

Xi Jinping 习近平

Born 1953



Current Positions

- General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (2012–present)
- President of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (2013–present)
- Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) (2012–present)
- Member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) (2007–present)
- Chairman of the National Security Committee (2013–present)
- Head of the Central Comprehensive Reform Committee (2013–present)
- Head of the Central Foreign Affairs Committee (2013–present)
- Head of the Central Audit Committee (2018–present)
- Head of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs (2012–present)
- Head of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Committee of the CCP Central Committee (2013–present)
- Head of the Central Network Security and Information Technology Committee (2014–present)
- Head of the CMC Central Leading Group for Deepening Reforms of National Defense and the Military (2014–present)
- Commander in Chief of the Joint Operations Command Center of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) (2016–present)
- Chairman of the Central Military and Civilian Integration Development Committee (2017–present)
- Head of the Central Committee for Comprehensive Ruling by Law (2018–present)
- Member of the Politburo (2007–present)
- Full member of the Central Committee of the CCP (2002–present)

Personal and Professional Background

Xi Jinping was born on June 15, 1953, in Beijing. His ancestral home is in Fuping County, Shaanxi Province. Xi was a “sent-down youth” at an agricultural commune in Yanchuan County, Shaanxi (1969–75).¹ He joined the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1974. Xi received his undergraduate education in chemical engineering from Tsinghua University in Beijing (1975–79) and later graduated with a doctoral degree in law (Marxism) from the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Tsinghua University (via part-time studies, 1998–2002).

Early in his career (1979–82), Xi served as a personal secretary (*mishu*) to Geng Biao, then minister of defense. Subsequently, Xi served as deputy secretary and then secretary of Zhengding County, Hebei Province (1982–85), and thereafter in Fujian Province as executive vice mayor of Xiamen City (1985–88), party secretary of Ningde County (1988–90), party secretary of Fuzhou City (1990–96), deputy party secretary of Fujian Province (1996–2002), and governor of Fujian Province (1999–2002). After his time in Fujian, Xi moved to Zhejiang Province, where he served as governor (2002–03) and party secretary (2002–07). In March 2007, Xi was appointed party secretary of Shanghai. Seven months later, he was transferred to Beijing to serve as a Politburo Standing Committee member (2007–present) and executive secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee (2007–12). In March 2008, he was elected PRC vice president (2008–13). Xi was in charge of preparations for both the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and the 2009 celebrations commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. He also served as president of the Central Party School (2007–12), the most important venue in the CCP for training officials and conducting research on ideology and policy. Xi was elected as General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee and Chairman of the CMC at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. He was then elected president of the PRC at the 12th National People’s Congress in March 2013. Xi was reelected as general secretary of the CCP and

chairman of the CMC at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, then as president of the PRC at the 13th National People's Congress in March 2018. He was first elected to the Central Committee as an alternate member at the 15th Party Congress in 1997.

Family and Patron-Client Ties

Xi is a princeling; he is the son of Xi Zhongxun, a former Politburo member and vice premier who was one of the architects of China's Special Economic Zones in the early 1980s.² Xi Jinping is widely considered to be a protégé of both former PRC president Jiang Zemin and former PRC vice president Zeng Qinghong. Xi's first marriage produced no children. His ex-wife, Ke Lingling, is the daughter of Ke Hua, former PRC ambassador to the United Kingdom, where Ke Lingling now lives. Xi's second marriage was to his current wife, Peng Liyuan. Peng is a famous Chinese folksinger who previously served in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) at the rank of major general. She served as president of the PLA General Political Department Song and Dance Troupe and president of the PLA Art Institute. Their only daughter, Xi Mingze, received her undergraduate degree in psychology from Harvard University (2010–14) and later attended a graduate program in the same field at a university in Beijing.

Policy Preferences and Political Prospects

Throughout his leadership over the past decade, Xi has proven himself to be China's strongest leader since Deng Xiaoping. Of the many noteworthy developments from what the Chinese called "Xi's New Era," the following four major moves stand out:

Anti-Graft Campaign – With the support of his principal political ally in the PSC, "anti-corruption czar" Wang Qishan, Xi launched a remarkably bold national anti-graft campaign. The campaign has resulted in the purges of not only retired heavyweight leaders such as former PSC member Zhou Yongkang, but also about 11 percent of the members of the 18th Central Committee, including Politburo member Sun Zhengcai. To some extent, the overriding objective of his anti-corruption campaign has been to restore the Chinese public's faith in its ruling party, which lost public trust in the wake of the Bo Xilai scandal and the Ling Jihua incident.³

Military Reform – Xi achieved a milestone victory in restructuring the PLA through efforts that have been officially referred to as "military reform." Reform efforts have centered on marginalizing the four PLA general departments that had undermined the authority of the civilian-led CMC; transforming China's military operations from a Russian-style, army-centric system toward what analysts call a "Western-style joint command" system; and swiftly promoting "young guards" to top positions in the officer corps. Of the 66 military members of the 19th Central Committee, 60 (91 percent) were newcomers.⁴

Poverty Elimination – Xi was not the first leader to initiate a poverty reduction campaign in China, but he was the first leader to announce the successful "elimination of absolute poverty" in the country. Over the past decade, the Xi administration has allocated far more funding to poverty reduction than the preceding Jiang and Hu administrations. Xi also adopted a new approach called "precision poverty alleviation," in which local governments were required to take targeted measures to help poverty-stricken villages and households. The Chinese authorities claimed that no other country has been able to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in such a short time.

Proactive Foreign Policy – Xi's "proactive" approach to foreign policy marks a significant departure from Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "keeping a low profile." Xi's efforts have sought to showcase China's rapid rise on the world stage under his leadership, including through the launch of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as well as China's deepening engagement in international institutions and forums, most notably his speech at the Davos World Economic Forum in 2017. His efforts have also included concerted attempts to seek a "new model of great power relations" with the United States. In the wake of the rapid deterioration of

U.S.-China relations in recent years, especially following Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's recent visit to Taiwan, the Chinese PLA held massive military exercises around Taiwan. As the Russian-Ukrainian war evolves and growing external pressures confront China, it is uncertain what position and means Xi will take toward Taiwan in his third term.

However, Xi has exhibited paradoxical preferences and tendencies on other domestic policy issues. For example, the objective of his economic policy, as articulated at the third plenum of the 18th Central Committee in 2013, has been to make the private sector the decisive driver of the Chinese economy. However, this policy was barely implemented. Xi has continued to favor China's industrial policy and has called for making flagship state-owned enterprises "bigger and stronger." His more recent call for "common prosperity" may resonate well with most of the population but will receive much criticism from private entrepreneurs in the country.

His attitude toward public intellectuals has proven similarly ambivalent. On the one hand, Xi has promoted Chinese think tanks, which are mostly staffed with academics. On the other, his politically conservative approach to governance — and in particular, his reliance on ideological oversight and media censorship — has left him at loggerheads with many of the country's intellectuals. Critics often point to the arrests and harassment of human rights lawyers in China as examples that the rule of law in China has actually regressed under Xi's leadership. Xi's leadership has disillusioned liberal intellectuals since 2013, when authorities began cracking down on the open discussion of "seven subversive currents," including universal values, constitutional democracy, human rights, civil society, and media freedom. Their perceptions of Xi as a Mao-like figure may have now crystallized.

The 2018 NPC meeting proposed removing a clause from the country's constitution — added during the Deng Xiaoping era — which limits the presidency and vice presidency to two five-year terms. Undoing this restriction essentially lines Xi up to be "President for Life." It appears that Xi has seized upon his moment at the pinnacle of accrued political capital to avoid becoming a lame duck and to cement his hold over the country for as long as he desires.

Xi will begin his third term as the party's general secretary after the 20th Party Congress. He will rule the country with more of his own protégés in the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee rather than with his political allies, as was the case during his first two terms. This change in personnel indicates that Xi will be even more powerful than before. Nevertheless, he must begin preparing during his third term for the inevitable political succession in Zhongnanhai, even if he plans to stay for a fourth term.

Compiled by Cheng Li and the staff of the John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings

Notes:

¹ "Sent-down youth" (插队知青) refers to young, educated urbanites who left their home cities to serve as manual laborers in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.

² For more information on Xi's family background and his early life experiences, see Liang Jian 梁剑, *New Biography of Xi Jinping* [习近平新传] (New York: Mirror Books, 2012), and Wu Ming 吴鸣, *Biography of Xi Jinping* [习近平传] (Hong Kong: 文化艺术出版社, 2008).

³ For a detailed discussion of these cases, see Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2016), pp. 1–5, 23–24.

⁴ This includes four military alternate members of the 18th Central Committee who were promoted to be full members of the 19th Central Committee. If these four leaders are excluded, 85 percent would be newcomers.