camp remembrance committee on individual career outcomes.

Table 7 shows that the effect of being linked to the leading elite is larger in magnitude for individuals who have been to a camp for which a camp remembrance committee existed in the GDR. These individuals rank lower in the hierarchy and are less likely to be part of the SED elite or in national politics when they are linked to the elite (columns 1 to 3). The effect is no longer statistically distinguishable from zero for individuals who only have been interned in camps for which no remembrance committees existed in the GDR.<sup>22</sup> These results indicate that individuals, that were presumably perceived to have a greater potential for engaging in faction building were penalized more, supporting the notion that fear of faction building explains the negative relationship between being linked to the elite and career outcomes. When focusing only on local-level political positions, only individuals who cannot have been part of a remembrance committee exhibit a higher probability to be active in local politics when they are linked to the political elite (column 4).

22. Note that coefficients are insignificant because standard errors are large and not because of small coefficients.

Table 7: Effect by Potential for Membership in Camp Committee

|                                       | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)     | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading & Camp Committee    | -0.910*<br>(0.478)           | -0.045*<br>(0.023) | -0.058**<br>(0.024)      | 0.017<br>(0.020)      |
| Linked to Leading & No Camp Committee | -0.659<br>(0.512)            | -0.037<br>(0.027)  | -0.043<br>(0.027)        | 0.050**<br>(0.025)    |
| Individual FE                         | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                               | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp            | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                                 | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962          | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations                          | 15,666                       | 15,666             | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>                        | 0.692                        | 0.669              | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1, where the main dependent variable, having a link to the elite, is split for individuals that have been to at least one camp for which a camp committee existed in the GDR, and individuals that were only interned in camps for which no camp committees existed. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

## 6.2 Patronage at the Local Level

Easter (1996) examines the role of personal networks for political appointments during the build-up of Soviet Russia. In his qualitative analysis, he finds that the central state administration appointed people whom they had personal ties with to local-level posts to strengthen the reach of the central party leadership into the regional administration. A strategy like this plausibly explains the positive effect of ties to the party leadership on individuals' county-level careers. As local-level politicians were not powerful enough to destabilize the regime, ties between the top levels of the national, political hierarchy and local politicians were not considered a faction that needed to be prevented.

The coefficient estimates in column 4 of Table 6 speak to patronage explaining the positive effects on local-level careers, as links emerging from joint internment at the same time have a stronger positive effect on being a local politician, than links emerging from having been to the same camp at different times. The coefficients are no longer individually significant, but the p-value for testing joint significance is 0.03.

## 6.3 Exploring other potential Mechanisms

Next, we evaluate the role of other plausible mechanisms for driving the negative effects of being linked to the party leadership on the likelihood that individuals are part of the leadership themselves. We discuss mental costs of being exposed to fellow inmates, a quota for politicians from camps, or the existence of *kompromat*.

### *Mental Costs of Exposure to Fellow Inmate(s)*

Concentration camp internment was a highly traumatic experience. Leading politicians might have used their power to avoid having regular contact to people that remind them of their camp internment. This would explain why individuals are less likely to be a member of the party leadership when linked to leading politicians through their shared camp internment.

This hypothesis, however, fails to adequately explain the observed effects. Despite their experiences of persecution, former communist internees took pride in their resistance to the Nazi regime and maintained a rich culture of remembrance of their internment. In fact, some of these individuals, such as Ernst Thälmann, achieved iconic status by leveraging their camp internment. The SED leadership, too utilized the history of communist persecution in Nazi concentration camps as a means of advancing state ideology and compensating for the regime’s lack of democratic legitimacy. This is evidenced by the extensive coverage of the topic by party-controlled media, which published about 20 related reports per year on average.<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, official organizations such as the “Victims of Fascism” and designated remembrance days played an influential role in GDR culture. Overall, no historical evidence suggests that communists sought to hide or erase their experiences in concentration camps. In contrast, they were idealized for their camp experiences and actively leveraged their persecution to legitimize their hold on power.

### *Quota*

A general quota for people with a camp background in the party leadership would be an obvious candidate explaining the negative effects of being linked to the party leadership on high-level careers. In this case, the promotion of an individual with a camp background into the political elite would require another individual to be demoted and/or no additional individual with a camp background could be promoted, so that the overall number of former camp inmates remained constant. It could even be the case, that politicians with camp backgrounds pushed for such a quota, aiming to protect their “unique selling point”, since as discussed above, communists used their camp experience as political capital.

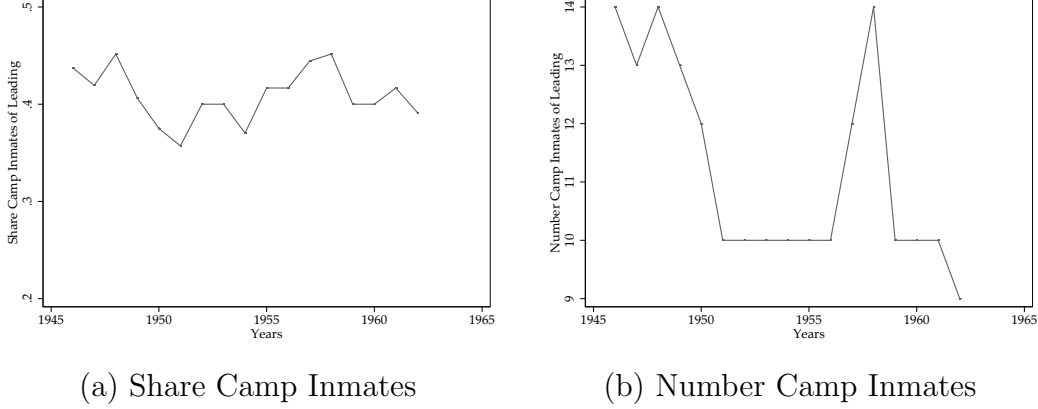
We test empirically, whether a quota limiting the share of people with a camp background in the party leadership can explain the effects we find. Initially, we examine the evolution of the share of individuals with camp background in party leadership positions over time. Figure 6 plots the share and number of people in the leading elite, that have been in a concentration camp, over time. We observe

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23. Based on the count of articles in the party-controlled newspaper “Neues Deutschland” about the subject of communists in concentration camps during the Nazi Era.

that neither the share nor the number of former camp inmates in the political elite are constant over time. Furthermore, the share of leaders with a camp background does not suggest quotas changing over time, as the shares are not regularly close to sharp cutoff values.

Figure 6: Former Camp Inmates in Leadership Positions



**Note** The graph plots the share and number of former camp inmates in the party leadership, i.e. the group captured by our outcome “Leading”, over the sample period.

As a second empirical test, we exploit the fact that a “camp-quota” would affect all people with camp background equally. We thus examine whether the number of people with a camp background in different leadership positions has a differential effect on the probability to be promoted to that particular position for *all* former camp internees. Hence, for each year we calculate how many people that were interned in a concentration camp, are in certain leadership positions. The explanatory variable of interest is the number of former camp inmates in the respective position (excluding individuals themselves, if applicable) interacted with a dummy that equals one for former camp inmates.

Table 8 presents the results from this analysis. The coefficient estimates for the quota interactions are statistically indistinguishable from zero for leading and national political positions (columns 1 and 2), and positive for the local-level positions (significant at 10 percent level, column 3). Importantly, the coefficient of interest (baseline) does not change in magnitude or significance after the inclusion of the quota interactions. This indicates, that the negative impact of having a link to someone from the central committee is not driven by an (implicit) quota, specifying that only a certain number of people with a camp background can be in each of the positions under consideration.

Table 8: Quota for Camp Internees

|   | Leading<br>(1)      | National Politics<br>(2) | Local Politics<br>(3) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading   | -0.038**<br>(0.017) | -0.052***<br>(0.016)     | 0.020*<br>(0.011)     |
| Num other Leading Politicians from Camp<br>× Camp <sub>i</sub>  | -0.005<br>(0.003)   |                          |                       |
| Num other National Politicians from Camp<br>× Camp <sub>i</sub> |                     | -0.002<br>(0.002)        |                       |
| Number other Local Politicians from Camp<br>× Camp <sub>i</sub> |                     |                          | 0.002*<br>(0.001)     |
| Individual FE   | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE   | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp                                      | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years   | 1946-1962           | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations  | 15,666              | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>  | 0.669               | 0.652                    | 0.677                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1, additionally controlling for interaction terms between the number of *other* former camp inmates in a respective position in a given year and a dummy that turns 1 for all former camp inmates. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. The outcomes are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

### *Kompromat*

Another potential mechanism explaining the connection-penalties for high-level careers is the existence of *kompromat*; leading politicians that have been interned in the same camp might have private, damaging information about potential politicians, obtained through the camp committee network, and had the power to use it to inhibit their careers. Specifically, the behaviour of communists within the camps might have been held against them after 1945. Many inmates collaborated with the Nazis during internment to enhance their chances of survival, and there have been instances where this behavior was brought forward causing the exclusion of individuals from the party or the demotion from their positions.<sup>24</sup>

If leaders possessed damaging information about other communists and used it to prevent their careers, the probability of a party reprimand, exclusion or dismissal from political positions might increase, once a person has a link to an important person with the power to remove them. Table 9 presents results from running regression 1 with either a dummy for getting a party reprimand, a dummy for being excluded from the party, a dummy for being laid-off, or a dummy that pools all of

24. The behavior of former inmates in concentration camps was deemed important by the party. For example, when Walter Bartel — a former Buchenwald inmate — became the center of a party inspection in 1953, he was interviewed several times about his behavior in the camp (Niethammer, 1995, pp. 414). He was removed from all political positions in 1953.



these three events as outcomes. It appears, that having a link to the party leadership does not increase the probability to be penalized in any of these ways, as none of the specifications returns significant effects.

In addition, we posit that the likelihood of having damaging information should be higher if two individuals were at the same camp at the same time, but as the results in Table 6 show, career costs of connections to the leading elite are not higher when individuals were interned jointly with a member of the GDR’s political elite. Taken together, the evidence does not support the idea of leading politicians impeding people’s careers by using their private information about past misdemeanors to remove corrupted people from the party leadership or preventing them from joining the elite.

Table 9: Penalties

|                            | Party<br>Reprimand<br>(1) | Party<br>Exclusion<br>(2) | Layoff<br>(3)     | Reprimand, Exclusion<br>or Layoff<br>(4) |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Linked to Leading          | -0.000<br>(0.004)         | -0.002<br>(0.003)         | -0.003<br>(0.004) | -0.004<br>(0.007)                        |
| Individual FE              | ✓                         | ✓                         | ✓                 | ✓  |
| Year FE                    | ✓                         | ✓                         | ✓                 | ✓  |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp | ✓                         | ✓                         | ✓                 | ✓  |
| Years                      | 1946-1962                 | 1946-1962                 | 1946-1962         | 1946-1962                                |
| Observations               | 15,666                    | 15,666                    | 15,666            | 15,666                                   |
| R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.073                     | 0.075                     | 0.231             | 0.167                                    |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1. The outcomes are dummies indicating whether an individual experiences the respective event in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

## 6.4 Who are the Decision Makers?

Lastly, we want to confirm that members of the GDR leadership, rather than other groups in the GDR or Soviet leaders, are the decision makers that produce the pattern of elite selection we uncover. First of all, historical evidence speaks against Soviet leaders having more than a controlling function in individual personnel decisions. While indeed, substantial influence was initially granted to the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD), and after 1949 the Soviet Control Commission (SCC) (known as High Commission of the USSR in Germany after 1953) on matters of economic and foreign policy, the Soviets relied heavily on the cooperation with German communists.

Importantly, decisions regarding whom to assign to political posts were made by German communists in the political elite, mostly the Politburo – in agreement with

the Soviets (Benser and Krusch, 1994; Kaiser, 1999). This implies that individuals outside of the elite, as for example the former camp inmates themselves, could not influence who would become a member of the elite. It was therefore not possible for former inmates to coordinate and push a single member of their camp network into the elite.

While the Soviet Military Administration had to agree to all personnel decisions made by the GDR elite, they did not seem to have been actively involved in the discussion of these issues. There is no evidence indicating that members of the Soviet Military Administration were present at the meetings of the Politburo, the organ that made all important cadre decisions within the GDR (Amos, 2003, p. 48).<sup>25</sup>

Second, we can exploit the decay of Soviet influence over GDR policy over time to test empirically, whether our results also hold in periods without major Soviet control. In 1955, the USSR and the GDR signed a treaty guaranteeing the full sovereignty of the GDR. We rerun equation 1, additionally controlling for an interaction term between having a link to the party leadership and a dummy  $PostSC_t$  that equals 1 for all years from 1955 onward, thus capturing the years in which the GDR was officially an independent state. As Table 10 shows, we do not uncover differential effects of being linked to the party leadership after the GDR was given full sovereignty. Coefficients on the interaction term  $LinkedtoLeading_{it} \times PostSC_t$  are small and statistically insignificant, while the baseline coefficients remain unaffected (columns 1 to 4). This result speaks against the claim that the Soviet leadership is responsible for the career trajectories we uncover.

Last, we argue that if decisions were made jointly by the GDR elite and the Soviet elite, this does not invalidate the interpretation of our results: both elites were interested in ensuring the stability of the GDR regime and the functioning of government processes, and therefore in preventing factions to form.

## 7 Conclusion

In autocratic states, the selection of political decision makers follows an opaque set of rules. In this paper, we shed light on the role of one potential determinant for elite selection in autocracies, that is links to the state’s political leadership. In particular, we examine how being linked to the political elite affects an individual’s prospects to hold political power within the state. We study this subject in the context of the socialist GDR regime during its early phase, from 1946 to 1962.

Our analysis is based on a novel, comprehensive dataset consisting entirely of leading communist figures that were active during the Weimar Republic, before

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25. The only exceptions took place in June and July 1953 after the large uprising in the GDR.

Table 10: Potential for German Control

|                                    | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)      | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading                  | -0.738**<br>(0.320)          | -0.039**<br>(0.016) | -0.050***<br>(0.015)     | 0.030<br>(0.018)      |
| Linked to Leading $\times$ Post SC | -0.319<br>(0.214)            | -0.009<br>(0.014)   | -0.007<br>(0.012)        | 0.008<br>(0.020)      |
| Individual FE                      | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                            | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp         | ✓                            | ✓                   | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                              | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962           | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations                       | 15,666                       | 15,666              | 15,666                   | 15,666                |
| R <sup>2</sup>                     | 0.692                        | 0.669               | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1, additionally controlling for an interaction between being linked to leading politicians and a dummy indicating all periods after 1955, in which Soviet control ceased and the GDR gained full sovereignty. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

the foundation of the GDR was foreseeable. Every individual in our sample that survived World War II was part of the natural pool of talent the GDR could draw from when it set up its state system.

We build our panel dataset by drawing on their detailed CVs and tracking their careers until 1933, their experiences during the Nazi period from 1933 to 1945 and throughout the founding period of the GDR. We ask how links to the GDR party leadership, defined as the top positions including the Central Committee according to an internal hierarchy, affect individuals' probability to be selected for political leadership themselves. As links are usually correlated with individual characteristics that explain career paths, we exploit quasi-exogenous, predetermined links that were formed through concentration camp internment in the same camp during the Nazi regime.

Links to the leadership affect individuals' careers in two ways: First, when individuals are connected to the political elite of the GDR, they hold lower positions within the state hierarchy, are less likely to be part of the party leadership, and to be active in national politics more broadly. Second, individuals are more likely to be active in county-level politics when they are connected to the party leadership. We intensively investigate possible mechanisms and find that the career patterns uncovered are most consistent with the state party's leadership implementing a policy against factionalism in the elite, which is a central feature of communist regimes. Importantly, results are stronger for individuals that have a higher potential for forming factions because they have been to concentration camps for which remembrance committees existed, which allowed former inmates to get together regularly.

We rule out that alternative mechanisms play a role for explaining the career pattern we observe: Evidence speaks against general quotas for people with a camp background in the party leadership, or preventing corrupted people to hold powerful positions. Controlling for individual fixed effects and robustness checks showing that camp networks do not pick up shared characteristics that are relevant for political careers, assures us that we can interpret our estimates causally.

The results of our paper contribute to the growing literature on the role of networks for political careers. In particular, we establish that the main results by Fisman et al. (2020), who find that connections play a negative role for promotions into the Chinese Politburo also hold in other settings. They, too find evidence for a connection-penalty and propose prevention of infra-party factions as main mechanism. We contribute to this literature by exploiting a novel natural experiment and by showing that links can have different effects on careers for high and low ranking positions. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first to aim at understanding the selection of politicians throughout the entire hierarchy of a new autocratic state exploiting links that are arguably formed exogenously.

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# Appendix

## A Data Description

### A.1 Who is included in the Dataset?

- 1918 Founding Congress participants
- Leading members of the KPD, i.e. members of the Politbureau and the Secretary
- Members of the KPD headquarters
- Members of the district organization
- Members and candidates of the central committee
- German members of international leading communist committees in the Komintern, communist youth international and the union international
- Head of departments in the central committees
- Editors of party organs
- Elected representatives of the KPD on Reichs and Landtags level
- Heads of the mass organisations that belonged to the KPD, such as members of the central committee of the Communist Youth etc.
- Leaders of the illegal KPD after 1933
- Participants of the “Brussels Conference” in October 1935 in Moscow
- Participants of the “Bern Conference” in January and February 1939 close to Paris
- Leading figures of the secret organization
- Some additional well-known German communists that did not hold any official roles, well-known authors etc.
- Socialists that were important in the foundation of the KPD

## A.2 Example CVs

### **Barthel, Karl:**

Born on March 20th 1907 in Lohmen (near Cobitz/county of Prina in Saxony), son of a working class family. Labourer and agricultural worker, then vertical and horizontal lathe operator in Dresden. There, in 1922 he became member of the DMV and the KJVD also in Saxony, between November 1927 and March 1931 administrator of the KJVD in Thuringia, since December 1929 until March 1931 deputy of the state parliament Thuringia. Beginning in June of 1931 Head of the Hesse-Waldeck district party organization, where he replaced Ernst Lohagen as head of office (Polleiter) in November 1931. In July of 1932 he became the youngest member of the German Reichstag (Constituency Hessa-Nassau). Beginning in February of 1933 he became Central Committee Instructor in Halle and Berlin, from August 1933 in lower Silesia. He was arrested on October 28th 1933 in Breslau, sentenced to two and a half years in jail after an eleven months long detention. Between October 1934 and October 1936 imprisoned in Wohlau/Silesia. 1936 transfer to the concentration camp Buchenwald, where he was imprisoned until April 11th in 1945. Starting in July 1945 until the beginning of April 1946, Barthel was the mayor of the city of Jena and afterwards he managed the public utility company (VEB) in Jena until the end of December 1964. After 1945, he was accused of misconduct in prison, and of mistakes in his position as mayor. Nevertheless he led the VVN district executive committee and the VdN district commission Gera as secretary until February 1953. From 1957 to 1962 he was chairman of the district committee of the National Front in Jena, in 1967 he received the VVO in gold. With the help of his wife, he had managed to smuggle out sketches and messages about life in the concentration camp. This resulted in one of the most impressive concentration camp reports in 1946: "Die Welt ohne Erbarmen, Greifenverlag Rudolstadt". Karl Barthel died in Jena on February 21, 1974.

### **Warnke, Hans:**

Born August 15th, 1896 in Hamburg, son of a saddler and roofer. He also learned roofing from 1911 to 1914. In 1914 he became member of the SPD. Between 1914 and 1918 front-line soldier, then member of the Volkswehr in Hamburg. He joined the USPD in 1919 and fled from the troops of General von Lettow-Vorbeck to Güstrow in June 1919, where he worked as a roofer until 1923. There, he co-founded the local USPD and entered the KPD together with the USPD's left wing at the end of 1920. From 1920 to 1924 and from 1928 to 1931 he was city councilor in Güstrow, since 1923 full-time functionary and actively involved in the preparation of the October uprising in 1923. In January 1924 Warnke was elected to the state parliament of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. He was arrested in August 1924 because of

the actions in 1923, and was sentenced to two and a half years in prison in 1925. As a result, he lost his mandate in the state parliament. However, he was elected again in 1926 and released from the Hamburg prison in July 1926. Initially, he worked as an instructor, then from November first, 1926, as head of the district leadership of Mecklenburg. Having been seriously ill since November 1931, he went to the Soviet Union for treatment in April 1932. He was replaced first by Arthur Vogt and then, after his arrest, by Hans Sawadzki. From the summer of 1932, Warnke was the head of the district leadership. From April 13th, 1933 to 1935 in protective custody, then again roofer in Güstrow. Arrested again at the outbreak of the war as a former KPD functionary, he was interned in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen until the end of 1939 and again in July/August 1944. In May 1945 he became mayor of Güstrow. From July 1945 to the end of 1946 he was the first vice President of the Mecklenburg State Administration, then until October 1949 Minister of the Interior of the Mecklenburg State Government and from 1949 to 1952 State Secretary in the GDR Ministry of the Interior. Warnke was a member of the PV and the Central Committee of the SED from 1946 to 1981. In August 1952 he became chairman of the Rostock district council, was criticized several times for deviations from the party line, then dismissed as chairman of the council in May 1959, allegedly due to his state of health and demoted to director of the Rostock port authority. Since 1965 he was employed by the Directorate of Maritime Transport and Port Management in Rostock. On the occasion of his 65th birthday he was awarded the Karl Marx Order. Hans Warnke died on January 9th in 1984.

### A.3 Official State Hierarchy

| Hierarchy Level | Positions  |
|-----------------|--|
| 1               | First Secretary of the Central Committee and Chairman of the State Council |
| 2               | Chairmen of the Council of Ministers of the GDR                            |
| 3               | President of the National Parliament                                       |
| 4               | Members and candidates of the Politburo                                    |
| 5               | Secretaries and Members of the Secretariat of the Central Committee        |
| 6               | the President of the National Council of the National Front of the GDR     |
| 7               | the deputies of the chairmen of the State Council                          |
| 8               | the deputies of the chairmen of the Council of Ministers                   |
| 9               | the chairmen of the block parties (CDU, LDPD, NDPD, DBD)                   |
| 10              | Members and candidates of the Central Committee                            |
| 11              | Members of the Council of Ministers  |
| 12              | President of the Supreme Court   |
| 13              | Attorney General   |
| 14              | Chairmen and deputies of the Presidium of the national Parliament          |
| 15              | Members of the State Council   |
| 16              | First Secretaries of the district leaderships of the SED                   |
| 17              | Chairmen of the district councils  |
| 18              | Vice President of the National Council                                     |
| 19              | Chairmen of the mass organizations of the GDR                              |
| 20              | Deputies of the chairmen of the block parties                              |
| 21              | State secretaries with their own competence areas                          |
| 22              | Generals of the armed bodies   |
| 23              | Heads of central state offices and administrations                         |
| 24              | Secretaries of State   |
| 25              | Deputy Ministers   |
| 26              | Chairmen of the Friendship Societies                                       |
| 27              | Secretaries of the district leaderships of the SED                         |
| 28              | Deputy chairmen of the district councils                                   |
| 29              | everyone else  |

Table A.1: Positions in Official State Hierarchy

## B Selection into Camps

In this section, we explore potential covariates that are associated with being interned in each of the camps in our dataset. We also show, which covariates are related to having a link to the political elite during the sample period.

To estimate which covariates predict in which concentration camp is interned, we run the following regression:

To estimate which covariates predict in which concentration camp is interned, we run the following regression:

$$Camp_{ij} = \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 X_{i,1933} + \beta_3 Distance_{ij,1933} + \epsilon_{ij} \quad (3)$$

where  $Camp_{ij}$  is a dummy for whether individual  $i$  has been to concentration camp  $j$  between 1933 and 1945,  $X_i$  are individual characteristics, such as gender, age in 1945, whether the place of birth was within the borders of the future GDR, and the year in which  $i$  became part of the communist party (KPD).  $X_{i,1933}$  are individual characteristics in the beginning of 1933 before the Reichstag fire in February 1933<sup>26</sup>, such as whether  $i$  was an elected politician, worker, unemployed, in prison, working in the media sector, member of a communist organization or the SPD in 1933. In addition, we add controls that capture where  $i$  lived in 1933: a dummy whether  $i$  was living in Berlin, a dummy whether  $i$  was abroad and latitude and longitude of  $i$ 's location in 1933. We also add the distance to the closest concentration camp that existed between 1933 and 1945 based on  $i$ 's location in 1933.

Results are presented in Figure B.1.

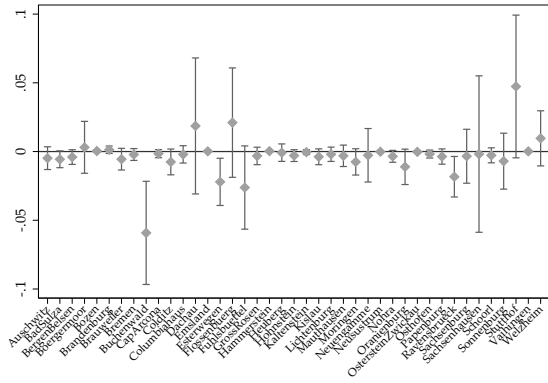
We rerun equation 3 using a dummy whether an individual ever has a link to someone in the leading elite between 1946 and 1962 as the dependent variable. Results are shown in Table B.1.

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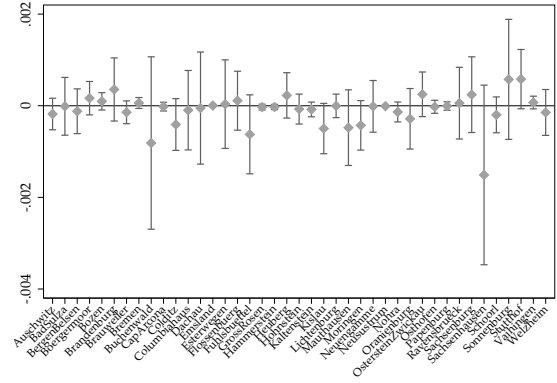
26. If we did not find any information for January or February 1933, we use the latest available information before.

Figure B.1: Selection Into Camps

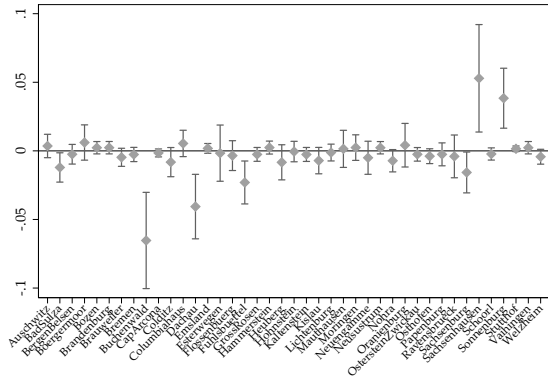
(a) Abroad 1933



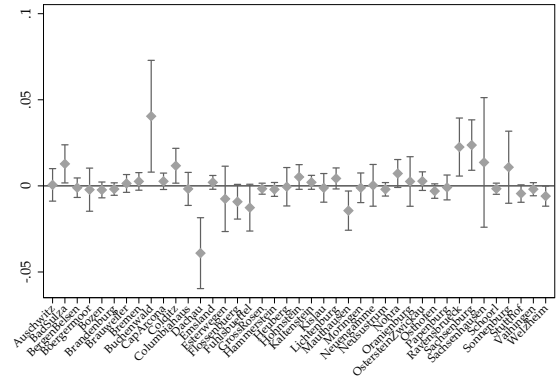
(b) Age in 1945



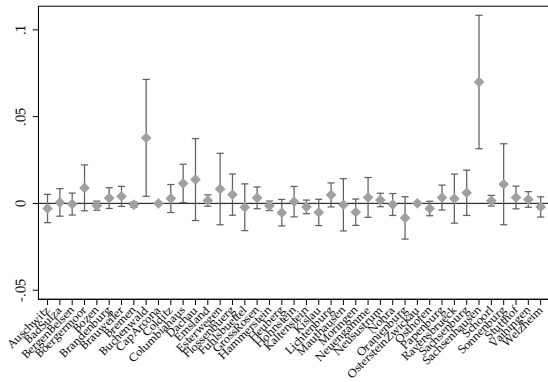
(c) In Berlin 1933



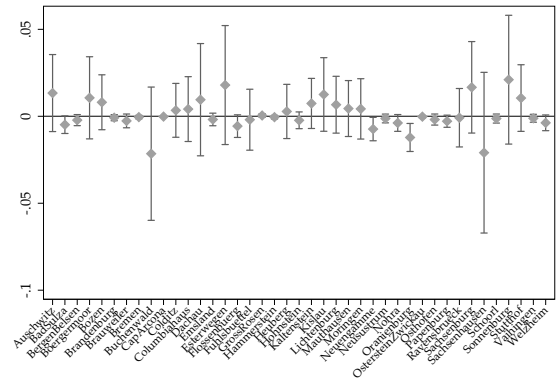
(d) Born in Area of GDR



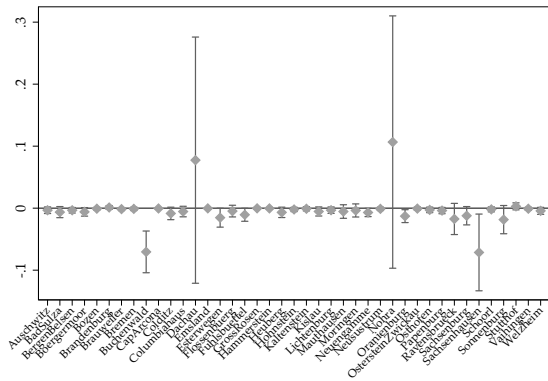
(e) In Communist Organization 1933



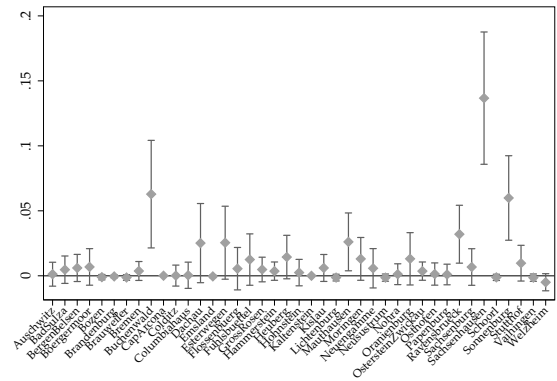
(f) In Media, 1933



(g) Unemployed, 1933

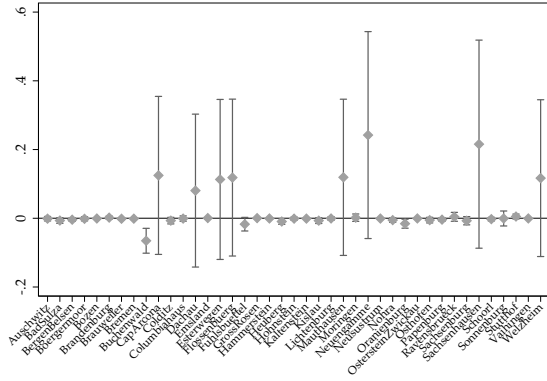


(h) Elected Politician, 1933

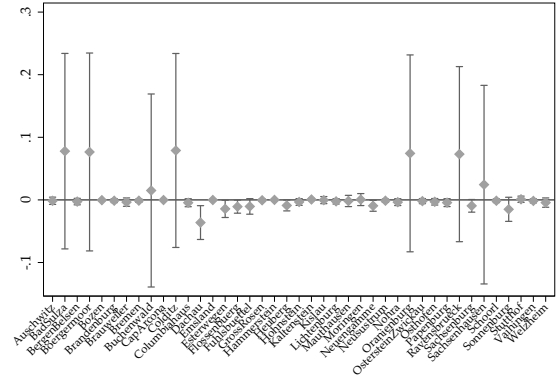


## Selection Into Camps, continued

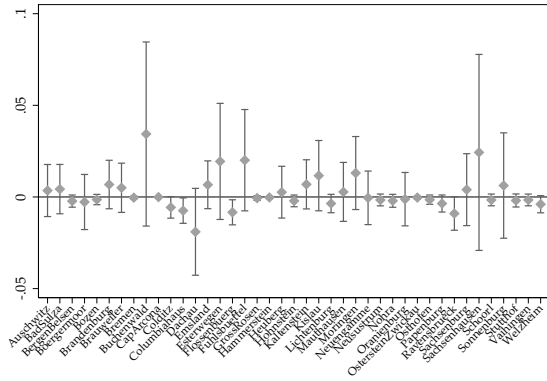
(i) In Prison, 1933



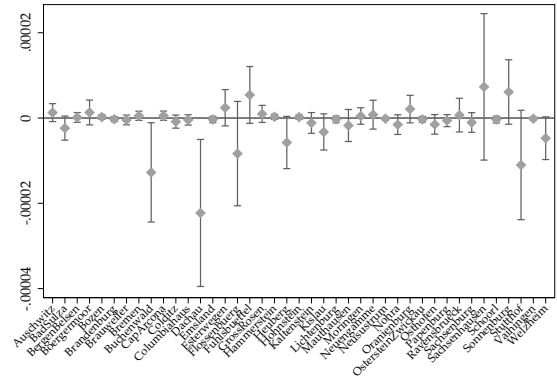
(j) In SPD, 1933



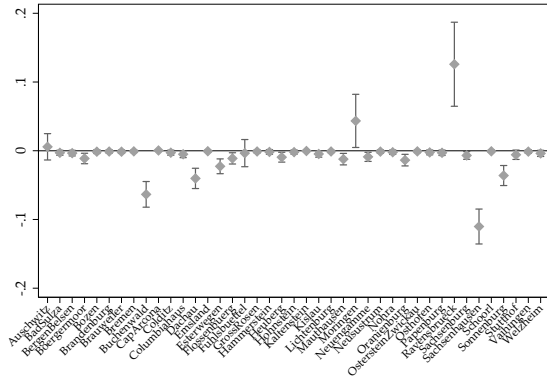
(k) Worker, 1933



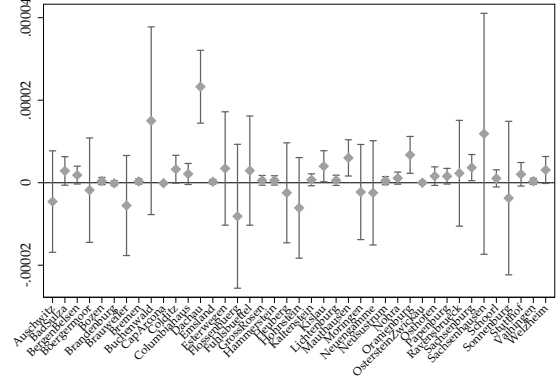
(l) Distance to Camp, 1933



(m) Female



(n) Year KPD Entry



The graphs plot the coefficients of estimating equation 3 (Appendix). Each point represents the result for a specific concentration camp with 95 percent confidence intervals.

Table B.1: Individual Characteristics and Treatment

|                                | Ever Linked to Leading |                     |                    |                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                                | All Individuals        |                     | Former Inmates     |                    |
|                                | (1)                    | (2)                 | (3)                | (4)                |
| Age 1945                       | -0.003<br>(0.002)      | -0.003<br>(0.002)   | -0.003<br>(0.003)  | -0.002<br>(0.003)  |
| Female                         | -0.137<br>(0.122)      | -0.137<br>(0.123)   | -0.015<br>(0.085)  | -0.020<br>(0.084)  |
| Born in Area of GDR            | 0.037<br>(0.037)       | 0.038<br>(0.037)    | 0.007<br>(0.038)   | 0.015<br>(0.036)   |
| KPD Entry Year                 | 0.000*<br>(0.000)      | 0.000*<br>(0.000)   | 0.000<br>(0.000)   | 0.000<br>(0.000)   |
| Elected Politician 1933        | 0.323***<br>(0.102)    | 0.321***<br>(0.102) | 0.084<br>(0.055)   | 0.097*<br>(0.054)  |
| Worker 1933                    | 0.059<br>(0.047)       | 0.060<br>(0.047)    | 0.011<br>(0.047)   | 0.009<br>(0.047)   |
| Unemployed 1933                | -0.034<br>(0.125)      | -0.036<br>(0.123)   | -0.098<br>(0.297)  | -0.091<br>(0.289)  |
| In Prison 1933                 | 0.173<br>(0.182)       | 0.172<br>(0.182)    | -0.193<br>(0.233)  | -0.195<br>(0.238)  |
| In Media 1933                  | 0.007<br>(0.032)       | 0.005<br>(0.032)    | -0.043<br>(0.058)  | -0.035<br>(0.056)  |
| In Communist Organization 1933 | 0.105*<br>(0.060)      | 0.106*<br>(0.060)   | 0.042<br>(0.044)   | 0.047<br>(0.044)   |
| In SPD 1933                    | 0.195<br>(0.167)       | 0.195<br>(0.167)    | 0.216**<br>(0.090) | 0.213**<br>(0.089) |
| In Berlin 1933                 | -0.055<br>(0.055)      | -0.053<br>(0.053)   | 0.028<br>(0.047)   | 0.087<br>(0.057)   |
| Abroad 1933                    | -0.140<br>(0.089)      | -0.105<br>(0.083)   | -0.125<br>(0.262)  | -0.306<br>(0.271)  |
| Latitude 1933                  | -0.001<br>(0.007)      | -0.005<br>(0.012)   | 0.011<br>(0.022)   | 0.007<br>(0.022)   |
| Longitude 1933                 | 0.000<br>(0.001)       | 0.001<br>(0.002)    | 0.005<br>(0.007)   | -0.010<br>(0.009)  |
| Distance to closest Camp 1933  |                        | -0.000<br>(0.000)   |                    | 0.001*<br>(0.000)  |
| Observations                   | 1,027                  | 1,027               | 341                | 341                |
| R <sup>2</sup>                 | 0.127                  | 0.127               | 0.050              | 0.071              |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 3. The dependent variable is a dummy that indicates whether an individual has been to the same camp as someone that is part of the leading elite between 1946 and 1962. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.



## C Robustness

### C.1 Different Standard Errors

Table C.1: Robustness: Different Standard Errors

|                            | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2) | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Linked to Leading          | -0.797                       | -0.041         | -0.051                   | 0.032                 |
| Longest Camp Cluster       | (0.342)**                    | (0.017)**      | (0.016)***               | (0.017)*              |
| Individual Cluster         | (0.313)**                    | (0.016)**      | (0.017)***               | (0.017)*              |
| Place 1933 Cluster         | (0.246)***                   | (0.014)***     | (0.015)***               | (0.014)**             |
| Bootstrap                  | (0.171)***                   | (0.008)***     | (0.009)***               | (0.013)**             |
| Individual FE              | ✓                            | ✓              | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                    | ✓                            | ✓              | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp | ✓                            | ✓              | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                      | 1946-1960                    | 1946-1960      | 1946-1960                | 1946-1960             |
| Observations               | 14,526                       | 14,526         | 14,526                   | 14,526                |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp-level (longest internment), inmate-level, and place 1933-level. Bootstrap results are from sampling individuals with replacement, performing 1000 repetitions. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

## C.2 Different Sample Periods

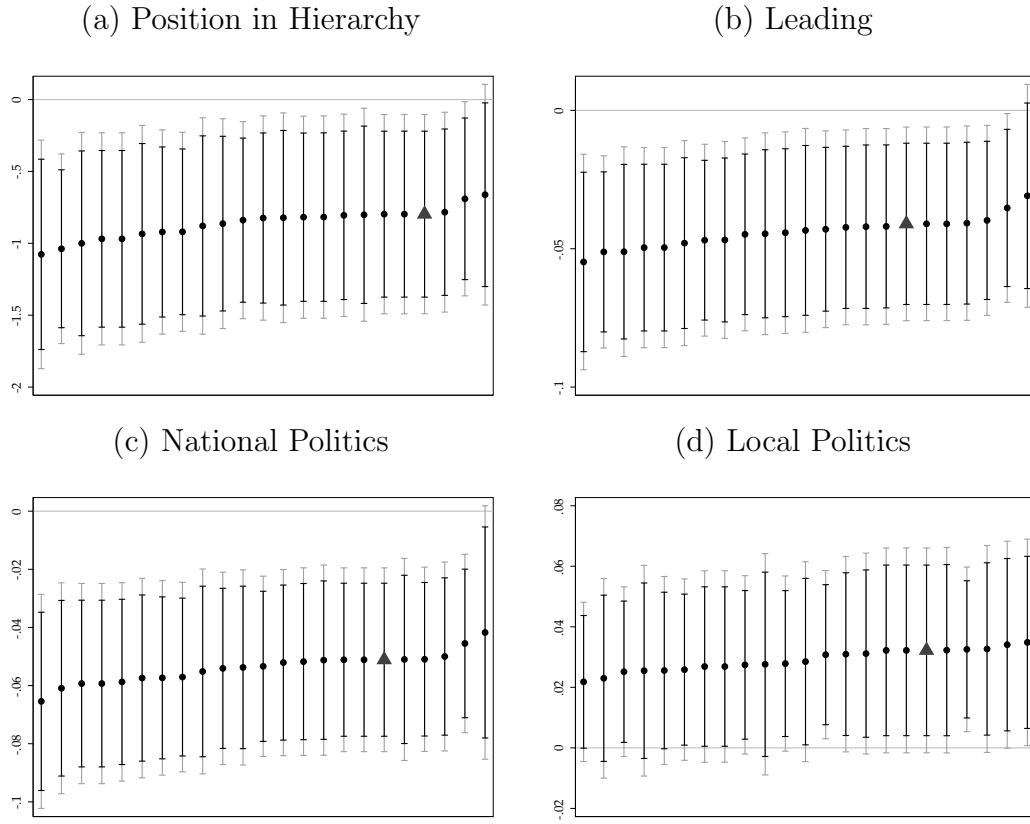
Table C.2: Links and Career Trajectories, Sample Years

|                            | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)     | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Panel A: 1946-1965</i>  |                              |                    |                          |                       |
| Linked to Leading          | -0.595**<br>(0.265)          | -0.024*<br>(0.014) | -0.031**<br>(0.014)      | 0.035***<br>(0.011)   |
| Observations               | 17,785                       | 17,785             | 17,785                   | 17,785                |
| R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.694                        | 0.673              | 0.655                    | 0.677                 |
| <i>Panel B: 1946-1970</i>  |                              |                    |                          |                       |
| Linked to Leading          | -0.431**<br>(0.203)          | -0.014<br>(0.010)  | -0.018*<br>(0.010)       | 0.039***<br>(0.011)   |
| Observations               | 20,799                       | 20,799             | 20,799                   | 20,799                |
| R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.699                        | 0.681              | 0.657                    | 0.679                 |
| <i>Panel C: 1946-1980</i>  |                              |                    |                          |                       |
| Linked to Leading          | -0.437**<br>(0.173)          | -0.014<br>(0.009)  | -0.017*<br>(0.009)       | 0.039***<br>(0.011)   |
| Observations               | 24,704                       | 24,704             | 24,704                   | 24,704                |
| R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.720                        | 0.708              | 0.669                    | 0.684                 |
| <i>Panel D: 1946-1989</i>  |                              |                    |                          |                       |
| Linked to Leading          | -0.419**<br>(0.172)          | -0.013<br>(0.008)  | -0.016*<br>(0.008)       | 0.036***<br>(0.012)   |
| Observations               | 26,479                       | 26,479             | 26,479                   | 26,479                |
| R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.724                        | 0.707              | 0.679                    | 0.694                 |
| Individual FE              | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                    | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp | ✓                            | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                     |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1 with different sample years. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through internment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

### C.3 Discarding Camp Networks

Figure C.1: Discarding links from individual Camps



Note: Results from running equation 1, iteratively setting all links stemming from a specific camp to zero. Baseline results are shown as a triangle, the results from the regressions where links are set to zero with dots. 95 percent confidence intervals in light gray, 10 percent confidence intervals in dark gray.

## C.4 Other Links

Table C.3: Camp Links and Other Links

|                                  | Position in Hierarchy<br>(1) | Leading<br>(2)       | National Politics<br>(3) | Local Politics<br>(4) |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Panel A: Baseline Results</i> |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.797**<br>(0.342)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017)  | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.692                        | 0.669                | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |
| <i>Panel B: Exile 1933-1945</i>  |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.796**<br>(0.341)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017)  | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| Exile Link to Leading            | 0.183<br>(0.217)             | 0.008<br>(0.011)     | 0.009<br>(0.012)         | -0.011<br>(0.010)     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.692                        | 0.669                | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |
| <i>Panel C: Location 1933</i>    |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.759**<br>(0.328)          | -0.039**<br>(0.016)  | -0.049***<br>(0.015)     | 0.031*<br>(0.017)     |
| Location 1933 Link to Leading    | -0.407<br>(0.276)            | -0.017<br>(0.010)    | -0.023<br>(0.017)        | 0.009<br>(0.011)      |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.692                        | 0.669                | 0.653                    | 0.676                 |
| <i>Panel D: Position 1933</i>    |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.809**<br>(0.342)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017)  | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| Position 1933 Link to Leading    | -0.397*<br>(0.216)           | -0.009<br>(0.006)    | -0.013<br>(0.014)        | -0.004<br>(0.013)     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.692                        | 0.669                | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |
| <i>Panel E: Year of Birth</i>    |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.794**<br>(0.342)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017)  | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| Year of Birth Link to Leading    | 0.063<br>(0.101)             | 0.004<br>(0.005)     | -0.006<br>(0.004)        | 0.003<br>(0.007)      |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.692                        | 0.669                | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |
| <i>Panel F: Place of Birth</i>   |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.797**<br>(0.343)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017)  | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| Place of Birth Link to Leading   | -0.252***<br>(0.063)         | -0.011***<br>(0.001) | -0.012<br>(0.012)        | -0.008<br>(0.006)     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.692                        | 0.669                | 0.652                    | 0.676                 |
| <i>Panel G: KPD Entry Year</i>   |                              |                      |                          |                       |
| Camp Link to Leading             | -0.803**<br>(0.343)          | -0.041**<br>(0.017)  | -0.051***<br>(0.016)     | 0.032*<br>(0.017)     |
| KPD Entry Link to Leading        | -0.580**<br>(0.267)          | -0.016<br>(0.017)    | -0.029*<br>(0.016)       | 0.024*<br>(0.014)     |
| R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.693                        | 0.669                | 0.653                    | 0.676                 |
| Individual FE                    | ✓                            | ✓                    | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Year FE                          | ✓                            | ✓                    | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Linear Year Trends by Camp       | ✓                            | ✓                    | ✓                        | ✓                     |
| Years                            | 1946-1962                    | 1946-1962            | 1946-1962                | 1946-1962             |
| Observations                     | 15,666                       | 15,666               | 15,666                   | 15,666                |

**Note** Results from estimating equation 1. Each panel includes one additional link to the party leadership, stemming from shared characteristics. Hierarchy is a score taking values between 1 and 29, linking jobs to their rank within the official state hierarchy. More powerful positions have higher scores. Outcomes in columns (2) to (4) are dummies indicating whether an individual holds the respective position in a given year. Linked to Leading is a dummy indicating whether an individual is linked to a member of the party elite, i.e. a person at least as powerful as someone in the Central Committee, through interment in the same concentration camp in the Nazi era. Standard errors clustered at camp level. Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.