THE TWENTIETH PARTY CONGRESS: A PRIMER

Linda Jaivin and M. Su

WHAT IS A Party Congress?

The Party Congress 中国共产党全国代表大会 is the most important meeting in the calendar of activities of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Since 1977, one has been held every five years. Before that, they were less regular. Delegates to the congress formalise changes to the party's leadership, review the previous five years, and set policy directions for the next five.

When and Where was the Twentieth Party Congress Held?

The Twentieth Party Congress took place on 16–22 October 2022 in the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

One to Twenty

First Party Congress: 23 July to 2 August 1921, Shanghai and Jiaxing.

Second Party Congress: 16–23 July 1922, Shanghai.

Third Party Congress: 12–20 June 1923, Guangzhou.

Fourth Party Congress: 11–22 January 1925, Shanghai.

Fifth Party Congress: 27 April to 9 May 1927, Wuhan.

Sixth Party Congress: 18 June to 11 July 1928, Moscow.

Seventh Party Congress:
23 April to 11 June 1945, Yan'an.

Eighth Party Congress:
15–27 September 1956, Beijing.

Ninth Party Congress:
1–24 April 1969, Beijing.

Tenth Party Congress:
24–28 August 1973, Beijing.

Eleventh Party Congress:
12–18 August 1977, Beijing.

Twelfth Party Congress:
1–11 September 1982, Beijing.

Thirteenth Party Congress:
25 October to 1 November 1987, Beijing.

Fourteenth Party Congress:
12–18 October 1992, Beijing.

Fifteenth Party Congress:
12–18 September 1997, Beijing.

Sixteenth Party Congress:
8–14 November 2002, Beijing.

Seventeenth Party Congress:
15–21 October 2007, Beijing.

Eighteenth Party Congress:
8–14 November 2012, Beijing.

Nineteenth Party Congress:
18–24 October 2017, Beijing.

Twentieth Party Congress:
16–22 October 2022, Beijing.

Who Goes, How Are They Chosen, and What Do They Do?

A total of 2,379 people were expected to attend the Twentieth Party Congress: 2,296 delegates representing the 96.7 million members of the CPC plus eighty-three special invitees, including retired former leaders. Forty-one people sent apologies, leaving a total of 2,338 attendees.

Thirty-eight 'electoral units' 选举单位 choose the delegates in multiple rounds of referrals and reviews overseen by and subject to the approval of party discipline and inspection organs, who screen for such things as loyalty to Xi Jinping and appropriate representation of ethnic minorities. Provinces, municipalities, and regions choose nearly 70 percent of the delegates, or 1,585 delegates in 2022. The People's

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Source: zh.wikipedia.org

Liberation Army and People's Armed Police chose another 13 percent of the total, and central party organs and state organs about 12 percent. Of the 2,296 delegates, 619 were women, or 27 percent of the total, a slight rise (2.8 percent) from the 19th congress in 2017.

The delegates' function is largely ceremonial: approving the selection of the new Central Committee and acclaiming official reports and resolutions.

Who Holds the Power?

The delegates formally approve the selection of the CPC Central Committee 中国共产党中央委员会. The Twentieth Central Committee has 205 members and 171 alternate members, with an average age of 57.2 years. Among those retiring in 2022 were Premier Li Keqiang 李克强 and Chinese Political Consultative Conference chairman Wang Yang 汪洋, though neither had reached the official retirement age of sixty-eight. Of the 205 members of the Twentieth Central Committee, 135 (66 percent) are new. Only eleven of the full members, or 4.9 percent, are women; another nineteen women are alternate members.

The Central Committee approves the appointments to the Politburo 政治局. The Twentieth Politburo has twenty-four members, only four of whom are under the age of sixty (three are fifty-eight and one is fifty-seven). The oldest member is seventy-two-year-old Zhang Youxia 张又侠, who is vice-chairman of the Military Commission.

For the first time in twenty-five years, no woman sits on the Politburo. Historically, there have only ever been six female full members and two alternates. Of those six, three were the wives

or widows of top leaders. Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing 江青, lost her position after her arrest as part of the 'Gang of Four' after Mao's death in 1976; she died in jail in 1991. Lin Biao's wife, Ye Qun 叶群, lost her position in 1971 when she and her husband — Mao's erstwhile 'closest comrade-in-arms' and chosen successor — supposedly died in a plane crash while fleeing China after allegedly trying to assassinate Mao. Deng Yingchao 邓颖超, the widow of popular premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来, joined the Politburo in 1977 as part of the group around Deng Xiaoping that ushered in the Reform Era; she retired in 1985. (See Focus, 'The Communist Party of China: Where Are the Women?', pp.147–152.)

The Politburo selects the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) 政治局常务委员会. Its members are the most powerful people in China. No woman has ever sat on the PSC. The current PSC has seven ranked members of whom Xi Jinping, as the third-term general secretary and chair of the Central Military Commission 中央军事委员会, is the most powerful of all; unlike previous committees, which comprised diverse 'factions' or groups — prominently including that which had its origins in the Communist Youth League — the new one is believed to consist entirely of men loyal to Xi personally and to his vision for the country.

No. 1: Xi Jinping 习近平, aged sixty-nine, holds the titles of CPC general secretary and chair of the Central Military Commission, among other non-party titles, including that of state chairman or president.

No. 2: Li Qiang 李强, aged sixty-three, was Xi's subordinate when Xi was party secretary of Zhejiang province. Promoted to the Politburo in 2017, he was also party secretary of Shanghai, responsible for the strict COVID lockdowns there in 2022. He is new to the PSC.

No. 3: Zhao Leji 赵乐际, aged sixty-five, is considered a member of Xi's 'Shaanxi Gang' 陕西帮. It is said Zhao's father had a personal relationship with Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun 习仲勋.

No. 4: Wang Huning 王沪宁, aged sixty-seven, has been the party's leading political theorist since the 1990s, including during the administrations of Xi's predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, and has been a member of the Politburo since 2012. He is one of Xi's closest

advisers. Unlike the others, Wang came to prominence not as a party bureaucrat but because of his work in the Central Policy Research Office 中共中央政策研究室, a major CPC think tank.

No. 5: Cai Qi 蔡奇, aged sixty-seven, is the party secretary of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and first secretary of the CPC Secretariat. A former subordinate of Xi's in both Fujian and Zhejiang, he has been known to call Xi '*Xi Dada*' or 'Daddy Xi'. He is also said to be a fan of the television series *House of Cards* and was behind the forced eviction of rural migrants from Beijing beginning in 2017. He is new to the PSC.

No. 6: Ding Xuexiang 丁薛祥, aged sixty, is the youngest member of the PSC and the director of the General Office of the Central Committee. Dubbed Xi's 'chief of staff', he has worked under him for many years, and frequently accompanies Xi on both domestic and foreign trips. He is new to the PSC.

No. 7: Li Xi 李希, aged sixty-six, until recently the party secretary of Guangdong province, chairs the powerful Central Commission for Discipline Inspection 中国共产党中央纪律检查委员会, which prosecutes the anticorruption campaign that is one of Xi's signature policies. He is said to be a close friend of Xi's and is new to the PSC.

Reports, Speeches, and Constitutional Amendments

Xi Jinping's keynote speech was titled 'Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects' 高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗—在中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会上的报告. It took about one hour and forty-five minutes for him to read the abridged version of the report, which in full is 31,600 characters and, printed, runs to 72 pages.

The overall message of the report was that China is advancing by leaps and bounds under the leadership of the Communist Party, with Xi at the helm. It reaffirmed that the central task of the CPC is to build a powerful modern socialist country and promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Compared with previous reports, there were many more mentions of security 安全 (in particular, 'national security' 国家安全) and references to 'risks' and 'challenges', and none of the previously popular expression 'period of strategic opportunity' 战略机遇期.[1] There were also fewer mentions of the economy (in particular, the market and reforms) — although there were numerous references to the importance of technology.

Among the changes to the party constitution adopted by the congress was the enshrinement of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era as well as the Two Establishes 两个确立 and Two Safeguards 两个维护. The first establishes Xi as the party's 'core' and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era as the party's guiding ideology — in essence, putting Xi on par with Mao and above Deng Xiaoping and his other post-Mao predecessors. The 'safeguards', meanwhile, maintain that 'core' status in the party and the party's authority over the nation.

The line from Xi's official report that the party must 'resolutely oppose and contain Taiwan independence' was also written into the party constitution.

An Unscripted Moment

After the press had been let into the congress, Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, appeared visibly agitated by something in the red folders on the table before him. When Xi motioned for attendants to lead him away, Hu appeared unwilling to go, and an attendant lifted him from his seat by the right armpit. As he left, he said something to Xi and patted the shoulder of Li Keqiang; both men nodded without turning to face him. Hu's first reappearance in public was at the 6 December memorial service for his own predecessor, Jiang Zemin.

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