

**THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA
RESHUFFLES MUNICIPAL LEADERS
FOR THE 20TH NATIONAL PARTY
CONGRESS**

ZHOU Na

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Executive Summary

1. As the Communist Party of China (CPC) prepares for its 20th National Party Congress in late 2022, it is reshuffling its local leaders and initiating a new round of elections in a bottom-up way at three sub-provincial levels, including the township, county and prefecture levels. Local party members show their support for these new leaders through elections.
2. The CPC strictly controls these elections for local leadership. The standing committees of the party committees (SCPCs) decide on the candidates for these elections, albeit subject to the veto of party representatives.
3. The CPC released two new documents to strengthen its control over local elections. The *Regulations on the Election of Local Organisations* enhances the responsibilities of the SCPCs in selecting the candidates of party committee members. The *Regulations on Organisational Work* clarifies the roles of central and local party committees in rulemaking and cadre appointment.
4. The reshuffling of over a half of the municipal leaders was conducted before prefecture-level elections in the first half of this year. The profiles of these leaders are reflective of the party's recent personnel preferences.
5. For municipal leaders at vice provincial level, the CPC appointed relatively young ones. These cadres may probably become Xi's alliances in the following years and part of the national leadership in the post-Xi era.
6. The party also particularly reviews a cadre's performance when he/she reaches the vice prefecture level as this is where the long-term nurturing of a cadre takes place before he or she is promoted to the vice provincial level, at which he or she may be a vice governor or a member of a provincial SCPC and later oversee an important city.

7. Young cadres are preferred for prefecture-level municipal leaders this year. Among them, new party secretaries are on average three years older than mayors.
8. Evidently, candidates for prefecture-level leaders are largely selected from local governments and party committees, albeit from diversified sources. Particularly, a small number were selected from the Communist Youth League of China and very limited ones from SOEs.
9. The CPC prefers to assign cadres from the government. It identifies talents in municipal or provincial governments and promotes them from the vice prefecture level to the prefecture.
10. The CPC also emphasises the importance of a cadre's experience as a county chief. About one third of current municipal leaders once were party secretaries of counties, county-level cities or districts.

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Local Elections and New Rules

- 1.1 In fall 2022, the CPC (Chinese Party Communist) will form China's new leadership at its 20th National Party Congress, which will generate a 25-member Political Bureau, a seven-member Political Bureau Standing Committee and the general secretary. The new leadership will determine China's political and economic trajectory for the next five years or even longer.
- 1.2 As the congress is approaching, the party has accelerated its personnel arrangement at sub-provincial levels recently, appointed relatively young cadres and promoted cadres mainly from municipal governments and party committees. It also released new regulations to strengthen the role of local SCPCs (standing committees of party committees) in selecting candidates of new leaders, most of the whom will be confirmed in party elections.
- 1.3 Since 2021, the CPC has initiated a new round of elections in a bottom-up way at three sub-provincial levels, including township, county and prefecture levels. These elections will be completed in late 2021 and the newly elected prefecture leaders will participate in provincial elections to generate new provincial leaders to sit in the 20th National Party Congress in 2022.
- 1.4 In an election, party representatives elected from diverse party units at each level will vote for a few important party members, including the formal and alternate members of the party committee, members of the commission for discipline inspection (CDI), and those who respectively sit in the SCPC and the Standing Committee of the CDI.

* Dr Zhou Na is Research Fellow at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore.

- 1.5 In fact, these party members are generated through controlled elections as candidates are decided by the CPC, which only allows limited competition among them. At least 10% of the candidates for party committee and the CDI would be filtered out, while one or two candidates for the two standing committees with less votes than others would be booted. The representatives will also elect party secretaries and vice party secretaries of party committees and the CDIs, but the number of candidates equals that for final appointments. While the guidelines state that candidates will only win elections if they receive more than half of the votes, most candidates are eventually appointed in practice.
- 1.6 Importantly, the CPC has strengthened the role of existing SCPCs in selecting candidates of new local leaders and tightening its control of local elections. The CPC first revised the *Regulations on the Election of Local Organisations*¹ in December 2020, which is an update to the version dated back in 1994. This document strengthens the responsibility of the SCPC in selecting the candidates of the forthcoming party committee members. The SCPC can now propose candidates according to cadre selection regulations and collected reviews from existing members. The formulated candidate list does not require a review from the same-level organisation department and approval need only to be sought from its direct upper-level party committee and not from all higher level party committees.²
- 1.7 The new regulations mainly revised the requirements for generating the representatives of a local party congress. It drops the required portion of professionals and advanced role models (at least 25% of total representatives) and raised the portion of representatives from front-line workers to above 30%.³ A party unit, which proposes its candidates for party representatives, has been entrusted with the task of reviewing and collectively deciding its candidate list before releasing the list to enlist public responses for at least five working days.
- 1.8 With the regulations, the party strengthens its requirement on election integrity. The party designates central and local CDIs to inspect and supervise the elections. It

¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-01/06/c_1126953207.htm, accessed 23 July 2021.

² <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0114/c117092-32000038.html>, acceded 4 August 2021.

³ Ibid.

clarifies the legal liabilities and party disciplinary punishment for types of misconduct.

- 1.9 In May 2021, the CPC released another document for organisational management, the *Regulations on Organisational Work*,⁴ to strengthen its leading role in personnel arrangement over the country. In general, this rule establishes a framework for building the party's organisational system, such as its structure, functions, rules and disciplines, and establishing a leading institution for managing cadres and talents.
- 1.10 The document emphasises the role of central and local party committees in cadre management. The former will be responsible for making important rules and decisions, and recommending, nominating and appointing cadres while the latter are to appoint and administrate cadres within their jurisdiction, and recommend key cadres of non-party local organisations, including the branches of state organs, People's Political Conference, people's organisations, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and public institutions.
- 1.11 With the release of the two new documents, the CPC has enhanced its authority in personnel control and strengthened the roles of each SCPC. The new rules are critical for building the local personnel foundations for the national leadership generated from the CPC's 20th National Party Congress.

The Party Secretaries of Chinese Cities

- 2.1 In fall 2021, the CPC reshuffled prefecture leaders and launched elections at this level after conducting elections at lower levels. These new leaders would go through and receive support from party representatives in elections.
- 2.2 In cadre management, the CPC highlights the importance of selecting local leaders who are loyal to the centre, capable and diligent in work, show distinct performance and have integrity. It also requires appointing ethnic minorities, females and the younger generation, and talents from diverse non-party organisations. It particularly

⁴ <https://www.12371.cn/2021/06/02/ARTI1622638688535935.shtml>, accessed 24 July 2021.

emphasises developing local leading teams of different age groups and cultivating young cadres.⁵

2.3 Of the 410 party secretaries overseeing a Chinese city or a prefecture-level administration (Table 1),⁶ four are provincial party secretaries leading the municipalities under the central government (MCGs).⁷

2.4 At the vice provincial level, 42 in the provincial SCPC oversee vice provincial cities⁸ or prefecture cities.⁹ Another four are heads of party committees of national level new districts, such as Binhai and Pudong. There are 360 party secretaries at the prefecture level,¹⁰ including 27 who are the heads of MCG districts.

TABLE 1 MUNICIPAL PARTY SECRETARIES' RANKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rank	Responsibility	Total number
Provincial	Overseeing an MCG	4
Vice provincial	Overseeing a prefecture city as member of provincial SCPC	42
	Overseeing a party committee of a national level district	4
Prefecture	Overseeing a prefecture city	333
	Overseeing a district of an MCG	27

Source: Data collected by the author.

Municipal party secretaries as vice provincial level party secretaries

2.5 The 45 vice-provincial party secretaries are the leaders of major cities with outstanding economic and social development in the country. Their administration covers provincial capitals, economic advanced cities, national level new districts and those of special political significance.

⁵ For more details, see Zhou Na, China's New Plan for Nurturing Top Leaders: Evidence from Provincial Political Elites Selection, *EAI Background Brief*, No. 1578, 25 February 2021.

⁶ Data collected from <https://ldzl.people.com.cn/dfzlk/front/>, accessed 4 June 2021.

⁷ See more information about them, refer to Zhou Na, China's New Plan for Nurturing Top Leaders: Evidence from Provincial Political Elites Selection, *EAI Background Brief*, No.1578, 25 February 2021.

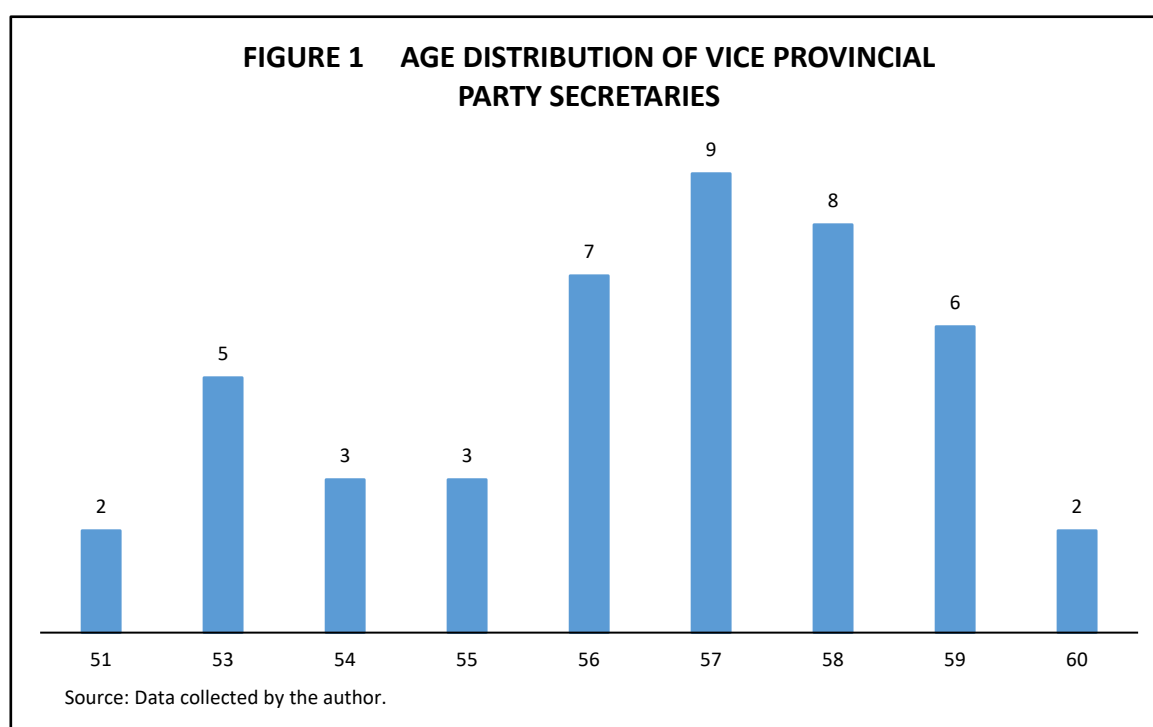
⁸ The 15 vice-provincial cities are Harbin, Changchun, Shenyang, Dalian, Jinan, Qingdao, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, Xi'an and Chengdu.

⁹ In June 2021, the party secretaries of Qingdao, Wenzhou and Wuhan were not installed.

¹⁰ In some Chinese cities, their PSs rank at the county level. They are not discussed in this article.

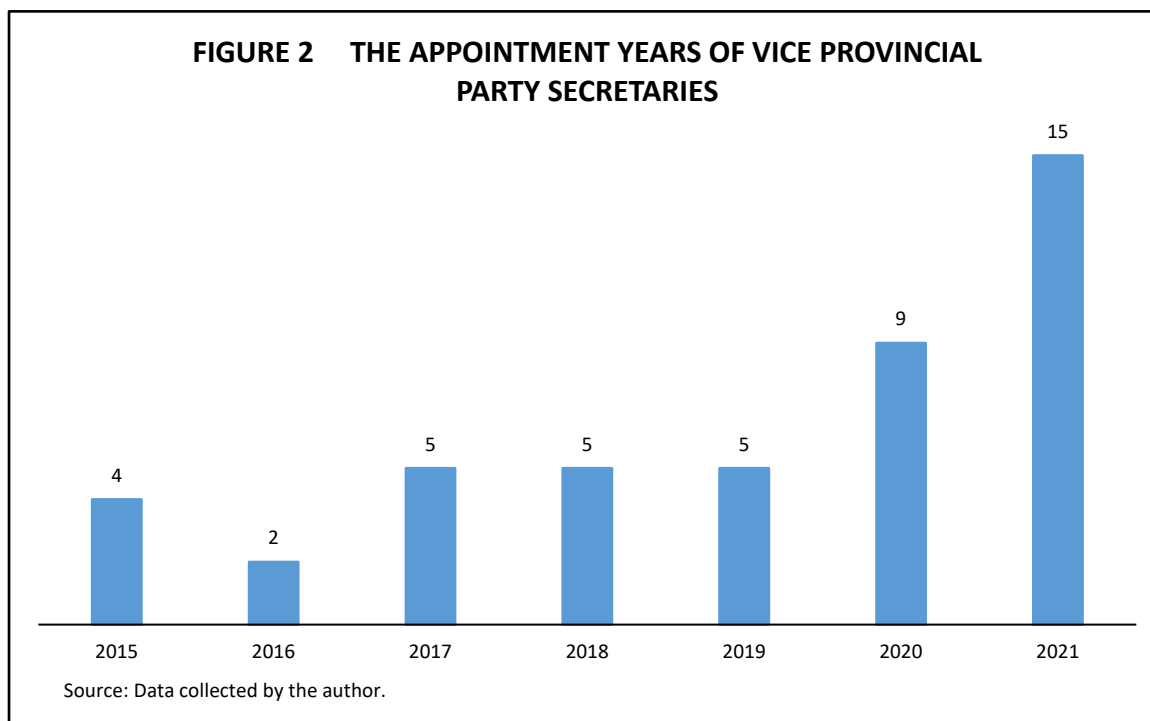
2.6 The profiles of party secretaries are reflective of some of the important features that promising cadres should possess. First, most of them are Han males and only four are females and three are of ethnic minorities, in which Wang Lixia,¹¹ the party secretary of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, is the only female minority.

2.7 Second, they are aged between 51 and 60 years old now, or an average age of 56.4 (Figure 1). Those aged 56 and below in particular have more promising political career than others. They may enter the 21th Central Committee (in 2027) before they reach 63 years of age. The youngest two cadres are Zhou Hongbo (51) from Sanya, Hainan, and Lian Maojun (51) from Binhai New Area, Tianjin.



2.8 Third, the CPC has appointed the cadres as party secretaries after 2015 (Figure 2). Fifteen of them were appointed in the first half of 2021, in which 11 cadres are younger than the average age and five were assigned to western China.

¹¹ Wang was promoted to president of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on 9 September 2021.

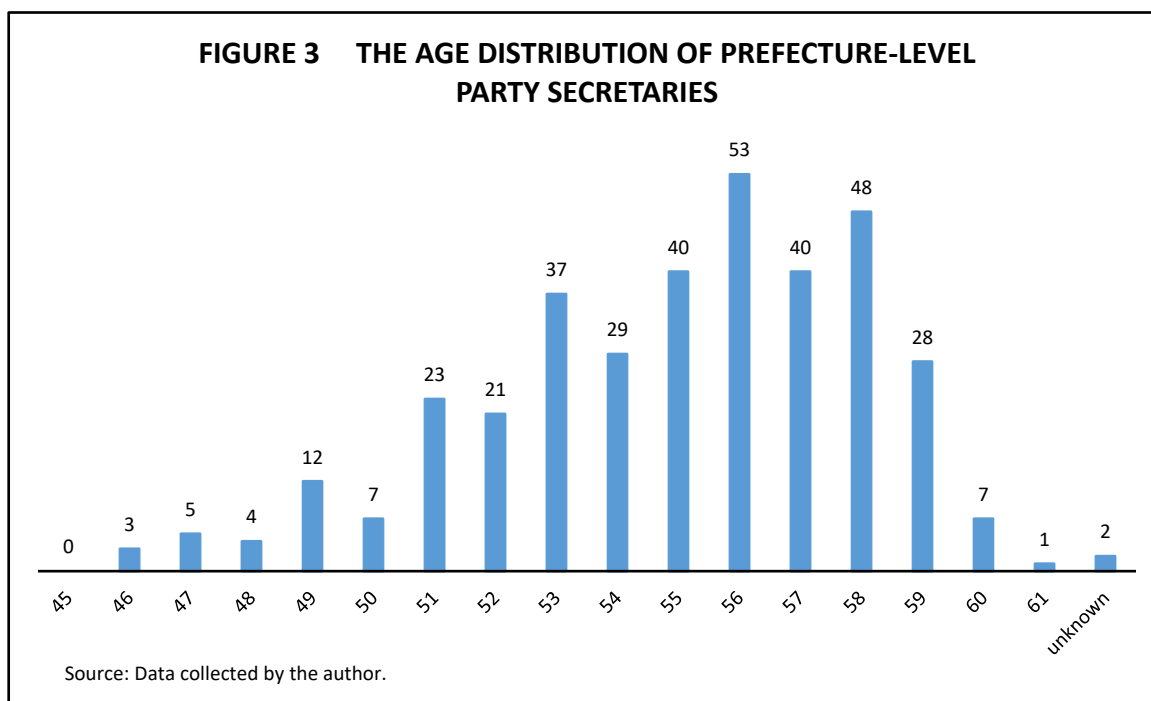


2.9 In their career paths, they assumed vice prefecture positions at an average age of 37.9 for about seven years before they were promoted to prefecture ones. They stayed for about 6.6 years at the prefecture level before they are eligible for promotion to mostly vice provincial governor positions. About three years thereafter, the CPC will designate them to oversee sub-provincial cities.

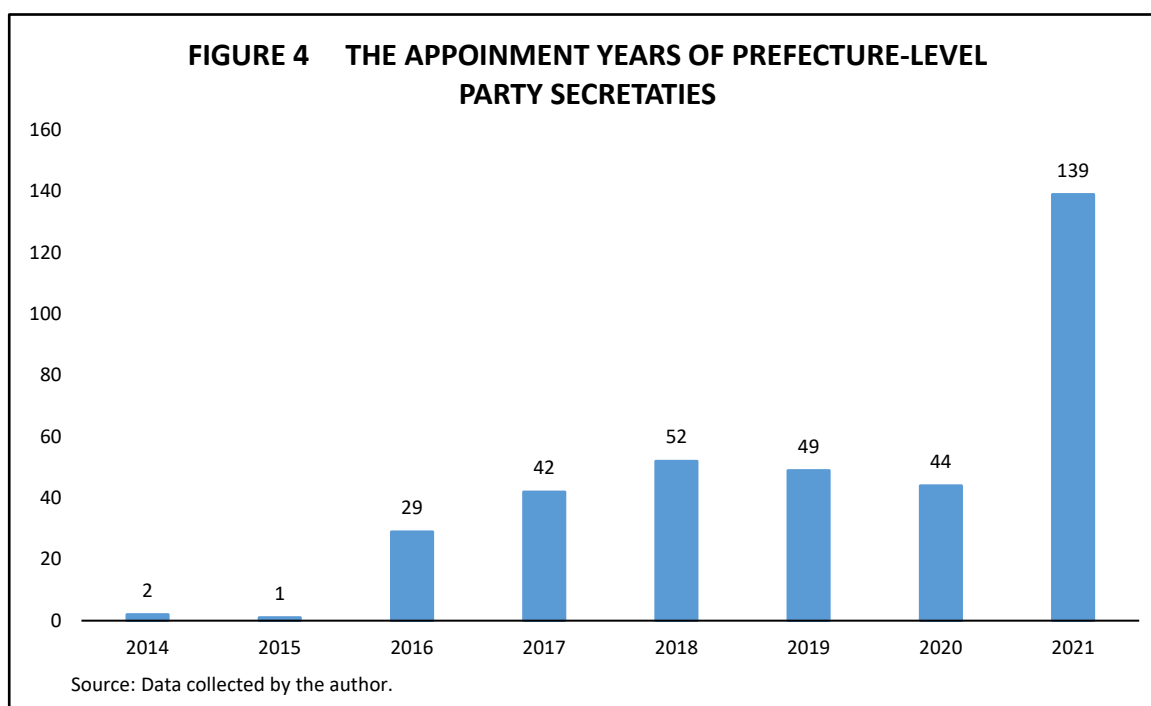
2.10 Apart from Wang Lixia, Zhou Hongbo and Lian Maojun, cadres with outstanding performance in this group who were promoted in 2021 include the 55-year-old female, Wu Guiying from Changsha, Hunan province and Ma Hancheng, the leader of Guyuan, Ningxia, an ethnic minority and aged 53.

Prefecture-level party secretaries

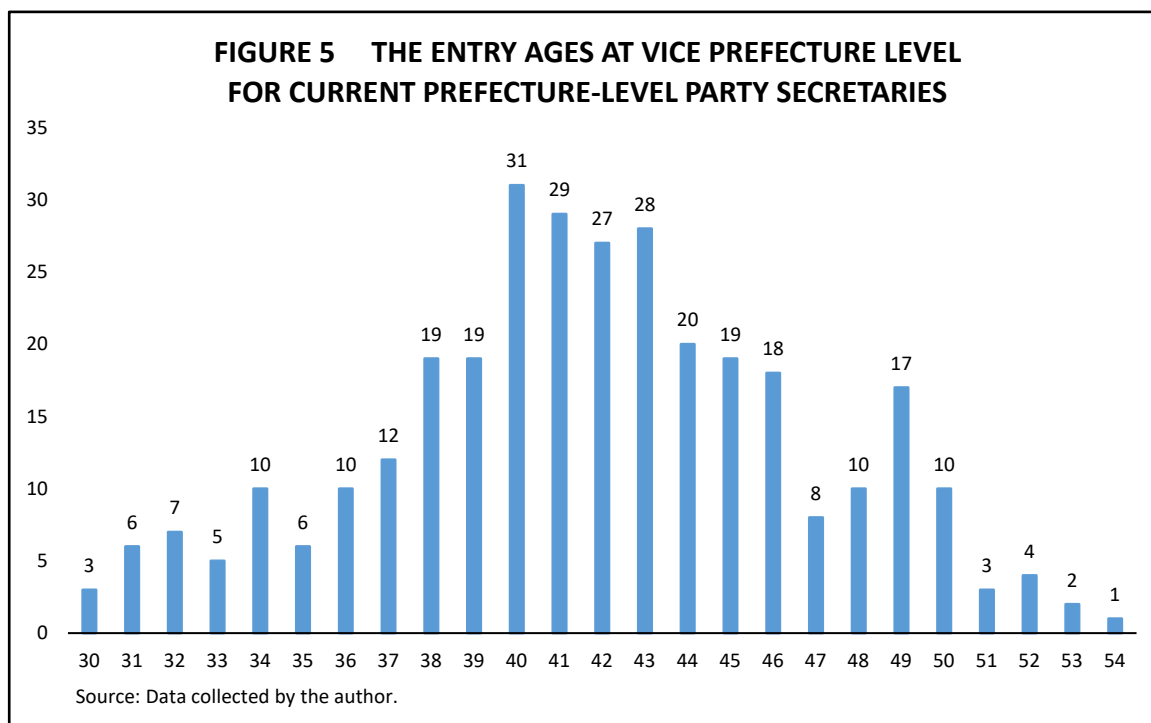
2.11 The 360 prefecture-level party secretaries, including 75 who are leading the districts of the four MCGs, are ranked at the middle of the Chinese administrative system. Seventeen females and 20 ethnic minorities sit among them. They are relatively younger than vice-provincial cadres and are aged between 46 and 61 years old, or an average age of 54.9 (Figure 3). Half of them (181) are between 55 and 58 years old.



2.12 Their career paths show important patterns. First, except for three in 2014 and one in 2015, they were assigned mainly after 2016 (Figure 4). In 2021, the CPC arranged 139 new cadres versus the 145 from 2018 to 2020 (145). In addition, the average age for these new faces is 53.6, more than one year younger than the entire group of prefecture-level party secretaries. Evidently, the CPC has accelerated its personnel arrangement before the 20th National Party Congress and appointed relatively younger cadres.



2.13 Second, before assuming duties as municipal party secretaries, 323 of them entered the vice prefecture level at an average age of 41.7, which is 3.8 years older than that of the vice provincial group when entering this level.¹² About one third of them were appointed at the prefecture level between the age of 40 and 43 (Figure 5). Most of them have stayed at this level for 11 years before becoming municipal leaders.

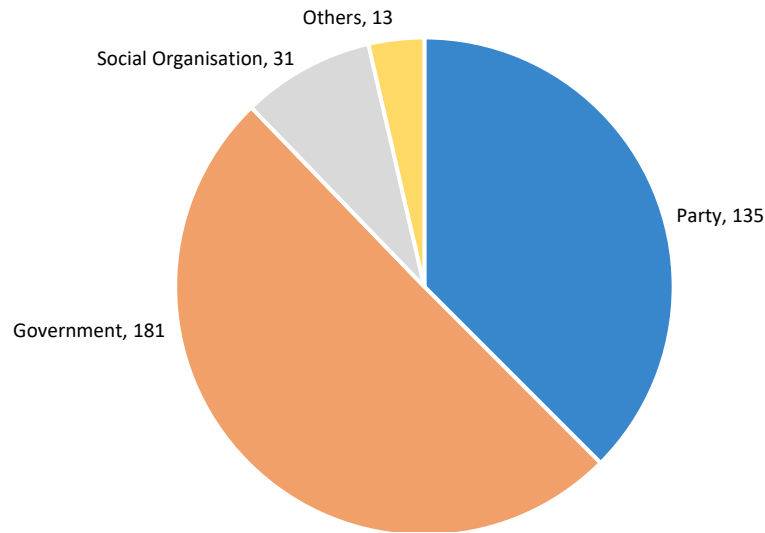


2.14 In addition, 97 cadres were below age 40 when entering the vice prefecture level and 28 of them were local heads of the Communist Youth League of China. Among the 28 cadres, 22 were then younger than 35 years old, indicating that the league provides a fast-developing channel.

2.15 Third, at the vice prefecture level, most of them held positions in the government (181) or the party (135), while a few worked in social organisations (31), SOEs (7), the People's Congress (4) and public institutions (2) (Figure 6). Among those from the government, 82 were then vice mayors with no adjunct position in the party.

¹² The profiles of 37 party secretaries are not available in the database.

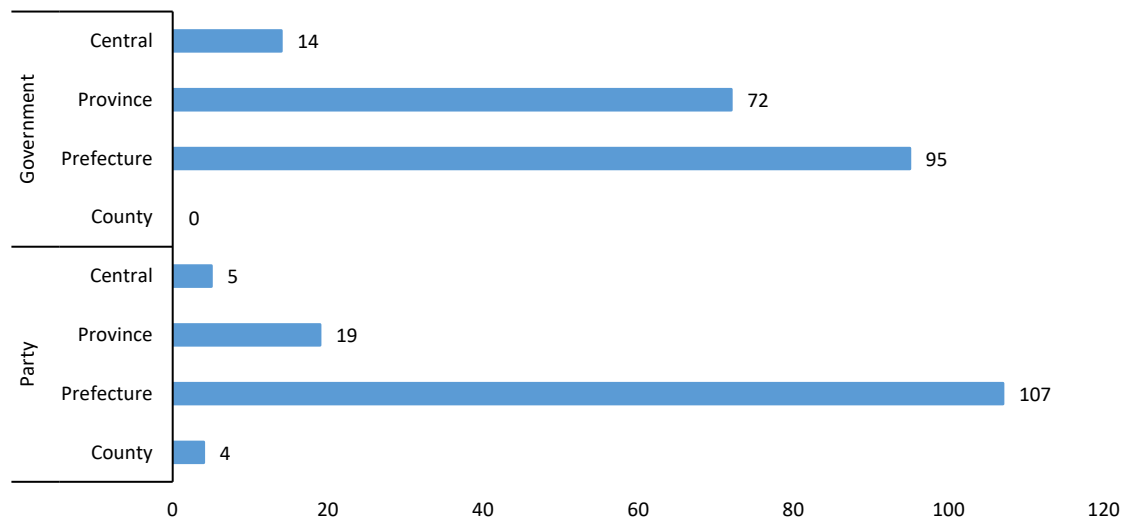
FIGURE 6 THE ORIGINAL BACKGROUND OF PREFECTURE-LEVEL PARTY SECRETARIES



Source: Data collected by the author.

2.16 Fourth, the CPC largely selects candidates for city leaders from the departments of municipal party committees, local governments and provincial governments. As shown in Figure 7, for cadres from the government, almost half of them are with the municipal governments (95) while the rest were working for provincial ones (72) or for the State Council (14). For those from the CPC, most of them were selected from the departments of municipal party committees (107) and a few from provincial party committees (19). A handful of them worked for the party's central branches (5) or for the counties (4).

FIGURE 7 THE ORIGINAL GOVERNMENT OR PARTY DEPARTMENTS FOR PREFECTURE-LEVEL PARTY SECRETARIES (BY LEVEL)



Source: Data collected by the author.

The Chinese Mayors

- 3.1 The heads of local governments, as the second in command in party committees, are also important for examining the CPC's personnel deployment before the 20th National Party Congress. Like party secretaries, Chinese mayors may rank at different levels. In mid-2021, there were four provincial level mayors from the MCGs,¹³ 15 vice-provincials overseeing some critical cities and national-level new districts,¹⁴ and 361 ranking at the prefecture level, including 69 district governors in the MCGs.¹⁵

The vice-provincial mayors

- 3.2 The 15 mayors ranking at the vice-provincial level are all male Han, now aged between 50 and 60 years old, at an average age of 55.1. Ten of them have assumed their current positions after 2020, and the rest did so from 2015 to 2019. Three mayors with outstanding performance, namely Chen Shaowang, 50, from Dalian, Qin Weizhong, 50, from Shenzhen, and Luo Lin, 50, director of Liangjiang New District Administrative Committee, Chongqing are relatively younger than the average and promoted recently.
- 3.3 Their career patterns indicate that the CPC observes a vice-prefecture cadre for a relatively long time and one's performance at this level is critical to his/her career movement.
- 3.4 First, their profiles show that a vice-provincial mayor moves up the ladder faster than previously discussed party secretaries at the same level. Most of them had spent about a total of 11.7 years at both vice prefecture and prefecture levels, which is three

¹³ For more information, refer to Zhou Na, China's New Plan for Nurturing Top Leaders: Evidence from Provincial Political Elites Selection, *EAI Background Brief*, No. 1578, 25 February 2021.

¹⁴ These cities are Harbin, Changchun, Shenyang, Dalian, Jinan, Qingdao, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, Xi'an and Chengdu, while the national-level new districts are Pudong, Binhai, Liangjiang and Xiong'an. In June 2021, the mayors of Changchun and Xiamen had not been assigned. The director of Xiong'an Administrative Committee, Zhang Guohua, also serves as its party leader; this was discussed in the previous section.

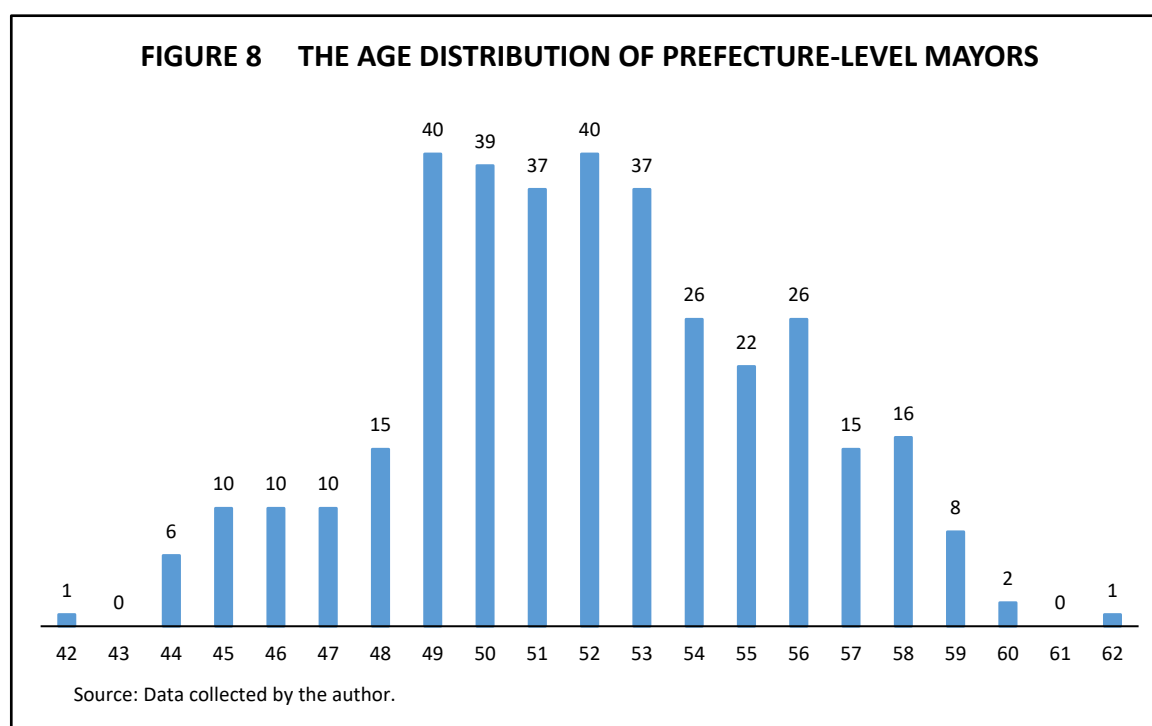
¹⁵ Data collected from <https://ldzl.people.com.cn/dfzlk/front/>, accessed 4 June 2021.

years shorter than that for party secretaries. However, their terms at vice prefecture level are 1.7 years longer than that of party secretaries.

- 3.5 Second, six of them were vice governors before becoming mayors or district directors. They were normally appointed as mayors or directors within one year of their promotion to the vice provincial level.

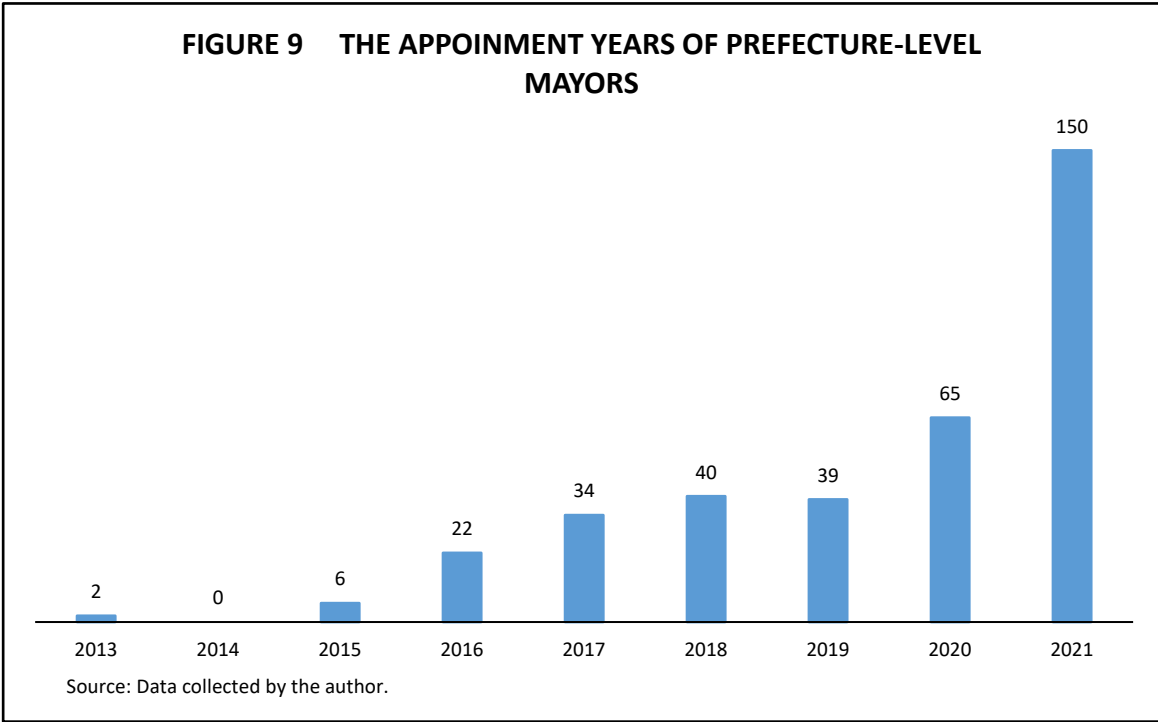
The prefecture-level mayors

- 3.6 The prefecture-level mayors comprise 361 cadres, of whom 32 are females and 66 are ethnic minorities. Their average age is 51.9 years old, which is three years younger than that of prefecture-level party secretaries. Most of them (196) are aged between 49 and 54, while 52 of them are aged 48 or below (Figure 8). This gives them an age advantage in political career. The youngest is Peng Yingmei, female, aged 42, mayor of Yaan, Sichuan.



- 3.7 The 361 prefecture-level mayors assumed their current positions after 2013 (Figure 9). Except two in 2013, the number of appointments has increased slowly since 2015 and sharply surged in the first half of 2021. The CPC subsequently appointed 150 mayors, double the number of 2020. Like prefecture party secretaries, those

appointed in 2021 are younger ones, 1.1 year younger on average than that of the entire cohort of mayors.

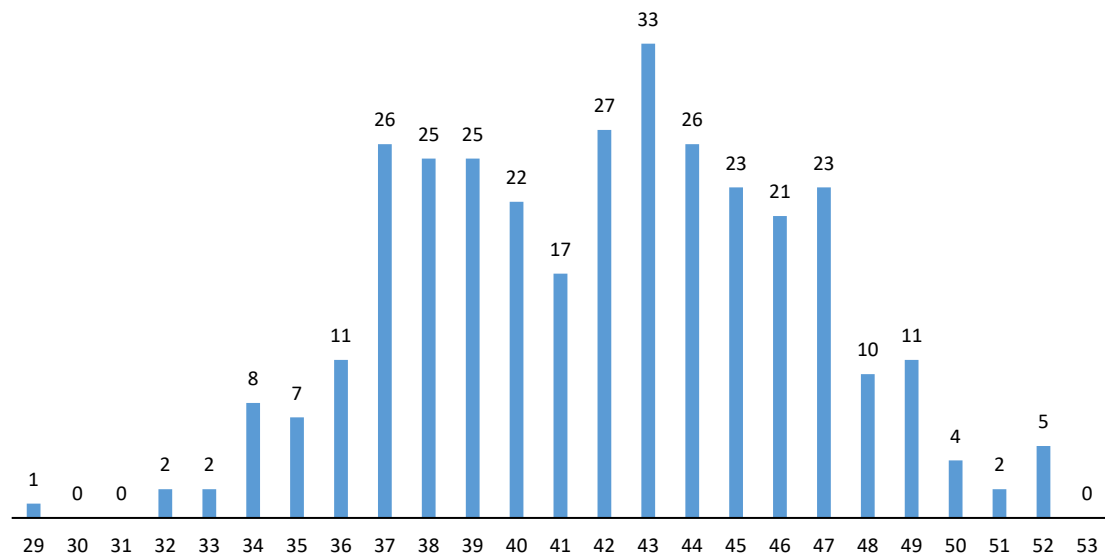


3.8 These mayors have diversified backgrounds. They mainly moved from county to vice prefecture level between the age of 37 and 47¹⁶ (Figure 10), at an average age of 41.98, which is 1.8 years older than that of vice provincial mayors. Like municipal party secretaries, those who worked in the Communist Youth League took a large part of the young cadres (below age 40) at the vice prefecture level.

3.9 Before being mayors, most cadres worked in the government (162) or the party (145), while only a handful were heads of social organisations (34) (Figure 11). Compared with municipal party secretaries, most mayors came from the party and the remaining from the government.

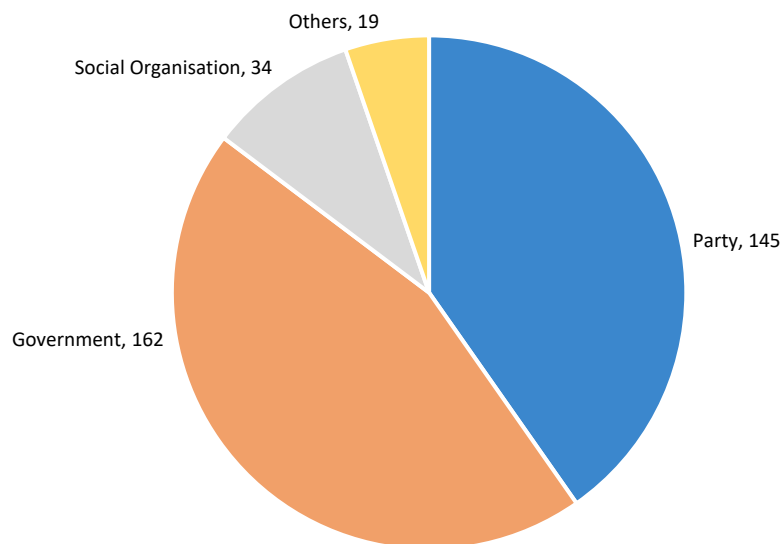
¹⁶ The resumes of 328 mayors show details of their vice-prefecture level positions including the starting year.

**FIGURE 10 THE ENTRY AGES AT VICE PREFECTURE LEVEL
FOR CURRENT PREFECTURE-LEVEL MAYORS**



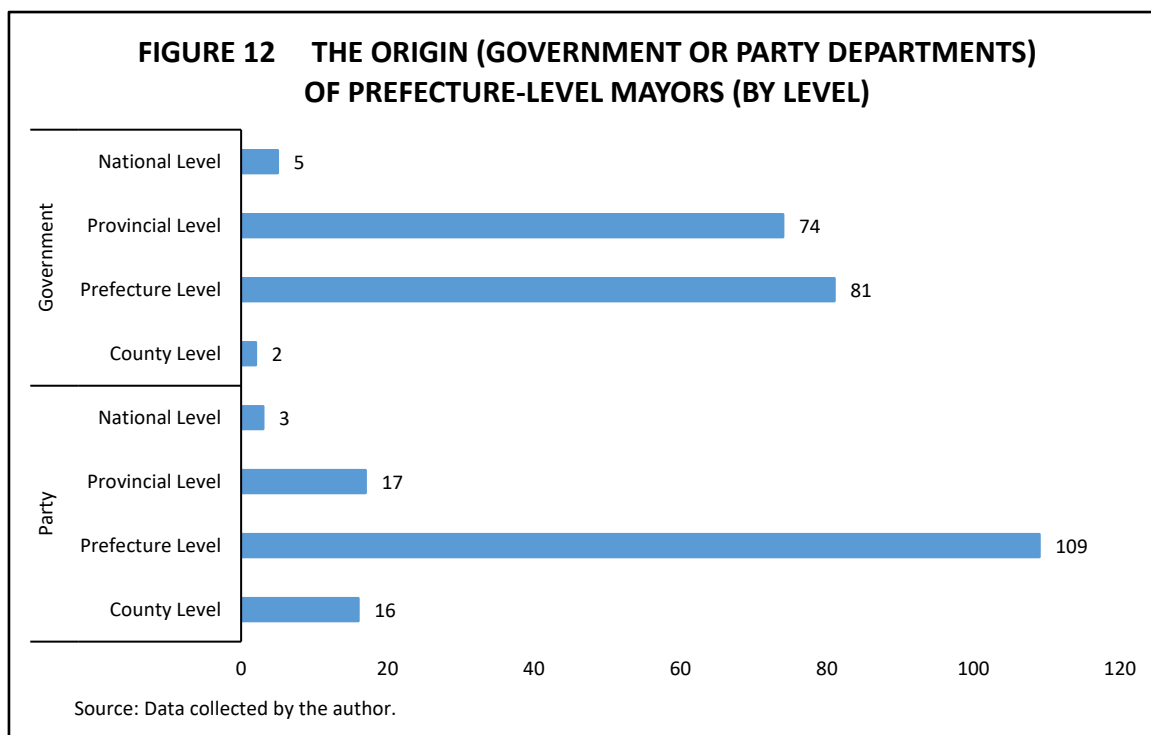
Source: Data collected by the author.

FIGURE 11 THE BACKGROUND OF PREFECTURE-LEVEL MAYORS



Source: Data collected by the author.

3.10 Moreover, those who had worked in municipal party committees are more likely to be mayors than others. According to Figure 12, most of the cadres once held positions in the departments of municipal party committees, city governments or provincial governments. Compared with those prefecture-level party secretaries, mayors mostly come from county party committees and few come from the State Council.



The CPC's Choice

- 4.1 The CPC has been reshuffling sub-national leaderships in late 2021 through selecting and appointing cadres in party committees, and seeking support from local officials in elections. Meanwhile, it formulated new rules for elections and party organisation work to further strengthen the role of SCPCs in personnel arrangement at all levels.
- 4.2 After the elections, current municipal leaders will probably remain in their positions for years. They will be the critical supporting cadres for Xi Jinping's leadership after the 20th National Party Congress and for implementing national plans and policies.
- 4.3 The profiles of the vice provincial party secretaries and mayors indicate the CPC's personnel preferences as well as some trends in selecting and cultivating candidates for leadership positions. First, the party has accelerated personnel reshuffle after 2020. It also selected relatively younger ones in the two years; particularly, in 2021, 15 out of 20 new cadres were below the average age of 56.4.

- 4.4 Second, for both party secretaries and mayors, the CPC pays attention to their performance at vice prefecture level and cultivates them for a longer period than those who are one level higher or below them. This long period should be a response to Xi Jinping's speech on organisational work when he criticised the fast-paced promotion ("*huojian tiba*") of young cadres and its negative impacts on society.¹⁷
- 4.5 In addition, a vice provincial party secretary may have to spend about the same amount of time at both vice prefecture and prefecture levels, while a mayor may stay at the former level for twice the time of the latter.
- 4.6 Third, the CPC promotes cadres to the department of provincial party committee or government before deploying them to an important city. For about a half of them, their first positions at the vice provincial level were vice governors or vice mayors of the MCGs, while one fifth of them were subsequently appointed to the provincial SCPCs. It shows that the party trains key municipal leaders at upper-level organisations.
- 4.7 Compared with vice provincial leaders, the profiles of prefecture-level cadres demonstrate the party's diverse personnel preferences. In general, prefecture-level cadres are almost three years younger than the vice provincial ones. Furthermore, within the prefecture level, party secretaries are three years older than mayors.
- 4.8 Notably, the CPC is evidently assigning young cadres at the prefecture level in 2021. It filled this level with about 54% of new faces who are aged 53.58 on average, an age which is 1.3 years younger than that of all party secretaries. New mayors' average age is 50.85, slightly younger than that of all mayors (51.9).
- 4.9 Moreover, the entry age of a cadre at the vice prefecture level shows that it is a more rapid climb up the administrative ladder for the young ones than others. The vice provincial party secretaries were 37.9 years old on average when first appointed at the vice prefecture level, while that for vice provincial mayors, prefecture party secretaries and prefecture mayors respectively were 40.1, 41.7 and 42.0.

¹⁷ Xi Jinping zai quanguo zuzhi huiyi shang de jianghua (Xi Jinping's Speech on National Organisation Work), available at <https://www.12371.cn/2018/09/17/ART11537150840597467.shtml>, accessed 19 October 2021.

- 4.10 The experience of prefecture-level cadres also demonstrates the CPC's special choices and training approach for city leaders. The party mainly chooses candidates from local governments and party committees to be municipal leaders, though the party central requires identifying talents from diversified sources to build local leadership. Only a small number of cadres came from social organisations and SOEs.
- 4.11 Moreover, the CPC prefers to assign cadres from the government to oversee cities. It often seeks candidates from municipal and provincial governments for promotion to the prefecture level. The second source for prefecture leaders is the branches of municipal party committees.
- 4.12 The CPC's emphasis on the importance of cadres' experience at county level is evident in its recent announcement for cultivating municipal leaders. This rule is well implemented. Among the 360 prefecture-level party secretaries, 101 were once party secretaries of counties, county-level cities or prefecture-level districts, and for current mayors it is 94.
- 4.13 Among current municipal leaders, the promising ones may go further than others in political career due to their advantages in age, gender, race, appointment year, working experience and economic importance of their administrations (see Appendix 1).

APPENDIX 1 THE PROMISING MUNICIPAL LEADERS

Name	City	Province	Position	Advantages
Sun Junmin	Xicheng	Beijing	Party Secretary	51, Female and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Wang Lan	Changning	Shanghai	Party Secretary	Female, 47, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Guo Fang	Hongkou	Shanghai	Party Secretary	51, Female, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Chen Jie	Baoshan	Shanghai	Party Secretary	52, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Li Chunkui	Jiulongpo	Chongqing	Party Secretary	52, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Wang Zhijie	Fulin	Chongqing	Party Secretary	49, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Cao Bangxing	Wushan	Chongqing	Party Secretary	48, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Zheng Ke	Foshan	Guangdong	Party Secretary	Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a city of GDP Top 30
Kang Tao	Quanzhou	Fujian	Party Secretary	Appointed in 2020 and Overseeing a city of GDP Top 30
Xiao Yafei	Dongguan	Guangdong	Party Secretary	Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a city of GDP Top 30
Fu Mingxian	Yantai	Shandong	Party Secretary	Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a city of GDP Top 30
Chen Jinhu	Changzhou	Jiangsu	Party Secretary	Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a city of GDP Top 30
Pu Hong	Lijiang	Yunnan	Party Secretary	49, Female and Appointed in 2021
Pubudunzhu	Shigatse	Tibet	Party Secretary	49, Ethnic Minority and Appointed in 2020
Zhong Xiaoyong	Xuhui	Shanghai	District Governor	49, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Gao Yiyi	Baoshan	Shanghai	District Governor	49, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Xu Jian	Qingpu	Shanghai	District Governor	49, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Yuan Quan	Fengxian	Shanghai	District Governor	45, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Tao Shixiang	Jiangbei	Chongqing	District Governor	49, Appointed in 2021 and Overseeing a district of an MCG
Peng Yingmei	Ya'an	Sichuan	Mayor	42, Female and Appointed in 2021
Ye Wanbin	Guoluo	Qinghai	Mayor	44, Ethnic Minority and Appointed in 2021

Source: Data collected by the author and Sina.com.¹⁸

¹⁸ 2020 nian zhongguo chengshi 100 qiang (The GDP top 100 cities in 2020), available from <https://finance.sina.com.cn/tech/2021-04-08/doc-ikmyaawa8444720.shtml>, accessed 2 October 2021.