

The New Party Politburo Leadership

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The processes of generational turnover of China's leadership at the Chinese Communist Party's 18th National Congress extended patterns of formal politics that trace their roots to Deng Xiaoping's political reforms of the 1980s, that advanced in the Jiang Zemin era in the 1990s, and that matured under outgoing General Secretary Hu Jintao in the 2000s. As such, the transition in the party leadership at the 18th Congress marked another step forward in the institutionalization of Chinese leadership politics.

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 18th National Congress convened in Beijing on 8-14 November 2012, and, following normal precedent, the newly elected 18th Central Committee held its First Plenum on the 15th. The convocation of the congress was late by the standard of previous congresses in the post-Mao era, which have usually met in September or October. Its dates replicate almost precisely the dates of the 2002 16th Party Congress, the occasion of the last turnover in leadership generations, suggesting that leadership transitions of this scale provoke greater political contention and so incur delay.¹

The Politburo

As widely anticipated, the scale of leadership turnover at the party congress was extensive. Among the 24 members of the outgoing 17th Central Committee Politburo who remained after the removal of Bo Xilai earlier in 2012, 14 retired, all on the basis of the party norm that members 68 or older by the time of a party congress step down. Among the nine members of the Politburo's Standing Committee, seven retired. In addition, 8 of 12 members of the party's Central Military Commission (CMC) stepped down, including Chairman Hu Jintao, and 5 of 6 members of the party Secretariat exited (though not entirely through retirement). As Table 1 shows, the scale of turnover easily surpasses that at the intra-generational 17th Congress in 2007 and rivals that at the 16th in 2002:

Table 1: *Leadership Turnover at the 16th, 17th, and 18th Party Congresses*

	16 th Congress	17 th Congress	18 th Congress
Politburo	14 of 22	9 of 25	15 of 25
Politburo Standing Committee	6 of 7	4 of 9	7 of 9
Central Military Commission	6 of 9	2 of 11	8 of 12
Secretariat	6 of 7	5 of 7	5 of 6

Table 2 lists the 25 members of the Politburo elected at the 18th Central Committee's First Plenum on 15 November. Numbers in parentheses indicate each member's age in 2012. Other posts that each leader holds concurrently are listed alongside each name. The party leadership changes at the 18th Congress portend sweeping changes in the make-up of the State Council executive committee at the 12th National People's Congress in March 2013, and appointments anticipated (with differing degrees of certainty) to be made then are indicated in curly brackets.

Table 2: The 18th Central Committee Politburo

Standing Committee (7 members, rank order)

XI JINPING 习近平 (59)	CCP general secretary; chairman, CCP CMC; {chairman, PRC CMC; PRC president; director, CC FALSG & TALSG}.
LI KEQIANG 李克强 (57)	{State Council premier; director, CC Fin. & Econ. LSG}.
ZHANG DEJIANG 张德江 (67)	{Chairman, National People's Congress}.
YU ZHENGSHENG 俞正声 (67)	{Chairman, CPPCC}.
LIU YUNSHAN 刘云山 (65)	Executive secretary, Secretariat; {president, Central Party School; vice president, PRC}.
WANG QISHAN 王岐山 (64)	Chairman, Central Discipline Inspection Commission.
ZHANG GAOLI 张高丽 (66)	{Executive vice premier}.

Regular Members (18 members, stroke order)

MA KAI 马凯 (66)	Secretary-general, State Council.
WANG HUNING 王沪宁 (57)	{Vice premier or state councilor?}
LIU YANDONG 刘延东 (67)	State councilor.
LIU QIBAO 刘奇葆 (59)	Director, CC Propaganda Department.
XU QILIANG 许其亮 (62)	Vice Chairman, CCP {& PRC} CMC.
SUN CHUNLAN 孙春兰 (62)	Secretary, Tianjin CP.
SUN ZHENGCAI 孙政才 (49)	Secretary, Chongqing CP.
LI JIANGUO 李建国 (66)	Secretary-general, NPC Standing Committee.
LI YUANCHAO 李源潮 (62)	{Vice premier or state councilor?}
WANG YANG 汪洋 (57)	{Vice premier or state councilor?}
ZHANG CHUNXIAN 张春贤 (59)	Secretary, Xinjiang AR CCP.
FAN CHANGLONG 范长龙 (65)	Vice chairman, CCP CMC.
MENG JIANZHU 孟建柱 (65)	Secretary, CC Political and Legal Affairs Commission.
ZHAO LEJI 赵乐际 (55)	Director, CC Organization Dept.
HU CHUNHUA 胡春华 (49)	Secretary, Guangdong CP.
LI ZHANSHU 栗战书 (62)	Director, CC General Office.
GUO JINLONG 郭金龙 (65)	Secretary, Beijing CP.
HAN ZHENG 韩正 (58)	Secretary, Shanghai, CP.

Attributes of the New Politburo

Appendix 1 below lists several background characteristics—age and generation, regional origin, education, military experience, and major work experience—of the 25 members of the Xi Politburo. Taken as a group, the new Politburo in many respects shares the attributes of Politburo members since the early 1990s. Specifically, the new Politburo's members embody the “post-revolutionary” characteristics sought by Deng Xiaoping in

promoting Party leaders since the early 1980s—that they be “younger, better educated, and more competent” and so suited to the progress of China’s modernizing reforms and not to Mao’s priority on waging class warfare.

- *Age*: The new Politburo continues the pattern established in the 1990s of electing leaders who on average are in their early 60s. The average age of the new Politburo’s members is slightly over 61, as compared to the average age of 62 on appointment to the 17th Central Committee Politburo in 2007. The average age on appointment of the Politburo elected with Hu Jintao as general secretary at the 16th CCP Congress was 60, and of the Politburo appointed at the 15th Party Congress in 1997—when Jiang Zemin consolidated power as Party leader—was 63. By contrast, the average age of the Politburo membership elected at the 12th Party Congress in 1982, when Deng Xiaoping consolidated power, was 72.
- *Education*: The new Politburo furthers the 1990s trend of electing leaders possessing university degrees. Among the new Politburo’s 25 members, 19 have university degrees, one has a military academy degree, and the remaining five have credentials from the Central Party School. Among the 25 members of the Politburo appointed in 2007, 23 had university degrees. Among the group elected to the Politburo in 2002, 22 had university degrees, while the 24 members of the Politburo elected in 1997 with Jiang Zemin included 17 degree-holders. By contrast, no one in the 1982 Politburo had a university degree. The slight dip in numbers in the new Politburo from previous years may reflect the disruptions in the normal course of education in the years of the Cultural Revolution spanning the late 1960s and early 1970s, when many of its members came of age.
- *Regional origins*: The new Politburo membership reverses the slight tilt in balance between leaders who hail from the coastal provinces—the backbone of economic reform—and those from the interior that characterized the 2007 Politburo. The new Politburo counts 14 members from the coastal provinces, 11 from the central provinces, and none from the western regions; the 2007 Politburo included 10 leaders come from the coastal provinces, 15 from the central provinces, and none from the western provinces. The 2002 Politburo leadership showed a similar balance, with 11 hailing from the coastal provinces and the rest from the interior.
- *Military experience*: As has been the case since the 1990s, the new Politburo leadership continues to be strongly civilian. Among the new Politburo’s 25 members, 21 have no military experience of any kind, either through service in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) or through work in the military bureaucracies. Among the 25 members of the 2007 Politburo, 22 had no military experience—the three exceptions being two professional military men who were serving concurrently in high military posts and, significantly, Hu’s intended successor, Xi Jinping. In the new Politburo, the four having military experience include the two new CMC chairmen Fan Changlong and Xu Qiliang, Xi Jinping,

and Xinjiang party chief Zhang Chunxian, who served five years as a PLA soldier in the early 1970s.

In addition, some characteristics of the new leaders bear out trends that emerged in the leadership of the past decade. The first trend is the rise of leaders in the top echelon of the party whose political careers began during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Among the members of the Xi Politburo, 15 joined the CCP during the Cultural Revolution. Another ten joined after, and only three joined before. Among the 2007 Hu Politburo, 12 among the 25 members joined the CCP during the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976) and another 3 joined in its aftermath. The remainder joined in the early '60s, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. The group elected in 2002 with Hu Jintao as general secretary had predominantly become Party members in the decade preceding the Cultural Revolution.

Those who joined the CCP during and after the decade of the Cultural Revolution undoubtedly share the judgment of those who, like Hu Jintao, joined the Party before the disastrous consequences of Mao's "revolutionary" movement. But their experiences at the very beginning of their Party careers are also likely to have been different from those of their older colleagues and may lead them to alternative perspectives and preferences in current politics.

In addition, the presence of "sixth generation" leaders in the ranks of the Politburo—Sun Zhengcai and Hu Chunhua, at age 49—marks the emergence of leaders whose active experience of the Cultural Revolution stems from their early childhood. The rise of that generation of leaders augurs the approaching moment when that era of tumultuous Maoist politics passes from personal memory.

Second, the new Xi Politburo leadership continues the trend begun in 2007 of a smaller proportion of "technocratic" leaders—those with university degrees in engineering or the hard sciences—in favor of leaders who studied the social science or humanities. Epitomizing the technocratic trend among leaders who dominated the 1990s, the 1997 Jiang Politburo counted 16 of 17 degree-holders in those fields, including 14 engineers. The 2002 Hu Politburo counted 17 engineers and one geologist among its 22 degree-holders. By contrast, among the 23 degree-holders on the 2007 Hu Politburo, only 11 were engineers and two were in the hard sciences or mathematics. The remaining 10 degree-holders included four economists, one political scientist, and three in the humanities.

Among the 18 members of the new Xi Politburo who hold university degrees, only four are engineers, and one (Li Yuanchao) holds a degree in mathematics. Meanwhile, the group includes six with economics degrees, two in international relations, two in Chinese literature, one in history (yay!) and one in political science (groan!). The heavy dominance in the 1990s of leaders holding university degrees in technical fields may reflect in part the political reality that in the 1950s and early 1960s, those fields were safer than social sciences and humanities in that ideologically charged era. The broadening diversity in educational credentials among the members of the 2007 and the

new Politburos may reflect in turn the rise of leaders better suited to the challenges of governing an increasingly complex society and economy rather than to the lopsided pursuit of high-speed economic growth and development of technology that their technocratic predecessors favored in the 1990s.

Finally, the Xi Politburo counts several holders of advanced degrees among its number, extending the trend that began in 2007. The 2007 Hu Politburo included three members—Xi Jinping, Li Yuanchao, and Liu Yandong—who hold law degrees, while Li Keqiang has a doctorate in economics, and two members have master’s degrees. Among the new Xi Politburo, 13 have postgraduate degrees, including the same three in law and four in economics.

The Politburo Standing Committee

Before the party congress convened, rumors proliferated that the Politburo Standing Committee—the party’s core decision-making group—would be shrunk from nine members—its size across Hu Jintao’s tenure as general secretary—to seven, its size during Jiang Zemin’s. There were plausible reasons for crediting these rumors. For one thing, the party’s constitution says nothing about the size of the Standing Committee, and across the post-Mao period, the Standing Committee has varied significantly in size, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The size of the CCP Politburo and Standing Committee, 1982–2011

<i>Central Committee</i>	<i>General secretary</i>	<i>Standing Committee</i>	<i>Full Politburo</i>
12 th (1982)	Hu Yaobang	6 members	25 + 3 alternates
13 th (1987)	Zhao Ziyang	5 members	17 + 1 alternate
14 th (1992)	Jiang Zemin	7 members	20 + 2 alternates
15 th (1997)	Jiang Zemin	7 members	22 + 2 alternates
16 th (2002)	Hu Jintao	9 members	24 + 1 alternate
17 th (2007)	Hu Jintao	9 members	25

For another thing, a reduction in size might have been under consideration to facilitate decision-making among a collective leadership that, with nine members, found it difficult to establish consensus about how to deal with the daunting array of issues and dilemmas the Hu leadership faced. The evidence that Standing Committee policymaking had become paralyzed is circumstantial but compelling. In Hu Jintao’s first term as general secretary, the nine-member Standing Committee launched several new policy departures in steady succession. These began with Hu Jintao’s enunciation of his new leadership’s focus on a “people-centered” policy agenda in December 2002, followed by the launch of the “scientific development concept” in 2003, the emergence of a goal of building a “socialist harmonious society” in 2004—ratified by party resolution in 2006, and the promotion of a campaign to build a “new socialist countryside” in 2005.

Across the entire five-year span of Hu's second term as general secretary, however, no new policy departures of this scale were proclaimed. Instead, despite mounting problems, symptoms of a top leadership unable to make major decisions appeared. For example, economic reform appeared to drift while state-owned enterprises crept into economic dominance (summarized in Chinese parlance as 国进民退). Beijing's longstanding ability to coordinate the actions of its foreign and security apparatus seemed to fail, allowing a burgeoning array of new actors with competing and conflicting interests to clutter and complicate China's international relations. In addition, since 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao's complaints about the need for political reform persisted, but with increasing bluntness. And the leadership seemed uncertain about how to deal with rising dissatisfaction and activism among an increasingly restive and wired society. New steps to enhance the ability of the party leadership to deal more effectively with the issues it faced therefore seemed a reasonable possibility.

In the end, the First Plenum did appoint a Standing Committee reduced to seven members. Some analyses have attributed this change to factional politics, in particular to the successful machinations of the long-retired general secretary, 85-year old Jiang Zemin, and his henchman Zeng Qinghong. Their aim was to limit the appointment of Hu Jintao's cronies in the new leadership and so reduce Hu's influence in retirement, while also promoting Jiang's own factional followers and sustaining his own influence.² Appointments to the Standing Committee reflected this factional calculus. For example, Tianjin party chief Zhang Gaoli and Chongqing party chief Zhang Dejiang—presumed to be Jiang faction adherents—were promoted on to the Standing Committee while Organization Department Director Li Yuanchao and Guangdong party chief Wang Yang—presumed to be associated with Hu Jintao—were excluded. Jiang's ability to stack the Standing Committee thus replicated his purported success at this same feat during the last turnover of leadership generations, at the 16th Party Congress in 2002, when he retired as party chief.

It's Just Arithmetic

Another explanation for the appointments to the Standing Committee is simpler and, because it does not rest on often slippery speculation about the factional linkages of individual leaders, more efficient. In this view, the promotions to the Standing Committee reflect the simple criterion of seniority.

This perspective emerges when the leadership is assessed using the concept of generational cohorts, which are defined by party stipulations regarding tenure and retirement.³ The CCP constitution mandates that national party congresses convene every five years, a stipulation that the party has rigorously observed since 1982, when the current constitution was adopted at the 12th Party Congress. This regularity in convocation of party congresses means that Politburo members serve five-year terms. In addition, the party has instituted a norm in 2002—observed consistently in the leadership transitions at the 2002 16th, 2007 17th, and now the 18th Party Congresses—that Politburo members achieving age 68 retire at the next party congress. These two stipulations effectively create a calculus of retirement and succession, dividing Politburo members

into cohorts based on their terms of membership and the dates of their anticipated retirement. For example, according to the age 68 norm, all Politburo leaders born between the years 1940 and 1944 were expected to retire at the 18th Party Congress—1944 because leaders born in that year would be 68 in 2012, and 1940 because leaders born before that year retired at the 2007 congress.

The two stipulations in effect create a process whereby the general secretary, the party's top leader, serves two consecutive five-year terms in that position and then retires. Hu Jintao, born in 1942, became party chief in 2002 at age 60; he turned 68 in 2010 and so retired at the 18th Party Congress this year. Xi Jinping was born in 1953 and so was 59 when he succeeded Hu; he will turn 68 in 2021 and presumably will retire in 2022. The expectation that the party general secretary serve two consecutive five-year terms and so be about 60 when promoted to the post presumably was one criterion in selecting the pool of candidates for the post that included Xi.

Hong Kong and Western observers of China's leadership politics have grown accustomed to describing CCP leaders in terms of leadership generations, even though PRC media no longer do so. The designation of "leadership generations" goes back to 1989, when, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crisis and the removal of party chief Zhao Ziyang, Deng Xiaoping called new General Secretary Jiang Zemin the "core leader" of the "third generation" leadership collective. He further described Mao Zedong as "core leader of the first generation leadership collective" and himself as "core leader" of the second. Throughout his 13-year tenure as general secretary, Jiang was routinely referred to in these terms.

From the very beginning of his tenure as party chief in 2002, PRC media as a rule did not refer to Hu Jintao as "core leader" of the "fourth generation" leadership. This omission was one of several steps taken to reduce the stature of the party general secretary relative to his Politburo colleagues and to reinforce collective leadership processes. Reference to "leadership generations" has therefore fallen out of use in PRC media, although foreign observers continue to use it.

Following that convention in referring to Hu Jintao as a fourth generation leader and Xi Jinping as a fifth generation leader, Politburo cohorts may be grouped accordingly. Because Hu has served two terms as party chief, the "fourth generation" Politburo members divide into two groups—a senior group that includes those in Hu's five-year age cohort and a junior group that includes those who fall into the next five-year group. Because Xi is likely intended also to serve two five-year terms, the "fifth generation" leadership also divides into two—a senior cohort and a junior cohort. Using this terminology, Politburo leadership generations break down as follows:

Table 4
Politburo Leadership Generations

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Leadership Generation</i>	<i>Designation</i>
1930-1934	Jiang senior cohort	3.0
1935-1939	Jiang junior cohort	3.5
1940-1944	Hu senior cohort	4.0
1945-1949	Hu junior cohort	4.5
1950-1954	Xi senior cohort	5.0
1955-1959	Xi junior cohort	5.5
1960-1964	senior cohort	6.0
1965-1969	junior cohort	6.5

Table 5 applies these generational cohort categories to the 17th (2007) Politburo leadership.

Table 5
Leadership Generational Cohorts in the 17th CC Politburo

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth Date</i>	<i>Generation</i>	<i>Expected Retirement*</i>
Standing Committee			
Hu Jintao	1942	4.0	2012
Wu Bangguo	1941	4.0	2012
Wen Jiabao	1942	4.0	2012
Jia Qinglin	1940	4.0	2012
Li Changchun	1944	4.0	2012
Xi Jinping	1953	5.0	2022
Li Keqiang	1955	5.5	2027
He Guoqiang	1943	4.0	2012
Zhou Yongkang	1942	4.0	2012
Regular Members			
Wang Gang	1942	4.0	2012
Wang Lequan	1944	4.0	2012
Wang Zhaoguo	1941	4.0	2012
Wang Qishan	1948	4.5	2017
Hui Liangyu	1944	4.0	2012
Liu Qi	1942	4.0	2012
Liu Yunshan	1947	4.5	2017
Liu Yandong	1945	4.5	2017
Li Yuanchao	1950	5.0	2022
Wang Yang	1955	5.5	2027
Zhang Gaoli	1946	4.5	2017
Zhang Dejiang	1946	4.5	2017
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	4.5	2017
Xu Caihou	1943	4.0	2012
Guo Boxiong	1942	4.0	2012

Table 6 applies these generational cohort categories to the 10 members of the 2007 Politburo who were eligible for reappointment and potential promotion to the new Standing Committee in 2012.

Table 6

Leadership Generations among Eligible Hold-Over Leaders for the 18th CC Politburo

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth Date</i>	<i>Generation</i>	<i>Expected Retirement*</i>
Xi Jinping	1953	5.0	2022
Li Keqiang	1955	5.5	2027
Wang Qishan	1948	4.5	2017
Liu Yandong	1945	4.5	2017
Liu Yunshan	1947	4.5	2017
Zhang Gaoli	1946	4.5	2017
Zhang Dejiang	1946	4.5	2017
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	4.5	2017
Li Yuanchao	1950	5.0	2022
Wang Yang	1955	5.5	2027

From this analysis of generational cohorts in the Politburo leadership, the logic of Politburo Standing Committee appointments at the 18th Party Congress emerges in straightforward fashion. All 14 generation 4.0 members of the 2007 Politburo retired, as mandated by the age 68 norm. Of the remaining 10 members of the 2007 Politburo who did not retire, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang retained their seats on the Standing Committee, consistent with the intention that they succeed as party general secretary and State Council premier, respectively. Among the remaining eight, six were in cohort 4.5 and two were fifth generation leaders—Li Yuanchao (5.0) and Wang Yang (5.5). The five leaders promoted to fill out the seven-member Standing Committee came from the cohort 4.5 group. The only cohort 4.5 leader not promoted was female state councilor Liu Yandong—a choice that is difficult not to interpret as a product of gender discrimination—no girls allowed in the Politburo Standing Committee clubhouse. The two leaders from the fifth generation, Liu Yuanchao and Wang Yang, were excluded simply on the basis of seniority. They will presumably be eligible for Standing Committee membership in 2017 at the 19th Party Congress, when all five of the 4.5 cohort leaders promoted onto the Standing Committee will retire according to the age 68 norm. In conclusion, it's just arithmetic.

In hindsight, the same logic of seniority prevailed during the last transition in leadership generations, at the 16th Party Congress in 2002. In that instance, all eight of the members of the outgoing 15th Central Committee Politburo who did not retire were elevated to the 16th Central Committee Politburo Standing Committee, expanding that body to nine members. The logic of seniority also is evident in the rankings of Standing Committee members since 2002. The four new members added to the Standing Committee in 2007, for example, were ranked after the five who retained their seats on the body from the preceding term. Similarly on the basis of seniority, in the current line-up premier-designate Li Keqiang is listed ahead of Zhang Dejiang, who will presumably be

appointed NPC chairman in March 2013, reversing the ranking of the NPC chairman and State Council premier in the outgoing 2007 Standing Committee.

Xi Jinping and Collective Leadership

The Hu Jintao leadership operated according to a cluster of practices that, among other goals, appeared aimed at inhibiting the ability of any single member of the leadership collective—and the general secretary, in particular—from asserting dominating power over the rest. That goal was addressed by means of several techniques, among which were circumscribing the authority of the general secretary, balancing institutional constituencies on the Politburo, and limiting the presence of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) on the Politburo.⁴

While the apparent paralysis in policymaking in Hu Jintao’s second term might have argued on behalf of strengthening the hand of the general secretary so that Xi Jinping could more easily break deadlocks in the Standing Committee, the Hu era system of reinforcing collective leadership appears so far to have been retained rather than reformed.

For one thing, media references to the new leadership indicate that Xi’s stature in the leadership has not been elevated. During his entire tenure as general secretary, Hu Jintao was not described in PRC media as the “core leader” of the leadership collective. Instead, the media referred simply to the 16th or 17th Central Committee leadership “with Comrade Hu Jintao as general secretary,” indicating that he was simply first among equals among the Standing Committee and the full Politburo. Since the 18th Party Congress, this same formulation has been retained, referring simply to the 18th Central Committee “with Comrade Xi Jinping as general secretary.” By contrast, Jiang Zemin was constantly referred to as “core” of the 14th and 15th Central Committee leaderships during his 1989–2002 tenure as general secretary.

Second, the Xi leadership appears to have retained Hu-era efforts to balance representation on the Politburo of major institutional constituencies—the party apparatus, organs of the PRC state, and the provinces. Leaving aside the four heads of the major hierarchies (Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, and Jia Qinglin), the 2007 Hu Politburo membership broke down into institutional constituencies, as shown in Table 7. Membership of the 16th Politburo broke down into identically balanced institutional groupings. This balancing of institutional constituencies in the Politburo may have borrowed from Soviet practice—the Soviet leadership used a similar system of institutional balancing in the Brezhnev period. As in the Soviet case, this balancing appeared intended to reinforce collective leadership among the Politburo oligarchy by inhibiting any single institutional sector from overwhelming the interests of the others and by inhibiting any single leader—and especially the general secretary—from using any single group as a base of power to assert dominance over the rest of the leadership collective.

Table 7

Representation of Institutional Constituencies on the 17th Central Committee Politburo (2007)

<i>Party apparatus</i>	<i>State organs</i>	<i>Regional</i>	<i>Military/Security</i>
Li Changchun	Li Keqiang	Wang Lequan	Zhou Yongkang
Xi Jinping	Wang Zhaoguo	Liu Qi	
He Guoqiang	Wang Qishan	Wang Yang	Gen. Xu Caihou
Wang Gang	Hui Liangyu	Zhang Gaoli	Gen. Guo Boxiong
Liu Yunshan	Liu Yandong	Yu Zhengsheng	
Li Yuanchao	Zhang Dejiang	Bo Xilai	

The Xi leadership appears to have retained this approach to institutional balance. Although appointments to some posts in the NPC and State Council are still uncertain and there may yet be changes among some leaders in party posts, and again leaving aside the four heads of the major hierarchies (Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Zhang Dejiang, and Yu Zhengsheng), institutional constituencies among members of the Xi Politburo similarly seem fairly closely balanced:

Table 8

Representation of Institutional Constituencies on the 18th Central Committee Politburo (2007)

<i>Party apparatus</i>	<i>State organs</i>	<i>Regional</i>	<i>Military/Security</i>
Liu Yunshan	Zhang Gaoli	Sun Chunlan	Meng Jianzhu
Wang Qishan	Ma Kai	Sun Zhengcai	
Liu Qibao	Wang Huning	Zhang Chunxian	Gen. Fan Changlong
Zhao Leqi	Liu Yandong	Hu Chunhua	Gen. Xu Qiliang
Li Zhanshu	Li Jianguo	Guo Jinlong	
	Li Yuanchao	Han Zheng	
	Wang Yang		

Finally, as Tables 7 and 8 show, the sharply limited representation of the PLA and the internal security sectors continues. The constrained representation on the Politburo of the PLA—which has since 1987 been limited to two or fewer members—seems in particular to be aimed particularly at limiting the general secretary from using the armed forces as a base of dictatorial power as Mao had done.

Institutionalization?

The evident contention in the run-up to the 18th Congress—apparently delaying its convocation—has invited the impression that efforts in the post-Mao period to institutionalize politics in the CCP and overcome the free-for-all power struggles that characterized the later Mao era had proven ephemeral after all. A step back to assess the outcome of the 18th Congress from a broader perspective, however, points to the opposite

conclusion. Arguably, the congress advanced rather than retarded the progress of institutionalization. In particular:

- However much leadership combat preceded it, the 18th Congress convened according to the prescribed five-year stipulation in the party constitution. This, together with the consistent convocation of Central Committee plenums and other subordinate institutions in the run-up to the congress, accords with the fastidious adherence to formal party processes characteristic of the entire post-Mao reform era. A quick review of the irregularity of party processes in the heyday of Mao Zedong's "revolutionary" politics ought to assure that the institutionalization of party congress processes is no trivial achievement. However intense leadership competition and conflict may have been at various times in the reform era, they have not derailed adherence to the formal provisions of the party constitution in this regard.
- The CCP leadership has delivered another orderly and deliberate transfer of power at the top, in which an established party chief has retired in favor of a younger leader prepared to succeed him. The first of these transitions was Hu Jintao's succession to Jiang Zemin as party general secretary in 2002, a transfer of power that appeared patterned after the staggered retirement of Deng Xiaoping in 1987-1990. In this case, the transfer of power proceeded in the absence of the imprimatur of Deng Xiaoping, which shored up Hu's accession to the top.
- Institutionalization of orderly transfer of power at the top was arguably advanced with Hu Jintao's decision to retire concurrently as CMC chairman, the top military post in China's political order, and to give the post to Xi Jinping immediately, rather than retaining it for two years as Jiang Zemin had done in 2002.
- As it had been in 2002 and 2007, the age 68 retirement norm was applied again to Politburo membership at the 18th Congress. PRC media affirmed in 2007, in the wake of the 17th Party Congress leadership changes, that the norm was not arbitrary. "The retirement of the three members of the Standing Committee born before 1940... manifests the rigorous rule of 'retirement of members of the Politburo Standing Committee at the age of 68,'" one account stated. "The institutionalization and standardization of the replacement of high-level leaders have not only assured political stability but also set an example for the transfer of power in the future," it predicted.⁵ Adherence to this norm across three party congresses confirms its consolidation.
- The mechanical appointments to the Politburo Standing Committee according to a logic of seniority, evident first at the transition between leadership generations in 2002 and again in 2012, arguably deflects and undercuts factional competition as the basis of promotions at that level during moments of inter-generational turnover. As such, it enhances the trend toward institutionalization in leadership politics.

The argument that leadership politics has seen a process of incremental institutionalization since the early 1980s does not mean that leadership competition and conflict have died away. To the contrary, Chinese leaders remain as competitive, ambitious, and power-seeking as leaders everywhere. The difference is simply that they now compete for power within increasingly consolidated institutions and according to increasingly established norms of accepted political behavior, making the struggles of the current era a world apart from the ruthless, anti-institutional politics of the later Mao era.

Appendix 1: Attributes of the 18th Central Committee Politburo

	Born	Gen.	Province	Major	Advanced	Joined CCP	Military?	Main Work Experience
PBSC								
Xi Jinping	1953	5.0	Shaanxi	Chemical eng.	LLD	1974	yes	Fujian, Zhejiang
Li Keqiang	1955	5.5	Anhui	Economics	PhD economics	1976	no	CYL, Henan
Zhang Dejiang	1946	4.5	Liaoning	Economics (Kim Il-song University)		1971	no	Jilin/Yanbian
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	4.5	Zhejiang	Missile guidance		1964	no	Shandong 1985-97
Liu Yunshan	1947	4.5	Shanxi	CPS degree.		1971	no	Neimenggu 1964-93
Wang Qishan	1948	4.5	Shanxi	History		1983	no	Central & rural finance
Zhang Gaoli	1946	4.5	Fujian	Economics		1973	no	Guangdong 1970-2001
Politburo								
Ma Kai	1946	4.5	Shanghai	Political economy	MA, economics	1965	no	State Council ministries
Wang Huning	1955	5.5	Shandong	Internat'l relations	MA, law	1984	no	Fudan University; CC Policy Research Center.
Liu Yandong	1945	4.5	Jiangsu	Pol. science	LLD	1964	no	CYL, UF
Liu Qibao	1953	5.0	Anhui	Economic planning	MA, economics	1971	no	Anhui, CYL
Xu Qiliang	1950	5.0	Shandong	5 th Aviation Acad.		1967	yes	PLA-AF
Sun Chunlan	1950	5.0	Hebei	CPS study		1973	no	Liaoning 1965-2005
Sun Zhengcai	1963	6.0	Shandong	Agriculture	PhD, agriculture	1988	no	Forestry, Beijing
Li Jianguo	1946	4.5	Shandong	Chinese literature		1971	no	Tianjin 1970-97
Li Yuanchao	1950	5.0	Jiangsu	Mathematics	LLD	1978	no	Shanghai, Jiangsu
Wang Yang	1955	5.5	Anhui	CPS: pol. economy	M.Eng.	1975	no	Anhui 1972-99
Zhang Chunxian	1953	5.0	Henan	Management science	MA, management science	1973	5 yrs soldier	State Council ministries
Fan Changlong	1947	4.5	Liaoning	CPS study: econ.		1969	yes	Infantry
Meng Jianzhu	1947	4.5	Jiangsu	Systems eng.	MA eng.	1971	no	Shanghai 1968-2001
Zhao Leji	1957	5.5	Shaanxi	CPS: politics		1975	no	Qinghai 1974-2007
Hu Chunhua	1963	6.0	Hubei	Chinese literature		1983	no	Xizang 1983-2006
Li Zhanshu	1950	5.0	Hebei	Political education	MA, industrial management	1975	no	Hebei 1971-98
Guo Jinlong	1947	4.5	Jiangsu	Physics-acoustics		1979	no	Sichuan 1970-93
Han Zheng	1954	5.0	Zhejiang	Internat'l relations	MA economics	1979	no	Shanghai 1975-present

Notes

¹ Indications that preparations for the 18th Congress were contentious are discussed in “A pre-Congress miscellany,” *China Leadership Monitor* No. 39 (1 October 2012).

² A powerful analysis along these lines is Joseph Fewsmith’s article in this issue of the *Monitor*.

³ The implications of leadership generational analysis for leadership transition were laid out more fully in “Prospects for leadership solidarity,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 37 (30 April 2012).

⁴ The collective leadership system under Hu Jintao is described more fully in “The Politburo Standing Committee under Hu Jintao,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 35 (21 September 2011).

⁵ China News Service (中国通讯社), 22 October 2007.