



Party Watch Quarterly Report 2

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About This Report

The Party Watch Initiative Quarterly Report 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the most important Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-related developments and trends for the period covering January 2018 to April 2018 and offers near-term estimates of their future direction. It includes analysis of the 2018 National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Xi Jinping's ongoing accrual of power, the new National Supervision Commission apparatus and its effect on the anti-corruption campaign, and united front work following bureaucratic reforms aimed at enhancing CCP control. The report is heavily based on Chinese language publications analyzed during the Initiative's daily monitoring of authoritative CCP-regime sources.

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Executive Summary: Trends and Near-Term Estimates

- General Secretary Xi Jinping oversaw the institutionalization of his personal authority through amendments to the People's Republic of China (PRC) Constitution and the appointment of his allies to positions of power. Most notably, these changes included the enshrinement of Xi's ideology into the PRC Constitution and the appointment of Wang Qishan and Yang Xiaodu as PRC vice president and National Supervision Commission director, respectively. Amendments to the PRC Constitution that institutionalize the CCP's leadership and its value system similarly serve to strengthen Xi's control and solidify the CCP's pervasiveness in society. It is highly unlikely that Xi's personal authority will be challenged in the foreseeable future barring serious policy failures or other unforeseen events.
- The creation of the National Supervision Commission apparatus increases the CCP's coercive control over the Chinese state by extending and proceduralizing the CCP's investigative and detention powers over non-CCP elements of China's bureaucracy, which now supersede the judicial authority of China's top courts. Central Commission for Discipline Inspection control over the National Supervision Commission is secured through the joint sharing of resources and the appointment of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Deputy Secretary Yang Xiaodu as director of the National Supervision Commission. Central Commission for Discipline Inspection meetings indicate that it will continue to prioritize enforcing political conformity with Xi Jinping in 2018.
- Direct CCP control over religious, overseas Chinese, and ethnic affairs was enhanced through the CCP United Front Work Department's displacement of state bodies that had previously managed those portfolios, further confirming the centrality of united front work to CCP objectives in the Xi Jinping era. United front sinicization policies aimed at solidifying CCP control over organized religion through cooptation will continue. Prominent united front speeches and events indicate that the United Front Work Department remains undeterred by growing foreign scrutiny of and opposition to its influence activities outside of China, including those targeting Chinese living abroad.

Xi Jinping's Continued Accrual of Power

This quarter saw General Secretary Xi Jinping (习近平) consolidate the gains in political power that he made at the October 2017 CCP 19th Party Congress. At that event, Xi oversaw the institutionalization of his authority over the Party as well as security forces through heavy handed measures that included: 1) enshrining “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想, hereafter Xi Jinping Thought) into the Party’s guiding ideology; 2) stocking the CCP Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) with Xi allies and non-challengers; 3) refraining from identifying a successor; 4) overseeing amendments to the CCP Constitution that institutionalized Xi’s military thought and authority as chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC); and 5) propagating Xi’s personal authority over China as paramount “leader” (领袖/*lingxiu*)—a title previously reserved by *People’s Daily* for Mao Zedong (毛泽东) alone. In March, this institutionalization of his personal power was further legitimized by China’s rubber-stamp legislative body, the National People’s Congress (NPC).

Lead Up to the 13th National People’s Congress

Xi’s politicking did not let up after the 19th Party Congress. On 15 January, Xi presided over a CCP PSC meeting in Beijing to hear the work reports from the Party groups (党组) of various state bodies, including the Standing Committee of the NPC, State Council, National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Supreme People’s Court, and Supreme People’s Procuratorate.¹ The Politburo would go on to approve these work reports on 30 January, stating that it was the task of these bodies to resolutely defend Party leadership throughout the remainder of the year.² Party media emphasized that the PSC had begun the practice of listening to these work reports three years ago as a necessity for promoting unanimity with the CCP Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core.^{3 4}

¹ “CCP Central Politburo Standing Committee to Meet, CCP Central Secretary General Xi Jinping to Host the Meeting to Hear Work Reports of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, State Council, CPPCC National Committee, Supreme People’s Court, Supreme People’s Procurement’s Party Groups, and the Central Committee Secretariat [中共中央政治局常务委员会召开会议 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议: 听取全国人大常委会、国务院、全国政协、最高人民法院、最高人民检察院党组工作汇报 听取中央书记处工作报告],” *People’s Daily*, January 16, 2018, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0116/c64094-29766300.html>

² “Xi Jinping Presides over Politburo Meeting [习近平主持中共中央政治局会议],” *Xinhua*, January 30, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/30/c_1122342158.htm

³ “CCP Central Committee Politburo Standing Committee Convenes a Meeting, CCP Central Secretary General Xi Jinping Hosts Meeting to Hear Work Reports of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, State Council, CPPCC National Committee, Supreme People’s Court, Supreme People’s Procurement’s Party Groups, and the Central Committee Secretariat [中共中央政治局常务委员会召开会议

The second plenary session of the 19th Central Committee was held on 18-19 January, and the session adopted the “Proposal of the CCP Central Committee on Amending Partial Contents of the Constitution” (中共中央关于修改宪法部分内容的建议).⁵ The session’s communiqué then formally proposed that Xi Jinping Thought be incorporated into the PRC Constitution.⁶ Prominent commentaries promoted the idea immediately after.⁷ The rationalization for such a move was to ensure that the Constitution is well adapted to the “new era”—a rationale that would be repeatedly used to justify both Xi’s accrual of unrivaled power and the post-13th NPC enhancement of direct CCP governance at the expense of the State Council.

An early indicator of what would eventually come to pass was the 29 January appointment of former PSC Member and Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) Secretary Wang Qishan (王岐山) to the 13th NPC as a deputy from Hunan Province.⁸ In pro forma observance of the Party’s retirement age norms,⁹ Wang had

议 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议: 听取全国人大常委会、国务院、全国政协、最高人民法院、最高人民检察院党组工作汇报 听取中央书记处工作报告],” *People’s Daily*, January 16, 2018, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0116/c64094-29766300.html>

⁴ The practice was officially mandated at the 6th Plenum of the 18th Central Committee with the adoption of the “Principles for Inner-Party Political Life Under New Circumstances” (关于新形势下党内政治生活的若干准则) and more recently at the first Politburo meeting of the 19th CCP Central Committee Politburo: “(Authorized Release) CCP 18th Central Committee 6th Plenary Session Communiqué [(受权发布)中国共产党第十八届中央委员会第六次全体会议公报],” *Xinhua*, October 27, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-10/27/c_1119801528.htm;

“CCP Central Committee Politburo Convenes Meeting to Research, Deploy, Study, Propagate, and Implement the Spirit of the 19th Party Congress and Deliberate on the ‘Several Regulations of the CCP Central Politburo Regarding Reinforcing and Defending the Collective and Unified Leadership of the Central Committee’ and the ‘Detailed Rules of the CCP Central Politburo for the Implementation of the Eight-Point Guideline.’ [中共中央政治局召开会议研究部署学习宣传贯彻党的十九大精神 审议《中共中央政治局关于加强和维护党中央集中统一领导的若干规定》和《中共中央政治局贯彻落实中央八项规定的实施细则》],” *Xinhua*, October 27, 2017, http://www.wenming.cn/specials/zxdj/19/11s_201710/t20171027_4468076.shtml

⁵ “Wang Chen Explains PRC Constitutional Amendments Draft (Summary) [王晨作关于《中华人民共和国宪法修正案(草案)》的说明(摘要)],” *Xinhua*, March 6, 2018, http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2018-03/07/nw.D110000gmrb_20180307_1-03.htm

⁶ “(Authorized Release) CCP 19th Central Committee Second Plenary Session Communiqué [(受权发布)中国共产党第十九届中央委员会第二次全体会议公报],” *Xinhua*, January 19, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/19/c_1122286278.htm

⁷ For example, see “Xinhua Commentator: Pushing the Constitution to Advance and Improve its Development to Keep Up with the Times - The Second Commentary on Implementing the Spirit of the 19th Central Committee Second Plenary Session [新华社评论员: 推动宪法与时俱进完善发展——二论贯彻落实党的十九大精神],” *Xinhua*, January 21, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/21/c_129795768.htm

⁸ “Announcement of the 13th Hunan Province People’s Congress First Meeting (Document No. 7) [湖南省第十三届人民代表大会第一次会议公告(第7号)],” *Hunan People’s Congress*, January 29, 2018, <http://www.hnrd.gov.cn/Info.aspx?ModelId=1&Id=19522>

recently stepped down at the 19th Party Congress. As such, his NPC appointment would have been considered unusual if not for Xi's own habit of bending Party norms. Given Wang's status as Xi's chief political ally of the 18th Central Committee, the NPC appointment was correctly viewed by many as a sign that he would reascend to political power as Xi's right-hand man. That same day, The 12th NPC Standing Committee convened to discuss amending the PRC Constitution, with Xi ally, CCP PSC Member, and Deputy Head of the Small Group on Amending the PRC Constitution Li Zhanshu (栗战书) briefing the group on the importance of constitutional amendments that reflect Xi Jinping Thought.¹⁰

The following month, Xi's end-goal became obvious. On 24 February, the CCP Politburo held a Saturday meeting, at which it decided that the third plenary session of the 19th Central Committee would be held from 26-28 February. This decision was unusual because it arranged the third plenum only one month after the second plenum and because third plenums are usually held in the fall. The Politburo also discussed the decision and draft plan to deepen Party and state institution structural reforms (深化党和国家机构改革). The draft plan made clear that vast structural changes were to be made to the Party and state—ostensibly to address perceived inadequacies in the regime's "new era" governance capabilities.¹¹ It was swiftly adopted at the third plenum.¹²

However, even more notable was the *Xinhua* authorized release that came one day prior to the third plenum; on 25 February, specifics of the CCP Central Committee's plan (officially dated 26 January) to amend China's constitution were announced. The most important target for change was the third paragraph of Article 79, which concerns the PRC presidency and vice presidency: the Central Committee proposed to alter the paragraph from "the term of office of the President and Vice-President of the People's Republic of China is the same as that of the National People's Congress, and they shall serve no more than two consecutive terms" to "the term of office of the President and Vice-President of the People's Republic of China is the same as that of the National

⁹ Norms stipulate that leaders should retire if they are over the age of 68 at the time of the Party Congress. Wang was 69 at the time of the 19th Party Congress.

¹⁰ "12th National People's Congress Holds its 32nd Meeting in Beijing [十二届全国人大常委会第三十二次会议在京举行]," *Xinhua*, January 29, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-01/29/c_1122336499.htm

¹¹ "CCP Central Committee Politburo Holds Meeting and Decides to Convene Third Plenum of the 19th Central Committee-- CCP Central Committee General Secretary Hosts the Meeting [中共中央政治局召开会议 决定召开十九届三中全会 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议]," *Xinhua*, February 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-02/24/c_1122448198.htm

¹² "19th CCP Central Committee Third Plenum Communiqué [中国共产党第十九届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报]," *Xinhua*, February 28, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/yaowen/2018-02/28/c_1122468026.htm

People's Congress"—thereby removing the two-term limitation for those positions.¹³ The announcement prompted an immediate backlash on Chinese social media, where many netizens drew political analogies to North Korea's Kim Jong Un and China's own imperial past.¹⁴ Some analysts posited that Xi may have even faced a backlash within the CCP Central Committee, citing the fact that the important proposal was absent from the third plenum communiqué.¹⁵ However, the fact that the CCP Central Committee's proposed amendments were adopted by near-unanimous vote suggests this was not so.

The 13th National People's Congress

On 5 March, the 13th NPC opened with great fanfare. A *People's Daily* editorial heralded the event as the transformation of the Party's positions into the nation's will, concluding that the country would "closely unite around the CCP Central Committee with comrade Xi Jinping at its core, use Xi Jinping Thought as the guide...and jointly write a new chapter of the undertaking of socialism with Chinese characteristics."¹⁶ Secretary General of the 12th Standing Committee of the NPC Wang Chen (王晨) explained the draft of the PRC constitutional amendments to the 13th NPC,¹⁷ and on 11 March the changes were adopted. Over 99% of the 2,980 deputies voted in favor.¹⁸ In addition to the amendments that removed term limits for the PRC presidency and vice presidency and added Xi Jinping Thought into the constitution, other modifications included new clauses emphasizing Party leadership as the defining feature of Chinese socialism, a new required oath of allegiance to the constitution for government workers, a clause promoting core

¹³ "(Authorized Release) CCP Central Committee's Proposal Regarding Amending Parts of the Constitution [(授权发布) 中国共产党中央委员会关于修改宪法部分内容的建议]," *Xinhua*, February 25, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-02/25/c_1122451187.htm

¹⁴ These social media posts were swiftly deleted: Neil Connor, "Chinese Censors Move to Block Ridicule of 'Emperor' Xi Jinping's Power Grab," *Telegraph*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/02/26/chinese-censors-move-block-ridicule-emperor-xi-jinpings-power/>

¹⁵ Charlotte Gao, "Constitutional Amendments Go Unmentioned in the CCP's Unusual Third Plenum Meeting," *The Diplomat*, March 1, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/constitutional-amendments-go-unmentioned-in-the-ccps-unusual-third-plenum-meeting/>

¹⁶ "Consolidate the Struggling Force of the New Era (Editorial) - Warmly Congratulate the Opening of the 13th National People's Congress First Meeting [凝聚新时代的奋斗伟力 (社论) ——热烈祝贺十三届全国人大一次会议开幕]," *People's Daily*, March 5, 2018, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-03/05/nw.D110000renmrb_20180305_1-01.htm

¹⁷ "Wang Chen Explains PRC Constitutional Amendments Draft (Abstract) [王晨作关于《中华人民共和国宪法修正案(草案)》的说明 (摘要)]," *Xinhua*, March 6, 2018, http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2018-03/07/nw.D110000gmrb_20180307_1-03.htm

¹⁸ "Support the Constitution and Reinforce Constitutional Awareness [拥护宪法 增强宪法意识]," *People's Daily*, March 12, 2018, <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2018npc/BIG5/n1/2018/0312/c417507-29861126.html>

socialist values, and the delegating of constitutional standing to the new National Supervision Commission (discussed below).¹⁹

On 17 March, Xi was unanimously elected PRC president for a second term, which *Xinhua* called the wish of more than 1.3 billion Chinese. Xi was also re-elected Chairman of the CMC. Xi then took his public oath of office—a new requirement—to the PRC Constitution and swore to struggle to build a prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful modernizing socialist powerful country.²⁰ Wang Qishan was elected to the PRC vice presidency, and Yang Xiaodu (杨晓渡) was elected director of the new National Supervision Commission.

Assessing Xi's Power

The results of the 13th NPC all but proved that Xi intends to remain in power past 2023, the year his second term ends. Not content with managing affairs through CCP channels alone, Xi seems bent on holding all titles of power in the Party-state as China's third generation leader (not fifth), the first two being Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. However, unlike Mao or Deng, Xi's desire to hold onto all reins of power—thereby denying them to any competitors—may signal a sense of insecurity that elders Mao and Deng did not possess at their prime.

Another potential indicator of Xi's relative insecurity is the manner in which the abolishment of presidential and vice presidential term limits was made public. The 19 January second plenum communiqué made no mention of potential changes to presidential term limits, despite the fact that constitutional amendments were plainly discussed, including the proposal to add Xi Jinping Thought to the PRC Constitution. Likewise, the fact that the Central Committee's proposal to alter term limits was dated seven days later (26 January) but only announced publicly on 25 February is notable, especially because the proposal could have been announced three days later in the 28 February third plenum communiqué. When taken into account with the near-unanimous NPC adoption of the proposed constitutional amendments and the public backlash that the 25 February announcement was met with, this series of events suggests that although NPC deputies widely supported the removal of term limits (at least officially), Party leaders purposely chose to both delay and downplay the issue in official media by leaving

¹⁹ “(Two Sessions Authorized Release) Amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China [(两会授权发布) 中华人民共和国宪法修正案],” *Xinhua*, March 11, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/11/c_1122521235.htm

²⁰ “The People's Trust and a Solemn Oath-- Xi Jinping Elected President and CMC Chairman and Conducted the Oath of Allegiance to the Constitution [人民的信赖 郑重的誓言——记习近平当选国家主席、中央军委主席并进行宪法宣誓],” *Xinhua*, March 18, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/18/c_1122552249.htm

it out of both the second and third plenum communiqués, likely due to their realization that the move might be broadly criticized by ordinary Chinese citizens.

Furthermore, Xi's positioning of Wang Qishan as PRC vice president suggests that Xi perceives the need to "dig in" for the future political battles that are sure to come. By positioning his former anti-corruption lieutenant as vice president, Xi reserves the right to empower Wang as he sees fit—article 82 of the Chinese constitution allows for the vice president to assist the president in his work and exercise presidential powers entrusted to him by the president. Perhaps more importantly, article 84 stipulates that if the presidency is vacant, the vice president will succeed to the office of the president.²¹ The result is that under normal circumstances, Wang can act as a loyal political ally to help enforce Xi's ambitious domestic reform and foreign policy agenda, and in a hypothetical scenario where Xi is incapacitated or otherwise unable to lead, Xi's own trusted discipline enforcer would be in charge to face potential policy challengers.

Finally, the significance of Yang Xiaodu's appointment as head of the National Supervision Commission should not be understated. It is notable that from 2006 to 2012, Yang served as standing committee member of the Party committee and United Front Work Department head in Shanghai, overlapping with Xi's short tenure there as Party secretary in 2007.²² Yang apparently made a good impression on Xi, and in 2014 Xi and Wang Qishan oversaw the appointment of Yang to deputy secretary of the CCDI, where he served under then-CCDI Secretary Wang.²³ Thus, appointing Yang as National Supervision Commission director ensures that President Xi and Vice President Wang have a key ally in charge of this new powerful discipline body, described in the next section.

²¹ "Constitution of the People's Republic of China," National People's Congress, March 29, 2018, http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content_1372966.htm

²² "Résumé of Comrade Yang Xiaodu [杨晓渡同志简历]," *People's Daily*, March 2018, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1025/c414940-29608821.html>; "Resume of Comrade Xi Jinping [习近平同志简历]," *People's Daily*, March 2018, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1025/c414940-29608803.html>

²³ Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership*, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), p. 346.

China's New Discipline Apparatus in the Context of the Anti-Corruption Campaign

Important changes were made to China's discipline system at the 13th NPC, most notably the creation of an entirely new and powerful discipline organ, the National Supervision Commission (NSC). Of note, in terms of sheer numbers, the intensity of the CCDI anti-corruption drive noticeably declined compared to the fourth quarter of 2017—the period of the 19th Party Congress. This relative reduction was complemented with a concerted effort to explain why the creation of the NSC was necessary, suggesting an overall change of focus from supercharged graft busting to successfully reorganizing the discipline bureaucracy. Even so, despite the overall quarterly reduction in CCDI investigations and disciplinary actions, many high-profile investigations continued to dominate headlines in China, including the charging of former Politburo Member Sun Zhengcai (孙政才) with bribery,²⁴ the sentencing of former vice mayor of Luliang City Zhang Zhongsheng (张中生) to death for bribery,²⁵ and the expulsion of former vice governor of Shaanxi Province Feng Xinzhu (冯新柱) from the Party for political transgressions and violations of the eight-point guideline.²⁶ Prominent commentaries continued to emphasize the ongoing nature of the Party's struggle against corruption, stating that “Firmly curbing the increase in corruption, gradually dissolving existing corruption, and consolidating an overwhelming posture for anti-corruption development” will remain the trend for the future.²⁷ Such media coverage drove home the message of the CCP leadership that an overhaul of the discipline apparatus was necessary to successfully root out corruption across China's state bureaucracy.

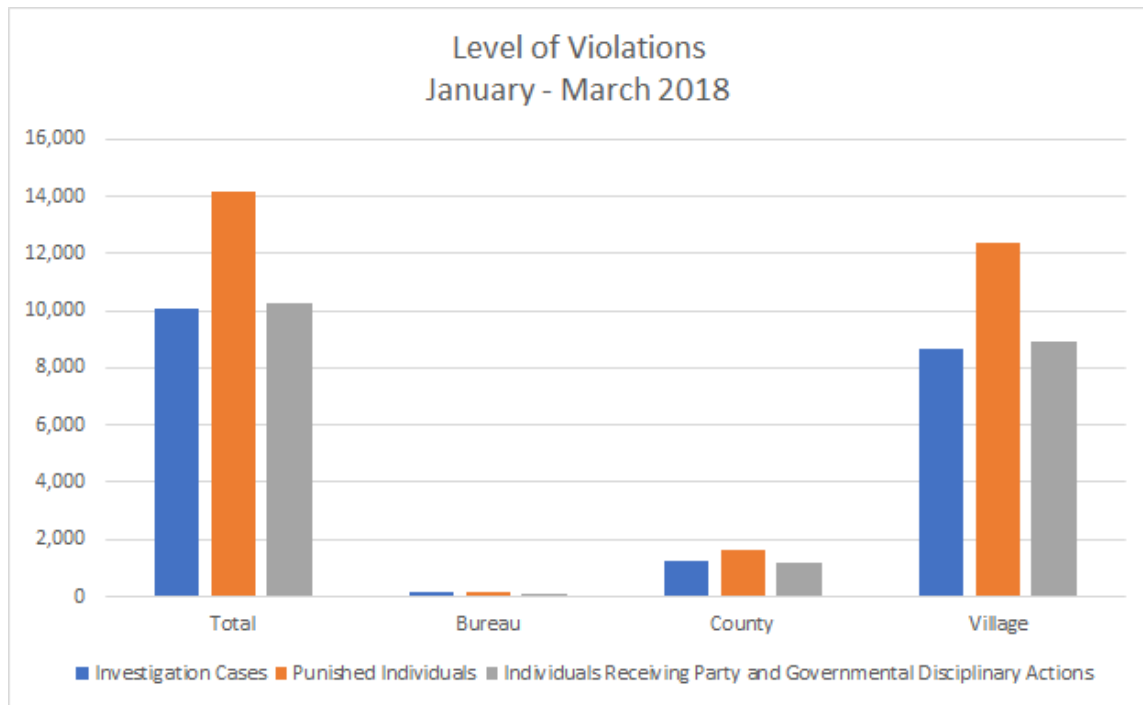
²⁴ “Tianjin Prosecutors Prosecute Sun Zhengcai for Receiving Bribes According to the Law [天津检察机关依法对孙政才涉嫌受贿案提起公诉,]” *Xinhua*, February 13, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-02/13/c_1122411842.htm

²⁵ “Zhang Zhongsheng Sentenced to Death for the Crimes of Receiving Bribes and Holding a Great Amount of Property Acquired through Unidentified Sources on His First Trial. His Private Property was Forfeited [张中生受贿、巨额财产来源不明案一审宣判被告人被判处死刑 并处没收个人全部财产],” *People's Daily*, March 29, 2018, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-03/29/nw.D110000renmrb_20180329_4-11.htm

²⁶ “Former Shaanxi Provincial Government Party Leadership Group Member and Shaanxi Vice Governor Feng Xinzhu Expelled from the Party and Public Office for Serious Disciplinary Violations [陕西省政府原党组成员、副省长冯新柱严重违纪被开除党籍和公职],” Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, March 31, 2018, http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/yaowen/201804/t20180401_167760.html

²⁷ “Seven Centrally Managed Cadres Fall within 60 Days, How Anti-Corruption Work Responds to a Severe and Complicated Situation [60 天内 7 名中管干部落马 反腐败如何应对严峻复杂形势],” *Legal Daily*, January 25, 2018, <http://fanfu.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0125/c64371-29786158.html>

Developments in the Anti-Corruption Campaign

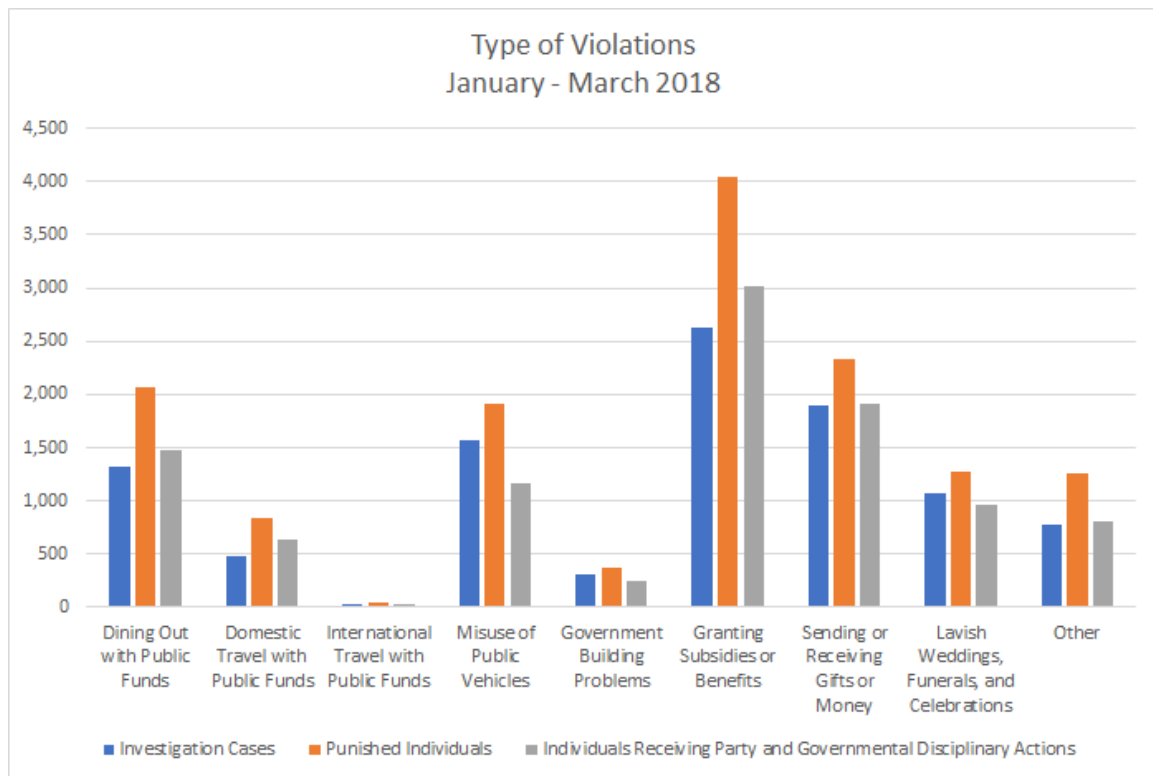


The CCDI's crackdown on violations of the eight-point guideline (中央八项规定) continued during the first quarter of 2018. The guideline is at the heart of Xi's anti-corruption drive as it seeks to prohibit malfeasance that detracts from the CCP's legitimacy. It regulates the work ethic of Party members, demanding they reject extravagance, simplify travel arrangements, make their documents and presentations concise, report only necessary news, and pursue frugal lifestyles.

This quarter saw 10,090 investigation cases, 14,141 punished individuals, and 10,255 individuals receiving Party and governmental disciplinary actions. Over 85 percent of the investigations, punishments, and disciplinary actions were at the village level. As none of the three categories were carried out at the provincial level this quarter, the remainder were at either the bureau or county level.²⁸

A closer look at the types of violations addressed during the quarter reveals a continued struggle against illegal village-level benefit and gift transgressions.

²⁸ “3,516 Violations of Eight-Point Guideline Were Investigated and Punished Nationwide in March 2018 [2018 年 3 月全国查处违反中央八项规定精神问题 3516 起],” Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, April 23, 2018, http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutiao/201804/t20180423_170478.html



Granting subsidies and benefits and sending and receiving gifts or money were the first and second most common violations respectively across all three categories. Misuse of public vehicles was the third most common for investigations. Dining out with public funds, however, was the third most common for punishments and disciplinary actions.²⁹ As the CCDI's 2018 Chinese New Year holiday warning to officials reveals, these old problems persist, and are in fact evolving.³⁰

Kickstarting the quarter's discipline efforts was the 2 February mobilization meeting of the 19th Central Committee's first round of discipline inspections, which symbolized the official start of inspections following the 19th Party Congress. Liaoning, Shandong, Henan, and Hunan provinces were signaled out for being the target of such inspection tours for the third time since the 18th Party Congress in 2012. PSC Member and CCDI Secretary Zhao Leji (赵乐际) was named the head of the inspection work leading small group while CCP Organization Department Head Chen Xi (陈希) and CCDI Deputy Secretary and Minister of Supervision Yang Xiaodu were named the deputy heads of the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Discloses 8 Cases of Eight-Point Guideline Violations [中央纪委曝光八起违反中央八项规定精神问题]," *People's Daily*, February 9, 2018, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-02/09/nw.D110000renmrb_20180209_1-04.htm

group.³¹ At the meeting, Zhao reiterated CCDI warnings against shirking responsibilities and inaction,³² indicating that the less prominent yet deleterious problem of cadres “keeping their heads low” remains a chronic issue.

However, Zhao’s work report of the 2nd Plenary Session of the 19th CCDI, which was released on 12 February, stressed that 2018 was an important year for defending Xi Jinping’s core position in the Party and implementing the work of the new supervision commissions at every level of government.³³ Indeed, the smooth implementation of the new supervision apparatus will ensure an expansion of the CCDI’s own influence, making it a top CCDI priority.

The National Supervision Commission

The eventual creation of the NSC came as no surprise in March; as described in the Party Watch Initiative’s first quarterly report, drafts of the prerequisite National Supervision Law had been deliberated since June 2017, and Xi made clear in his report to the 19th Party Congress that the supervision commissions would be created and work in tandem with the CCDI out of the same offices.³⁴

On 13 March, NPC Standing Committee Vice Chairman Li Jianguo (李建国) explained the important content points of the National Supervision Law draft during the 13th NPC, stating that the draft’s nine chapters and 69 articles cover regulations on the duty, scope of power, procedures, and legal responsibility of the supervision commissions. Li explained that members of the NSC will be selected by the NPC and that the reform of the national supervisory system will allow supervision over all personnel who exercise public authority—not just Party members.³⁵ The Supervision Law also replaces the CCDI’s “shuanggui” (双规) system, a secretive detention system used on Party members

³¹ “19th Central Committee’s First Round of Disciplinary Inspection: New Leadership Group Formation Revealed and First Time Entering Subprovincial Cities [十九届中央首轮巡视: 领导组新阵容曝光 首次纳入副省级城市],” *People’s Daily*, February 5, 2018, <http://fanfu.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0205/c64371-29805069.html>

³² “Zhao Leji: Deeply and Thoroughly Implement the Spirit of the 19th Party Congress and Firmly Conduct Inspection Work [赵乐际: 深入贯彻落实党的十九大精神 扎扎实实做好巡视工作],” *Xinhua*, February 2, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-02/02/c_1122361147.htm

³³ “Zhao Leji’s Work Report to the 19th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Second Plenary Session [赵乐际在十九届中央纪委二次全会上的工作报告],” *Xinhua*, February 12, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-02/12/c_1122410308.htm

³⁴ David A. Gitter, Julia G. Bowie, and Ann Listerud, “Party Watch Quarterly Report One,” Party Watch Initiative, March 6, 2018, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/183fcc_79ebd71f0227431e87c4b54633725fc1.pdf

³⁵ “Li Jianguo: Supervision Law Draft Consists of Nine Chapters and 69 Articles, Covering 7 Main Aspects [李建国: 监察法草案分为9章共69条 涵盖7方面主要内容],” *People’s Daily*, March 13, 2018, <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2018npc/n1/2018/0313/c418468-29864878.html>

which included the use of extreme isolation and harsh interrogation, with a new mechanism called “liuzhi” (留置). Like the shuanggui system, the liuzhi system allows supervision commissions to detain a suspect for up to six months without charge, but extends this detention authority to cover nearly all public servants, including managers at state-owned enterprises and public educational, scientific, cultural, medical, and athletic institutions.³⁶

These controversial powers were the focus of critics that warned of their detrimental effects on even the semblance of rule of law free from political interference. They noted that the NSC and its subordinate commissions would expand the scope of Xi Jinping’s extrajudicial anti-corruption campaign by allowing the Party to punish nearly any public servant charged with perceived political transgressions. These concerns are warranted, given the fact that state propaganda openly acknowledges the NSC “is a political organ, not an administrative or judicial organ.”³⁷ The fact that the NSC’s political power would supersede that of other institutions, most notably China’s Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate, was even noted by Chinese state academics worried that it may undermine those bodies.³⁸

Likewise, foreign observers had posited that public officials charged with wrongdoing would have no real legal recourse to challenge or appeal official decisions against them, given the commissions’ unbridled investigative powers, and that the old problem of fearful Party officials abstaining from meaningful action—lest they cross ill-defined political boundaries—would likely spread to state officials, state-owned enterprise managers, and even foreign investors.³⁹ Regarding liuzhi, experts warned that the new mechanism does not go far enough in limiting the abuses of shuanggui, proceduralizing the detention process but not providing basic fair-trial protections, granting investigators enormous power over detainees.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “Active Exploration and Practice, Formation of Valuable Experience, National Supervision System Reform Pilot Produces Results-- A Summary of the National Supervision System Reform Pilot Programs [积极探索实践 形成宝贵经验 国家监察体制改革试点取得实效——国家监察体制改革试点工作综述],” *Xinhua*, November 5, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2017-11/05/c_1121908387.htm

³⁸ Li Zhong [李忠], “National Supervision System Reform and Constitutional Reconstruction [国家监察体制改革与宪法再造],” *Global Law Review*, no.2 (2017), <http://www.iolaw.org.cn/showArticle.aspx?id=5154>

³⁹ Dimitar Gueorguiev and Jonathan Stromseth, “New Chinese Agency Could Undercut Other Anti-Corruption Efforts,” *Brookings*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/06/new-chinese-agency-could-undercut-other-anti-corruption-efforts/>

⁴⁰ “China: Revise Draft National Supervision Law,” *Human Rights Watch*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/10/china-revise-draft-national-supervision-law>

Despite these concerns, the NSC was officially approved along with the passing of the National Supervision Law on 20 March, the last day of the first session of the 13th NPC,⁴¹ subsuming the duties of the former Ministry of Supervision. Former Minister of Supervision and CCDI Deputy Secretary Yang Xiaodu was elected director of the NSC,⁴² ensuring that the head of the NSC reports to CCDI Secretary Zhao Leji. As noted in the previous section, Yang is a protégé of Xi and former deputy to Vice President Wang Qishan, ensuring the new body is controlled by a key Xi political ally. Thus, the new supervision commissions serve to expand the Party's disciplinary grip over the PRC government, enabling political reprisals against those that fail to fall in line with Xi Jinping in all areas of the public sector. Observing how this new system works in tandem with the CCDI, how often the liuzhi mechanism is employed against non-Party officials, and the reaction of China's public sector to the threat of liuzhi will be important developments to follow for China watchers concerned with progress on economic structural reforms, the deterioration of rule of law, and the political nature of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign.

⁴¹ Xi Jinping, "Decree of the President of the People's Republic of China [中华人民共和国主席令]," *National People's Congress*, March 20, 2018, http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/2018-03/20/content_2052201.htm

⁴² National Supervisory Commission Director Yang Xiaodu Takes an Oath of Allegiance to the Constitution [国家监察委员会主任杨晓渡进行宪法宣誓], *Xinhua*, March 18, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/18/c_1122554125.htm

United Front Work After Bureaucratic Restructuring

A series of bureaucratic reforms aimed at strengthening the Party's control over the state apparatus has brought the work of the state organs responsible for religious affairs, ethnic affairs, and liaising with overseas Chinese populations under the control of the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD). Previously, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC), and the State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) shared control of these groups with the UFWD. However, after the bureaucratic restructuring, the management of these groups is left entirely in the hands of the UFWD, an affirmation of the increasing importance of united front work to CCP objectives under Xi Jinping.

Overseas Chinese Affairs

Indications of the UFWD's new-found prominence in overseas Chinese affairs work and attendant changes to this work appeared shortly after the announcement of the reform. During a 23 March OCAO general meeting on the reform, the OCAO Party leadership group secretary Xu Yousheng (许又声) stressed that the office's merger with the UFWD will only strengthen overseas Chinese affairs work. He cited the reform's enhancement of centralized and unified CCP leadership in overseas Chinese affairs work, strengthening of the overall coordination of such work, and boosting of the role of relevant departments and social groups in this work as evidence.⁴³ These changes underscore how the CCP not only aims to use the reform to sideline the state's bureaucracy in favor of the Party in carrying out overseas Chinese affairs work, but also the CCP leadership's belief that the broadening of the Party's role will make this work more effective in practice.

This point is also evident in three additional changes stemming from the reform that Xu drew attention to during the meeting. First, Xu stated that, "Our work duties have become more serious." He listed taking charge in formulating relevant policies and programs, researching the "situation" of overseas Chinese, liaising with relevant social groups and representatives, coordinating with relevant departments and social groups, and guiding and promoting propaganda, cultural exchange, and Chinese language education as being among the UFWD's primary duties related to overseas Chinese work. Second, he claimed that, "Our field of work has become wider." He insisted this would require being more adept at mobilizing and bringing into play relevant departments and social groups. Finally, Xu said that, "Our work methods must realize a great transformation,"

⁴³ "Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council Convenes an Office Cadre Meeting to Convey and Learn the Spirit of the Third Plenum and the Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions [国务院侨办召开全办干部大会 传达学习中全会精神 和《深化党和国家机构改革方案》], Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, March 23, 2018, <http://www.gqb.gov.cn/news/2018/0323/44601.shtml>

highlighting the need to break away from familiar and routine work and throw more energy into research, policy and program formulation, coordination, support guidance, and management supervision.⁴⁴

The reform's emphasis on broadening the OCAO's work under the UFWD is consistent with the UFWD's recently exposed efforts to use overseas Chinese—especially through the targeting of politically influential persons—to pursue the CCP's interests abroad. Examples of such targeting are numerous. For instance, Fairfax Media revealed the united front ties of Chau Chak Wing (周泽荣), one of Australia's biggest political donors, in July 2017.⁴⁵ Additionally, Anne Marie-Brady detailed ethnic Chinese New Zealander politicians' connections with various united front organizations in September 2017.⁴⁶ Similarly, an October 2017 *Financial Times* article referenced a UFWD teaching manual's approving description of ethnic Chinese Canadian politicians' electoral successes in Toronto and expressed goal of working with individuals and groups in prominent positions.⁴⁷ As the structural reform as well as Xu's speech occurred several months after these reports were published, the UFWD appears undeterred by increased foreign scrutiny of its activities. Its efforts to involve overseas Chinese in its influence operations will thus likely continue unabated.

The Sinicization of Religion

Since the restructuring, the UFWD and organizations associated with it have been particularly vocal about religious policy and how the CCP's approach to religious work is changing in the "new era." The UFWD has made efforts to demonstrate that it will continue the pressure campaign against China's religious groups that has been heating up since Xi Jinping entered office.⁴⁸ First and foremost, it will press forward with the "sinicization" of religions in China, a process intended to shape religious traditions and doctrine to better conform with Chinese society and CCP objectives. This has been a primary objective of religious policy since Xi's April 2016 speech, in which he asserted

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Nick McKenzie and Richard Baker, "Wikileaks: Billionaire Australian donor's Beijing links detailed in 'sensitive' diplomatic cable," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 16, 2017, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/wikileaks-billionaire-australian-donors-beijing-links-detailed-in-sensitive-diplomatic-cable-20170714-gxb21c.html>

⁴⁶ Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping," Wilson Center, September 2017, 18, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/for_website_magicweaponsanne-mariesbradyseptember2017.pdf

⁴⁷ James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini, "Inside China's secret 'magic weapon' for worldwide influence," *Financial Times*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/fb2b3934-b004-11e7-beba-5521c713abf4>

⁴⁸ Sarah Cook, "The Battle for China's Spirit," Freedom House, February 2017, 7, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_ChinasSprit2017_Abridged_FINAL_compressed.pdf

that in order to “actively guide the adaptation of religions to socialist society, an important task is supporting China’s religions persistence in the direction of sinicization.”⁴⁹

Xi has since reiterated the focus on sinicization in his report to the 19th Party Congress, where he made clear that this would be the main thrust of religious policy: “We will fully implement the Party’s basic policy on religious affairs, insist on the sinicization of Chinese religions, and provide active guidance for religion and socialism to coexist.”⁵⁰ In April, former SARA deputy director Chen Zongrong (陈宗荣) said at a press conference that basic religious freedoms as stated in the constitution will remain unchanged, however, “China’s attitude towards religious guidance should move toward the direction of sinicization.”⁵¹

At events surrounding the Two Sessions, various officials associated with the UFWD concentrated on sinicization in their discussion of religion. Though sinicization is often associated with policy toward China’s Christian population, both Buddhist and Muslim leaders made clear that it applies to their religions as well. As the Two Sessions were underway, president of the Buddhist Association of China Master Xuecheng (学诚) gave an exclusive interview with *China News Net* about the state of religious affairs in China, saying “religion should escape the limitations of tradition in order to modernize and sinicize.”⁵²

Similarly, Islamic Association of China Head Yang Faming (杨发明) emphasized the importance of extending sinicization to Islam as well in his speech to the CPPCC National Committee, saying, “We must allow traditional Chinese culture to permeate Islam and jointly guard the spiritual homeland of the Chinese people.” He suggested that the Islamic Association of China would work to ensure that socialist core values,

⁴⁹ “Xi Jinping: Comprehensively Improve the Level of Religious Work for a New Situation [习近平: 全面提高新形势下宗教工作水平],” *Xinhua*, April 23, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/23/c_1118716540.htm

⁵⁰ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era - Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China [决胜全面建成小康社会夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告],” *Xinhua*, October 27, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm

⁵¹ Rong Qihan, “China’s Religious Freedom Policy is Sincere, Effective, and Based on its National Situation-- State Council Information Office Holds a Press Conference on Releasing a White Paper on ‘China’s Freedom of Religion Safeguarding Policies and Implementation’ [“中国的宗教信仰自由政策是真诚、立足国情、行之有效的”——国新办举行《中国保障宗教信仰自由的政策和实践》白皮书发布会],” *Xinhua*, April 3, 2018, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-04/03/content_5279627.htm

⁵² “Master Xuecheng: Religions in China Should Escape the Limitations of Tradition [学诚法师: 中国宗教应跳出固守传统的局限],” *China News Net*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.chinanews.com/gn/2018/03-07/8462024.shtml>

traditional Chinese culture, and “Muslim Patriotic Education” will enter the mosque, and religious ceremony, culture, and architecture will embody Chinese characteristics, style, and manner. Yang said that Muslims in China must regard the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as the highest interest of the nation, and should actively participate in reform, opening up, and socialist modernization.⁵³ Since then, the Islamic Association of China has initiated a “Four Enters” (四进) campaign, intended to “promote Islam’s adaptation to a socialist society” by requiring mosques to hold national flag raising ceremonies, hold special study lectures and speech contests at mosques, and conduct other activities intended to raise political consciousness.⁵⁴

After taking over religious work in March, UFWD Head You Quan (尤权) addressed the subject himself in a speech during a 3-4 April visit to Anhui Province entitled “Thoroughly Research Resolutions for Religious Work’s Prominent Problems, Continue the Sinicization of Religion in China.” In conducting religious affairs, You Quan stated the department will focus on “adopting an attitude conducive to guidance, building a grassroots religious work management system, strengthening the education of religious figures, giving full play to patriotic religious groups, resolutely resisting outside forces using religion as a means of infiltration, guarding against and controlling illegal religious activities, and safeguarding national security and social harmony and stability.”⁵⁵

The various comments by officials associated with the UFWD about religious work make clear that the bureaucratic restructuring is intended to aid the CCP in raising the intensity of the pressure it is already putting on religious groups. The UFWD will lead the charge in molding the traditions and doctrine of China’s religious groups to bring them closer in line to the CCP. At a time when the Vatican is in talks with the Chinese government to normalize relations, the UFWD will attempt to ensure, through its campaign of sinicization, that no authority is higher than the CCP in the eyes of religious Chinese.

⁵³ “CPPCC National Committee Member Yang Faming: Insist on the Direction of Islamic Sinicization [杨发明委员: 坚持我国伊斯兰教中国化方向],” *Xinhua*, March 10, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/10/c_1122518319.htm

⁵⁴ “Launching Ceremony of the ‘Four Enters’ Campaign for Mosques was Held [“四进”清真寺活动启动仪式举行],” *People’s Daily*, May 18, 2018, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-05/19/nw.D110000renmrb_20180519_11-06.htm

⁵⁵ “You Quan: Thoroughly Research Resolutions for Religious Work’s Prominent Problems, Continue the Sinicization of Religion in China [尤权: 深入研究解决宗教工作中的突出问题 持续推进我国宗教中国化],” *Xinhua*, April 4, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-04/04/c_1122639879.htm