

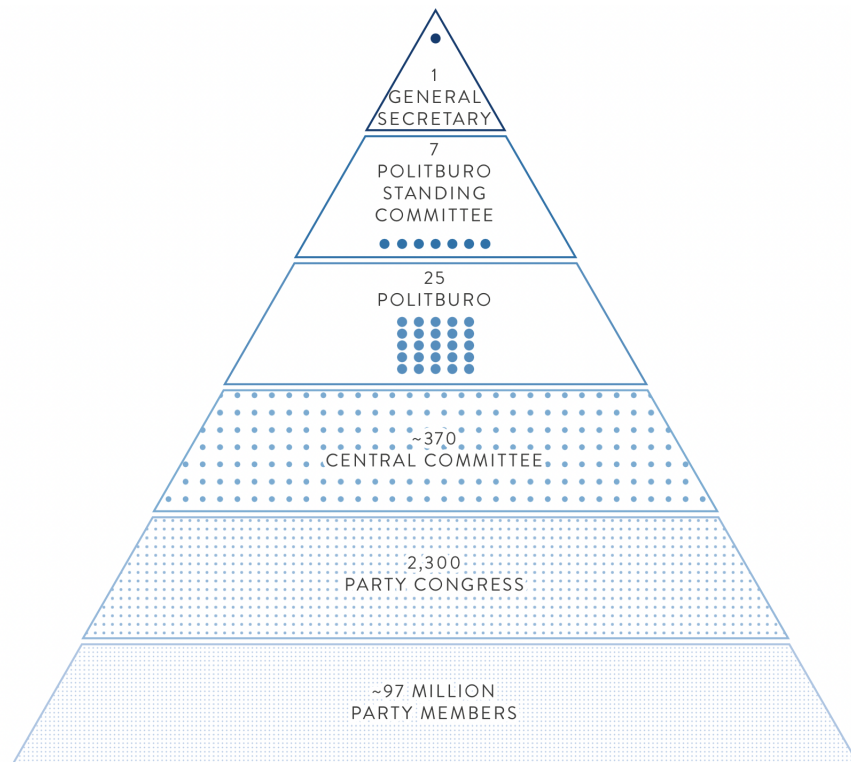
Briefing Note

Debrief: The Chinese Communist Party's 20th Party Congress

What is the Party Congress?

- Every five years, the top brass of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) come together in Beijing for the most important event of China's five-year political cycle.
- About 2,300 senior party members gather at the Great Hall of the People, ostensibly representing the tens of million party members across China.
- Little in the way of concrete policy announcements emerges from the congress, but personnel changes - finalised through jostling for position and bargain-striking in the lead up to the congress - and the party's [work report](#) will guide China's domestic and foreign policy priorities.

Figure 1 - Central Structure of the Chinese Communist Party



Source: [TBI](#)

Xi cements his legacy

- President Xi Jinping's third term as paramount leader was confirmed, after he scrapped the two-consecutive-term limit to China's presidency put in place by Deng Xiaoping in 1982.
- He will also stay on as general secretary of the party and head of the armed forces.
- Setting himself up as the '[Chairman of Everything](#)' leaves Xi with no places to hide. He has put himself in the firing line should there be a public backlash to zero-Covid, continued economic slowdown and failure to manage expectations over unifying with Taiwan.

Key personnel changes:

- The **Politburo Standing Committee** - a seven-member group that represents the apex of political power in China - is now stacked with loyalists of Xi. Surrounding himself with "yes" men raises concerns that Xi will only hear what people think he wants to hear.
 - *The BBC offers a lowdown: [Politburo Standing Committee: Who are the men that rule China now?](#)*
- Xi has also forced out potential rivals. The new 205-person **Central Committee** does not include Premier Li Keqiang - the second most powerful individual after Xi - or fourth-ranking official Wang Yang. Both were seen as economic liberals and were part of the high-flying [Youth League faction](#) of the party. A conspicuous absence from the **25-member Politburo** was Hu Chunhua, another member of the Youth League faction who was once touted as a candidate for the premiership.
- No women will be sitting on the **Politburo** - the first time this has happened for 25 years.

Hu Jintao's dramatic exit

- Dramatic [footage](#) of Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, being unceremoniously escorted out of the Great Hall of the People has attracted global attention.
- The CCP rarely airs its dirty laundry in public, suggesting that Hu's removal was a deliberate showcase of Xi's power and personal achievements.
- Some analysts have suggested that the Hu incident was a staged humiliation, aimed at former party leaders and senior officials who might consider themselves protected.
- However, Hu appeared on Chinese state news [reports](#) of the Congress, suggesting he may not have been purged.
- Chinese state media outlet Xinhua said in a [tweet](#) that Hu left because "he was not feeling well".

The global outlook

1. This year's party work report is the **most ideological** in tone since Mao Zedong. As former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd [points out](#), it emphasises the **Marxist-Leninist worldview** that fuels Xi's quest to make China the pre-eminent regional and global power by 2050. Packing his leadership team with loyalists is a move designed to consolidate power and rally the country behind his muscular foreign policy vision.
 2. Beijing's assessment of its **external environment** is increasingly pessimistic. Xi spoke of "global changes of a magnitude not seen in a century" that present immense risks to China. In large part, this refers to the idea of a US-aligned '[Global West](#)' intent on halting China's rise through strategic competition. Unlike five years ago, the work report does not explicitly reference the deadline of 2049 for making the People's Liberation Army into a "world-class" military.
 3. Central themes of the Congress this year included **greater state direction over markets** and **national self-reliance** in critical supply chains and science and technology. Beijing is acutely aware of the dangers of being beholden to dollar-denominated financial markets and new security-focused policies of other countries - such as [US export controls](#) - that could limit China's global presence in the fields of infrastructure and technology and access to key resources.
 4. There was a marked shift in language from "peaceful reunification" with **Taiwan** to warning the US and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen that a tougher line will be taken on external interference in what China considers to be its own affairs. Xi warned that the CCP "will never promise to renounce the use of force" to assert its claim to the self-governing island.
 5. The **Belt and Road Initiative** appears to have been relegated to a lower place in Beijing's foreign policy hierarchy. Opposition to the BRI in recipient countries has risen, with a growing number of China-backed projects suspended or cancelled, primarily due to debt sustainability concerns. Nascent foreign policy schemes - the [Global Development Initiative](#) and the [Global Security Initiative](#) - received greater coverage at the congress.
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