

# Projecting the Next Politburo Standing Committee

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Analysis of appointments to the Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party shows that over the past two decades three simple rules have been followed. These rules offer a means to project appointments to the Standing Committee at the upcoming 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017. Whether in fact the Xi leadership follows the precedents set down in past appointments or instead sets them aside offers a key benchmark against which to assess Xi Jinping's strength as party leader.

The Politburo Standing Committee has been the party's key decision-making body since the beginning of the reform era in the late 1970s. Appointments to the body are routinely made at the party's national congress, held every five years, and the subsequent first plenum of the new Central Committee appointed by the party congress. The party has never publicly explained how it makes decisions as to whom it appoints to the Politburo Standing Committee. Observers outside the party in China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere have filled this information vacuum with speculation based on presumptions of factional competition, bargaining among factional chieftains, and intense jockeying among potential candidates in the run-up to a party congress.

## Three Rules

Close analysis of Standing Committee appointments over the past four party congresses, however, sheds different light on leadership procedures in this highly sensitive area. Specifically, examination of Standing Committee leader retirements and appointments at the 1997 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 17<sup>th</sup>, and 2012 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses shows that three basic rules have been followed:

- First, retirement of both Standing Committee and regular members of the Politburo has followed a defined age limit. At the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1997, the mandatory retirement age was, with one significant exception, 70 or older. At the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2002, the retirement age was lowered to 68 or older, and it has been rigorously followed since.
- Second, with the sole exception of younger leaders promoted onto the Standing Committee in preparation to succeed as party general secretary and PRC premier, new appointments to the Standing Committee have been drawn exclusively from the pool of regular members not retiring from the full Politburo.
- Third, from among the pool of eligible Politburo members, appointments to the Standing Committee have been made on the basis of age.

None of these rules has been explicitly acknowledged in publicly available party documents or leader statements or in PRC official media commentary. Their existence is instead inferred from the attributes of leaders appointed to the Politburo Standing

Committee since 1992. The appendix to this article lists all members of the Politburo Standing Committee and regular and alternate members of the full Politburo—together with their birthdates, ages at the time of successive party congresses, as well as other data—since the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1992.

The existence of the First Rule—mandatory retirement of Politburo members (including those in the Standing Committee)—has been long recognized by observers. Examination of the membership of the Politburo and its Standing Committee and their respective ages at the time of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1997 demonstrates that an age 70 or older retirement rule had been imposed for the first time. The single exception to this rule was the reappointment of General Secretary Jiang Zemin, who exceeded the age limit by a year, likely as a result of bargaining involved in setting it. Inspection of Politburo appointments at the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress shows by contrast that no age limit existed at that time.

Similarly, examination of appointments to the Politburo and its Standing Committee at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002 shows that the mandatory retirement age had been lowered from 70 to 68, without exception. As the appendix demonstrates, the age 68 or older rule was upheld thereafter at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2007 and the 18<sup>th</sup> in 2012. Though never acknowledged by the party publicly, this age criterion is known widely among Chinese observers as “(sixty-)seven up, (sixty-)eight down” (七上八下).

The Second Rule—service on the outgoing Politburo as a criterion for promotion to the incoming Standing Committee—has not been remarked on by Chinese or foreign observers, but its existence is evident upon inspection of each Standing Committee membership since 1997. With two exceptions, all leaders—30 out of 32—appointed to the Politburo Standing Committee between 1997 and 2012 were promoted from among the membership of the preceding Politburo. The two exceptions were Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, appointed at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2007. Neither had previous experience serving on the full Politburo, and they were added to prepare them to succeed Hu Jintao as party general secretary and Wen Jiabao as premier, respectively, in 2012.

### The Third Rule

The Third Rule—selection of Standing Committee members according to age—emerges clearly when the leadership is assessed using the concept of generational cohorts.<sup>2</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. This regularity in convocation of party congresses means that Politburo members serve five-year terms. This stipulation, in combination with the age 68 retirement norm, effectively creates 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 retirement rule, all Politburo leaders born during the years 1930 to 1934 were expected to retire at the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2002. Similarly, all Politburo leaders born during the years 1935 to 1939 were mandated to retire at the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2007, and

all members born during the years 1940 to 1944 were expected to retire at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

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 to reduce the stature of the party general secretary relative to his Politburo colleagues and to reinforce collective leadership processes, a practice that has continued in the Xi period. 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. Thus, because Hu 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 1**  
*Politburo Leadership Generations*

<i>Age cohort</i>	<i>Leadership generation</i>	<i>Designation</i>
1930–1934	third-generation senior cohort	3.0
1935–1939	third-generation junior cohort	3.5
1940–1944	fourth-generation senior cohort	4.0
1945–1949	fourth-generation junior cohort	4.5
1950–1954	fifth-generation senior cohort	5.0
1955–1959	fifth-generation junior cohort	5.5
1960–1964	sixth-generation senior cohort	6.0
1965–1969	sixth-generation junior cohort	6.5

The appendix incorporates these generational cohort data for all Politburo members since 1997. Using these data, we may analyze the Standing Committee promotion criteria for each of the successive party congresses since the 16<sup>th</sup> in 2002.

*The 16th CC Politburo Standing Committee Appointments*

At the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002, all leaders in cohort 3.0 and older were required to retire under the age 68 or older retirement rule.<sup>3</sup> That meant that six of seven members of the 15<sup>th</sup> Central Committee (CC) Politburo Standing Committee were required to retire, leaving only Hu Jintao, who had been groomed for 10 years to succeed Jiang as party general secretary, eligible to continue. The Congress also expanded the membership of the Standing Committee from seven to nine. Therefore, there were a total of eight slots on the Standing Committee to fill. Following the Second Rule, nine members of the 15<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo were eligible for appointment to the Standing Committee—six cohort 3.5 and four cohort 4.0 leaders:

- **Cohort 3.5:** Li Tieying, Wu Guanzheng, Luo Gan, Huang Ju, Zeng Qinghong, and Wu Yi.
- **Cohort 4.0:** Li Changchun, Wu Bangguo, Jia Qinglin, and Wen Jiabao.

Heading into the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress, it was apparent the Lie Tieying would retire. His appointment to the 15<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo in 1997 was likely a courtesy pending retirement at age 66 at the next party congress. This inference was at the time bolstered by the fact that his only concurrent post was as president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a sinecure that normally did not merit concurrent Politburo membership.

Wu Yi was not selected. Since 1949, no woman has served on the Politburo Standing Committee, from which fact we may infer that girls are not allowed in the Standing Committee clubhouse.

With eight Standing Committee slots to be filled, all eight of the remaining eligible 15<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo members were elevated to the Standing Committee. This result does not confirm the Third Rule, but it does not contradict it, either.

*The 17th CC Politburo Standing Committee Appointments*

At the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2007, all cohort 3.5 Politburo members were required to retire under the Second Rule, among them four Standing Committee members. The new Standing Committee again had nine members, meaning that four slots were open for new appointment. As the congress appointments revealed, two of those four slots were to go to two younger leaders—Xi Jinping (cohort 5.0) and Li Keqiang (cohort 5.5)—to prepare them to succeed Hu Jintao as general secretary and Wen Jiabao as PRC premier, respectively, in 2012. The slots open to holdover 15<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo members were therefore just two.

The pool of 16<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo members not retiring included seven cohort 4.0 leaders and four from cohort 4.5:

- **Cohort 4.0:** Wang Lequan, Wang Zhaoguo, Hui Liangyu, Liu Qi, Zhou Yongkang, He Guoqiang, and Guo Boxiong.
- **Cohort 4.5:** Liu Yunshan, Zhang Dejiang, Chen Liangyu, Yu Zhengsheng.

The two appointed were both cohort 4.0 leaders—Zhou Yongkang and He Guoqiang—confirming the Third Rule.

Alternative explanations may account for why Zhou and He were selected and not any of the remaining five. One possibility is that these appointments reflected efforts by Jiang Zemin to place his cronies in these sensitive positions to prevent Hu Jintao from using them to attack Jiang's faction in anti-corruption campaigns.<sup>4</sup> Another possibility is that the two men best suited the two slots to be filled under the Standing Committee's division of policy labor—party discipline, vacated by Wu Guanzheng, and internal security, vacated by Luo Gan—were He Guoqiang and Zhou Yongkang. He Guoqiang, who served as director of the party Organization Department from 2002 to 2007, was the natural successor to Wu by this logic. And Zhou Yongkang, who served as minister of public security and as deputy chairman of the CC Politics and Law Committee under Luo Gan over the same years, was the obvious successor to Luo. The prior responsibilities of the four other cohort 4.0 leaders not promoted to the Standing Committee—Xinjiang party chief Wang Lequan, NPC Vice Chairman Wang Zhaoguo, vice premier in charge of agriculture Hui Liangyu, and Beijing city party chief Liu Qi—were not as clearly relevant to the open Standing Committee slots as were Zhou's and He's.

Finally, Central Military Commission (CMC) Vice Chairman Guo Boxiong was likely not considered because military leaders, with one exception, have not been appointed to the Politburo Standing Committee since 1987. The sole exception was Liu Huaqing's appointment to the 14<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo Standing Committee in 1992. Liu was called out of retirement to serve in that post, apparently to help the civilian general secretary Jiang Zemin consolidate power over the PLA in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis and to help maintain stability in the army during the purge of the Yang brothers and as Deng Xiaoping retired.

#### *The 18<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo Standing Committee Appointments*

At the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, seven of nine Politburo Standing Committee members were slated to retire under the Second Rule. The two men who did not retire from the Standing Committee were Xi Jinping, who succeeded Hu Jintao as general secretary, and Li Keqiang, who succeeded Wen Jiabao as premier. In addition, as it turned out, the new Standing Committee was reduced from nine members to seven. That meant that there were five slots to fill.

Under the Second Rule, the pool of holdover Politburo members eligible for appointment to the Standing Committee were seven cohort 4.5 leaders, one cohort 5.0 leader, and one cohort 5.5 leader:

- **Cohort 4.5:** Wang Qishan, Liu Yunshan, Liu Yandong, Zhang Gaoli, Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, and Bo Xilai.
- **Cohort 5.0:** Li Yuanchao.
- **Cohort 5.5:** Wang Yang.

The five men promoted to the Standing Committee were all cohort 4.5 leaders, bearing out the Third Rule. One of the two not selected from among that cohort—Bo Xilai—was purged in the months prior to the party congress. The other—Liu Yandong—supports the inference that girls are not allowed in the Politburo Standing Committee clubhouse.

## Projecting the 19<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo Standing Committee

The preceding analysis of Politburo Standing Committee appointments in 2002, 2007, and 2012 bear out the three rules posited above.<sup>5</sup> Thus:

- The age 68 or older mandatory retirement rule held in all three cases;
- with the exception of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, who were promoted as eventual successors to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, all other men appointed to the Standing Committee in all three cases had previous experience on the outgoing Politburo; and
- with the exception of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, all Standing Committee appointments were drawn from the most senior generational cohorts of eligible holdover Politburo members.

Based on the premise that these apparent rules continue to hold, we may project the pool from among which the next Politburo Standing Committee will be drawn at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017.

Under the First Rule, five of the seven members of the current Politburo Standing Committee—all cohort 4.5—will retire in 2017. If the Standing Committee retains its current seven-member size, then five slots will be filled by new appointments at the party congress.

If the leadership continues its past practice of appointing leaders to prepare to succeed Xi Jinping as general secretary and Li Keqiang as premier at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2022, two of those five slots will be filled by significantly younger men. Li Keqiang will be 67 in 2022 and so will not be required to retire in that year. But he will have served two terms as premier by that time and under the PRC constitution must step down from that post, and so a successor-in-training will need to be appointed to the Standing Committee.

Who those two successors-in-training will be is, of course, a matter of speculation at this point. But at least some characteristics are predictable. For one thing, they will be drawn from cohorts 6.0 (born 1960–1964) or perhaps 6.5 (born 1965–1969). Also, they need not have previously served on the Politburo. Neither Hu Jintao nor Xi Jinping nor Li Keqiang had served on the Politburo prior to their appointment to the Standing Committee as successors-in-training. Because of their age—both were born in 1963 and so are members of the 6.0 cohort—much speculation has attached to Sun Zhengcai and especially Hu Chunhua as potential successors since their appointment in 2012 to the current Politburo. Neither Hu's nor Sun's candidacy is implausible, but, again, past selections of successors have not come from the ranks of the Politburo. Finally, it is likely that the leaders selected to replace Xi and Li in 2022 will have long experience in

the provinces, in addition to service in the capital, as was true in the case of Hu Jintao, Xi, and Li.

Under the Second Rule, the remaining three Standing Committee slots will be drawn from the pool of members not retiring from the current Politburo. That pool will consist of seven cohort 5.0 leaders, three cohort 5.5, and two cohort 6.0:

- **Cohort 5.0:** CMC Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang, Propaganda Department chief Lu Qibao, United Front Work Department Director Sun Chunlan, PRC Vice President Li Yuanchao, Xinjiang party boss Zhang Qunxian, party General Office chief Li Zhanshu, and Shanghai party boss Han Zheng.
- **Cohort 5.5:** policy adviser Wang Huning, Vice Premier Wang Yang, and party Organization Department Director Zhao Leji.
- **Cohort 6.0:** Chongqing city party chief Sun Zhengcai and Guangdong party boss Hu Chunhua.

Under the Third Rule, the three open Standing Committee slots will be selected from among the seven cohort 5.0 leaders. Among them, unless the ongoing reforms of the PLA's Central Military Commission also bring revision of the longstanding policy of not appointing military leaders to the Politburo Standing Committee, General Xu Qiliang will not be considered, reducing the pool of candidates to six.

But which three of the remaining six? From this point forward, the answers likely involve a logic of policy experience as well as the entanglements of politics, and so sheer guesswork.

In the Jiang, Hu and Xi eras, the Politburo Standing Committee has been organized according to a logic of institutional and policy representation., as Table 2 shows:

**Table 2**  
*Politburo Standing Committee Division of Policy Labor, 1997–2012*

<i>Role</i>	<i>15<sup>th</sup> CC PBSC</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> CC PBSC</i>	<i>17<sup>th</sup> CC PBSC</i>	<i>18<sup>th</sup> CC PBSC</i>
General secretary	Jiang Zemin	Hu Jintao	Hu Jintao	Xi Jinping
NPC chairman	Li Peng	Wu Bangguo	Wu Bangguo	Zhang Dejiang
Premier	Zhu Rongji	Wen Jiabao	Wen Jiabao	Li Keqiang
CPPCC chief	Li Ruihuan	Jia Qinglin	Jia Qinglin	Yu Zhengsheng
Party apparatus	Hu Jintao	Zeng Qinghong	Xi Jinping	Liu Yunshan
Propaganda chief	—	Li Changchun	Li Changchun	Liu Yunshan
CDIC chief	Wei Jianxing	Wu Guanzheng	He Guoqiang	Wang Qishan
Executive VP	Li Lanqing	Huang Ju	Li Keqiang	Zhang Gaoli
Security czar	—	Luo Gan	Zhou Yongkang	—

If this system of institutional representation and division of policy labor continues to hold in the next Standing Committee, the slots opened by retirement and to be filled are:

- National People's Congress (NPC) chairman;

- Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) chairman;
- Party Secretariat executive secretary and party apparatus deputy to Xi Jinping;
- Party Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC) chairman;
- Party propaganda czar; and
- Executive vice premier.

In the current Standing Committee, the two functions of Secretariat executive secretary and of propaganda czar have been performed by a single leader, Liu Yunshan. During the Hu period, they were separate slots and occupied by different leaders. In the Jiang period, the propaganda position was not included in the Standing Committee division of policy labor. The party Secretariat executive secretary slot has always been given to the leader being prepared to succeed the general secretary, when one was appointed to the Standing Committee. Hu Jintao served in that role from 1992 to 2002, and Xi Jinping did so from 2007 to 2012. Assuming that a successor-in-training to Xi Jinping is appointed to the Standing Committee in 2017, the Xi leadership will face the decision of what to do with the propaganda czar slot. There are three possibilities: task the new successor-in-training to fill it concurrently with his Secretariat executive secretary role, as Liu Yunshan is doing now; appoint a different leader, which would mean expanding the Standing Committee to eight; or eliminate the slot, as was done in the Jiang period. If the propaganda czar slot is retained separately from the Secretariat executive secretary slot, then the obvious choice to fill it would be current party Propaganda Department Director Lu Qibao.

The executive vice premier slot would presumably go to the leader selected to succeed Li Keqiang as premier in 2022. Li Keqiang performed that role on the Standing Committee before succeeding Wen Jiabao.

That leaves three slots to fill, and here guesswork prevails. If relevant policy experience guides the choices, then party United Front Work Department Director Sun Chunlan might seem the obvious choice for the CPPCC post. But, as we know, girls are not allowed in the Politburo Standing Committee clubhouse, and so her candidacy is dubious. As an alternative, the CPPCC slot might go to Xinjiang party boss Zhang Chunxian.

Under a relevant policy experience criterion, the open NPC chairman slot might be filled by PRC Vice President Li Yuanchao. For a time in 2015, investigations in Jiangsu Province, where Li once presided as provincial party chief, spurred speculation that he was about to fall as a “tiger” in the ongoing anti-corruption campaign. But these rumors have since died down, and so far Li does not appear to be in trouble.

Finally, the sensitive CDIC slot might go to Li Zhanshu. As General Office director, Li will have gained intimate knowledge of the mechanics of the party apparatus and broad connections throughout the political system. He is also widely considered to be a crony of Xi Jinping’s.

Table 3 tabulates these rashly reasoned projections.



**Table 3**  
*A Plausible 19<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo Standing Committee (2017)?*

<i>Slot</i>	<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2017</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>18<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
General secretary	Xi Jinping	1953	64	5.0	yes
Premier	Li Keqiang	1955	62	5.5	yes
NPC chairman	Li Yuanchao	1950	67	5.0	yes
CPPCC chairman	Zhang Qunxian	1953	64	5.0	yes
Secretariat executive secretary	Successor-in-training to Xi Jinping	—		6.0	maybe
CDIC chairman	Li Zhanshu	1950	67	5.0	yes
Executive vice premier	Successor-in-training to Li Keqiang			6.0	maybe

These projections, made solely on the basis of relevant policy experience as applied to the Standing Committee division of responsibilities, are not at all inevitable, as other criteria—political and personal preferences, for example—may well determine choices from among the candidate pool.

## Implications

Is it all really that simple—three rules guiding candidacy for appointment to the Politburo Standing Committee? Those who view Chinese leadership politics as a ruthless, unconstrained free-for-all struggle for power may object that leadership politics just does not work that way. If they are correct, they must somehow explain by some other logic the evident regularities in Standing Committee appointments that point to the three rules.

Why would the Chinese leadership impose such constraints on the competition for the highest and most powerful positions in the PRC’s political system? One reason may be that it indeed inhibits the all-out free-for-all competition for power that plagued the politics of the later Mao Zedong and early post-Mao years. Instead, the rules channel competition within institutionalized constraints. This motivation was central among Deng Xiaoping’s goals in political reform, as was explicit in his landmark August 1980 Politburo speech, “On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership,” a text that bears continual re-study and so merits placement on analysts’ bedside tables. The 1982 PRC constitution set clear term limits for state posts, and, while the 1982 CCP constitution did not do so explicitly, efforts to regulate and refine Politburo process in that and other ways have been visible since 1987.

If they exist, the three rules effectively reshape the politics of the top leadership. The Second Rule—which limits promotion to the Standing Committee to holdover members of the Politburo—makes the latter body the proving ground for promotion. With the exception of younger leaders chosen to prepare for eventual succession, experience on the Politburo is the critical requirement for promotion to the Standing Committee. The Third Rule, which promotes Politburo members according to seniority in age, gives the eldest cohort a shot at the top over younger cohorts on the Politburo who will have new

opportunities to advance the next time round. Membership in the eldest cohort in the candidate pool does not bring automatic promotion to the Standing Committee, as the examples of Li Tieying in 2002 and Liu Qi, Wang Zhaoguo, and others in 2007 and 2012 show. But taken together, the rules broadly respect experience and merit over narrower calculations of factional and personal politics, and so prioritize criteria essential to managing a country whose power and prosperity have grown and whose stake in orderly and stable politics has grown accordingly.

Personalistic politics is of course, not abolished under the rules.<sup>6</sup> They certainly play a role in the selection of Standing Committee leaders from the cohort-defined pool of eligible candidates for the Standing Committee as prescribed by the rules. They also certainly play a critical role in the selection of successors-in-training.

The rules, moreover, channel faction-driven competition for top leadership positions into membership in the Politburo as the key step for possible consideration for the Standing Committee. And since Politburo membership brings concurrent posting in a predictable list of positions elsewhere in the political order—heads of the party Organization and Propaganda Departments and of the party General Office, vice premiers, party bosses in several provinces, and so forth—competition for those posts is in some degree accentuated. Plenty of room remains, therefore, for factional competition to play itself out.

### *Xi Jinping*

The projections sketched above for the 19<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo Standing Committee depend entirely on continued adherence to the three rules that have evidently shaped appointments at the last four party congresses. If the rules are apparent again in defining appointments to the next Standing Committee in 2017, then it would clearly mean that the Xi leadership has sustained them as a core element in the efforts to institutionalize leadership politics over the past three decades.

As another possibility, small changes in one or more of the three rules—whether motivated by political machinations or other purposes—may be apparent in the party congress results. Political manipulations were apparent when the rules were first imposed in 1997—thus Jiang’s one-term exemption from retirement on grounds of age—and again in 2002, when the age limitation was lowered from 70 to 68, though the rules have not changed since. Such tinkering would invite speculation as to the reasons but not necessarily signal the demise of the rules altogether.

But if the Standing Committee appointments emerging from the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress diverge starkly from the rules, it may mean one of two things. One is that the regime’s fundamental goals and the conditions it faces are so radically different from those of the preceding three decades that reforms are required and the old rules be discarded in favor of new approaches to guide leadership processes. So far, there seems no warrant for such changes in the offing.

The other possibility is that, as widely alleged these days, Xi Jinping has amassed such overwhelming personal power that he can set aside the institutionalization of politics in a collective leadership and impose his own preferences on the basis of personal and factional considerations. Therefore, the degree to which the Xi leadership follows past rules in appointing a new Standing Committee offers a key test whose results will say something important about the question of whether Xi Jinping has assumed sufficient power to break collective leadership norms or remains committed to sustaining them. This writer has long been and remains skeptical of the now conventional wisdom about Xi's surpassing power, and sees the Xi leadership as continuing to act within the constraints of institutionalized collective leadership, as past *Monitor* articles have argued. And so she expects the actions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to conform to the precedents set at the last four congresses. But time will tell, we shall see, it will all come out in the wash, we will see how the cookie crumbles, the chips will fall where they may, and history shall judge.

## Appendix: Politburo Age Cohorts, 1992–2012

14<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo (1992)*Standing Committee*

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 1992</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>13<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Jiang Zemin	1926	66	2.5	yes
Li Peng	1928	64	2.5	yes
Qiao Shi	1924	68		yes
Li Ruihuan	1934	58	3.0	yes
Zhu Rongji	1928	64	2.5	no
Liu Huaqing	1916	76		no
Hu Jintao	1942	50	4.0	no

*Regular Members*

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 1992</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>13<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Ding Guan'gen	1929	63	2.5	yes (alternate)
Tian Jiyun	1929	63	2.5	yes
Li Lanqing	1932	60	3.0	no
Li Tieying	1936	56	3.5	yes
Yang Baibing	1920	72		no
Wu Bangguo	1941	51	4.0	no
Zou Jiahua	1926	66	2.5	no
Chen Xitong	1930	62	3.0	no
Jiang Chunyun	1930	62	3.0	no
Qian Qichen	1928	64	2.5	no
Wei Jianxing	1931	61	3.0	no
Xie Fei	1932	60	3.0	no
Tan Shaowen	1929	63	2.5	no

*Alternates*

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 1992</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>13<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Wen Jiabao	1942	50	4.0	no
Wang Hanbin	1925	67	2.5	no

**15<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo (1997)*****Standing Committee***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 1997</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>14<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Jiang Zemin	1926	71	2.5	yes
Li Peng	1928	69	2.5	yes
Zhu Rongji	1928	69	2.5	yes
Li Ruihuan	1934	63	3.0	yes
Hu Jintao	1942	55	4.0	yes
Wei Jianxing	1931	66	3.0	yes
Li Lanqing	1932	65	3.0	yes

***Regular Members***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 1997</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>14<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Ding Guan'gen	1929	68	2.5	yes
Tian Jiyun	1929	68	2.5	yes
Li Changchun	1944	53	4.0	no
Li Tieying	1936	61	3.5	yes
Wu Bangguo	1941	56	4.0	yes
Wu Guanzheng	1938	59	3.5	no
Chi Haotian	1929	68	2.5	no
Zhang Wannian	1928	69	2.5	no
Luo Gan	1935	62	3.5	no
Jiang Chunyun	1930	67	3.0	yes
Jia Qinglin	1940	57	4.0	no
Qian Qichen	1928	69	2.5	yes
Huang Ju	1938	59	3.5	yes (1994)
Wen Jiabao	1942	55	4.0	yes (alternate)
Xie Fei	1932	65	3.0	yes

***Alternates***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 1997</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>14<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Zeng Qinghong	1939	58	3.5	no
Wu Yi	1938	59	3.5	no

NOTE: Age 70 retirement norm imposed.

**16<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo (2002)*****Standing Committee***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2002</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>15<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Hu Jintao	1942	60	4.0	yes
Wu Bangguo	1941	61	4.0	yes
Wen Jiabao	1942	60	4.0	yes
Jia Qinglin	1940	62	4.0	yes
Zeng Qinghong	1939	63	3.5	yes (alternate)
Huang Ju	1938	64	3.5	yes
Wu Guanzheng	1938	64	3.5	yes
Li Changchun	1944	58	4.0	yes
Luo Gan	1935	67	3.5	yes

***Regular Members***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2002</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>15<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Wang Lequan	1942	60	4.0	no
Wang Zhaoguo	1941	61	4.0	no
Hui Liangyu	1944	58	4.0	no
Liu Qi	1942	60	4.0	no
Liu Yunshan	1947	55	4.5	no
Wu Yi	1938	64	3.5	no
Zhang Lichang	1939	63	3.5	no
Zhang Dejiang	1946	56	4.5	no
Chen Liangyu	1946	56	4.5	no
Zhou Yongkang	1942	60	4.0	no
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	57	4.5	no
He Guoqiang	1943	59	4.0	no
Guo Boxiong	1942	60	4.0	no
Cao Gangchuan	1935	67	3.5	no
Zeng Peiyan	1938	64	3.5	no

***Alternate***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2002</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>15<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Wang Gang	1942	60	4.0	no

NOTE: Age 68 retirement norm imposed; followed in subsequent Politburo membership selection procedures in 2007 and 2012.

**17<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo (2007)*****Standing Committee***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2007</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Hu Jintao	1942	65	4.0	yes
Wu Bangguo	1941	66	4.0	yes
Wen Jiabao	1942	65	4.0	yes
Jia Qinglin	1940	67	4.0	yes
Li Changchun	1944	63	4.0	yes
Xi Jinping	1953	54	5.0	no
Li Keqiang	1955	52	5.5	no
He Guoqiang	1943	64	4.0	yes
Zhou Yongkang	1942	65	4.0	yes

***Regular Members***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2007</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Wang Gang	1942	65	4.0	yes (alternate)
Wang Lequan	1944	63	4.0	yes
Wang Zhaoguo	1941	66	4.0	yes
Wang Qishan	1948	59	4.5	no
Hui Liangyu	1944	63	4.0	yes
Liu Qi	1942	65	4.0	yes
Liu Yunshan	1947	60	4.5	yes
Liu Yandong	1945	62	4.5	no
Li Yuanchao	1950	57	5.0	no
Wang Yang	1955	52	5.5	no
Zhang Gaoli	1946	61	4.5	no
Zhang Dejiang	1946	61	4.5	yes
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	62	4.5	yes
Xu Caihou	1943	64	4.0	yes (2004)
Guo Boxiong	1942	65	4.0	yes
Bo Xilai	1949	58	4.5	no

**18<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo (2012)*****Standing Committee***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2012</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>17<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Xi Jinping	1953	59	5.0	yes
Li Keqiang	1955	57	5.5	yes
Zhang Dejiang	1946	66	4.5	yes
Yu Zhengsheng	1945	67	4.5	yes
Liu Yunshan	1947	65	4.5	yes
Wang Qishan	1948	64	4.5	yes
Zhang Gaoli	1946	66	4.5	yes

***Regular Members***

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Birth year</i>	<i>Age in 2012</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>17<sup>th</sup> CC PB?</i>
Ma Kai	1946	66	4.5	no
Wang Huning	1955	57	5.5	no
Liu Yandong	1945	67	4.5	yes
Liu Qibao	1953	59	5.0	no
Xu Qiliang	1950	62	5.0	no
Sun Chunlan	1950	62	5.0	no
Sun Zhengcai	1963	49	6.0	no
Li Jianguo	1946	66	4.5	no
Li Yuanchao	1950	62	5.0	yes
Wang Yang	1955	57	5.5	yes
Zhang Chunxian	1953	59	5.0	no
Fan Changlong	1947	65	4.5	no
Meng Jianzhu	1947	65	4.5	no
Zhao Leji	1957	55	5.5	no
Hu Chunhua	1963	49	6.0	no
Li Zhanshu	1950	62	5.0	no
Guo Jinlong	1947	65	4.5	no
Han Zheng	1954	58	5.0	no

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Paul Heer, Avery Goldstein, Stapleton Roy, and Joe Fewsmith for useful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> The implications of leadership generational analysis for leadership transition were previously laid out in “Prospects for Leadership Solidarity,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 37 (30 April 2012) and in “The New Politburo Leadership,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 40 (Winter 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The imposition of the age 68 rule in 2002 replaced the age 70 rule imposed at the 1997 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. This change effectively shifted the generational cohort age groups by two years, eliminating leaders born in 1933 and 1934 from consideration for



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promotion onto the Standing Committee or the full Politburo. The only leader on the 15<sup>th</sup> CC Politburo born during those years was Standing Committee member Li Ruihuan, whose consequent disqualification on grounds of age was politically expedient for Jiang Zemin and may well have been the reason for the lowering of the mandatory retirement age to 68.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to former *Monitor* stalwart Joe Fewsmith for suggesting this possibility.

<sup>5</sup> The three rules also held for Standing Committee appointment at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1997, though with a retirement norm of 70 and with the single exception of Jiang Zemin's reappointment despite his age.

<sup>6</sup> My contention is not nor has it been that factions do not exist in Chinese politics. It is rather that in the contemporary period factional politics plays out within an increasingly institutionalized setting. In that regard, thanks to Deng Xiaoping's political reforms, Chinese leadership politics today is qualitatively different from the politics of the later Mao and early post-Mao eras. In addition, I believe that much analysis of leadership factions these days fails to take into account this fundamental shift and rests on arbitrary interpretation of frequently poor evidence, leads to obviously contradictory conclusions, and fails to connect alleged factional politics to policy issues. See "The Trouble with Factions," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 46 (March 2015).