

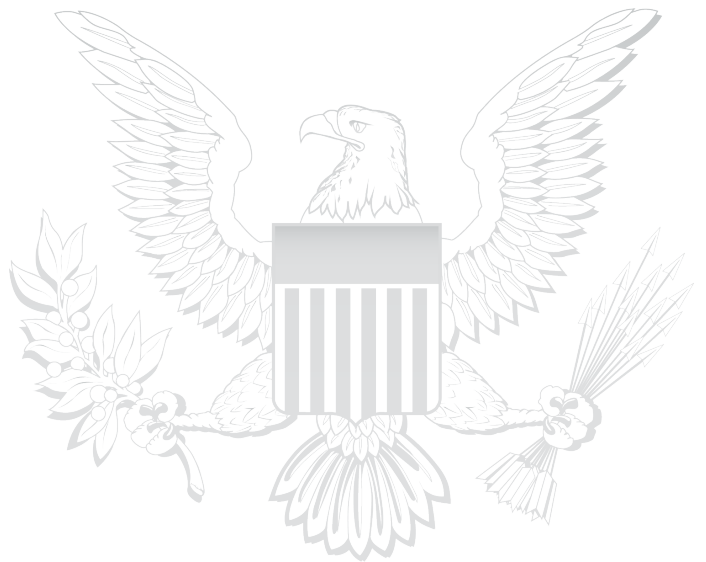
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Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Wealth and Corrupt Activities of the Leadership of the Chinese Communist Party

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Executive Summary

This report is provided by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) in response to section 6501 of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (Pub.L. No. 117-263). This unclassified report addresses the wealth and corrupt activities of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

This product was drafted by ODNI's National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Officer for China.

Wealth and Corrupt Activities of the Leadership of the Chinese Communist Party

Corruption is an endemic feature of and challenge for China, enabled by a political system with power highly centralized in the hands of the CCP, a CCP-centric concept of the rule of law, a lack of independent checks on public officials, and limited transparency. President Xi Jinping launched a sweeping campaign to address persistent corruption in China in 2012, and in the ensuing years the campaign has investigated—and found guilty—nearly five million officials at all levels of government. Corruption in China often involves money in the form of different types of bribery or graft, and open-source research has demonstrated that some officials and their families have amassed significant wealth due to their positions and connections. However, Xi’s anti-corruption campaign more deeply reflects a party-directed securitization, or a targeting of political indiscipline and ideological impurity, particularly at the highest levels of government, in an effort to preserve the CCP’s domestic control and legitimacy.

A lack of transparency within China, pervasive government censorship, and the absence of rules regarding disclosures of leaders’ finances challenges public research on issues of corruption or leaders’ personal wealth. The powerful Central and regional Commissions for Discipline Inspection (CDI) are the lead organizations for enforcing anti-corruption in China and operate at all levels of government. These organizations publish some data that helps to illuminate the scope of anti-corruption investigations in China and also provide indications of the extent of corruption overall.

Corruption and Anti-Corruption

Academic studies show corruption has been prevalent in China since its founding, with particular intensification over the years of sharp economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s. Many academics and observers claim corruption since 2000 is so widespread that it undermines the regime’s legitimacy.

Consistent with this analysis, when Xi came to power in 2012, he launched a sweeping anti-corruption campaign, vowing to take a “zero tolerance” approach targeting “flies” (low-level cadres) and “tigers” (senior officials) alike. His campaign has also targeted officials at department and bureau levels, as well as county and division levels. From 2012 through 2022, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) and the National Supervisory Commission investigated nearly five million people within the government and CCP, finding 4.7 million officials guilty. In his words, Xi intended to make government officials “unable and unwilling to be corrupt.”

Xi uses the anti-corruption campaign to eliminate rampant corruption that undermines Party legitimacy and control and, in select cases, to target his political rivals. Xi has linked rooting out corruption with internal Party discipline and ideological commitment, viewed as critical to China’s stability and ability to achieve its long-term

ambitions. Corruption in China is framed as a political crime and a sign of disloyalty and ideological impurity, highlighting its importance to the Party and serving as a warning against any internal disobedience. Government propaganda highlights the CCP's commitment and self-sacrifice and promotes a narrative characterizing corrupt officials as political enemies of the state. Purged officials, particularly at higher and more visible levels of government, are often first publicly accused of serious violations of Party discipline. In 2021 the CCDI described anti-corruption as “a severe political struggle” that “undermined the Party's leadership and unity.” In 2024, the campaign targeted more than 50 senior government officials.

Although Xi has not used the campaign primarily to target his political rivals, a drive to eliminate competing power centers factored significantly into decisions made in the initial phases of the campaign. Early in Xi's tenure, senior officials with ties to his predecessors were targeted with investigations and arrests. However, academic analysis of anti-corruption investigations over its 10-year span has not identified a focus on officials with specific factional ties or backgrounds, indicating that the campaign has broadly sought to root out corruption in all levels of government where it exists. More significantly, political connections to high-ranking officials have not protected officials from prosecution, including those with close personal ties to Xi himself; the anti-corruption campaign has purged top officials considered loyal to Xi and who had risen under his patronage.

The level of corruption in China almost certainly varies based on the region and level of government. One scholarly study focusing on one city found that 8- to 65-percent of officials—depending on the official's rank—received an unofficial income from bribery or graft; a separate study and a survey of public perceptions both estimated that approximately half of Chinese officials have engaged in corruption, especially at the local levels. These analyses of corruption concluded that bribery could increase an official's legal earnings four to six times, with higher echelons able to earn more through graft and bribery than those at lower levels of the government, commensurate with their level of access and authority. The studies collectively demonstrate the endemic nature and widespread perception of corruption within the party-state.

Corruption within China is primarily due to structural features that centralize power, eschew independent checks or accountability—especially at the provincial level—and produce perverse incentives for political advancement and financial enrichment. These features of China's bureaucratic system entrench incentives for corruption or obstruct efforts to reform the system in numerous ways. For example:

- The CDI organizations primarily responsible for investigating misbehaviors are political organizations that work directly for their Party committees and lack independent external oversight, allowing them to pursue anti-corruption cases in often arbitrary ways. The CCP is loath to allow external oversight and instead prioritizes self-rectification, probably fearing independent authorities would

undermine central control, limiting accountability and any prospects for sweeping reforms.

- Centrally directed economic growth targets for local governments—which must be achieved for career advancement—but decentralized decision-making at provincial and other local levels of government allow significant flexibility in policy implementation. This structure effectively encourages provincial and local leaders to take illicit actions for personal and professional gain.
- Membership in elite organizations such as the National People’s Congress (NPC) is coveted as a symbol of power and authority, and provides access to sensitive government documents. Potential benefits of NPC membership incentivize individuals to pay high costs to join, often through bribes, and to accept bribes while a member, or even upon completion of service, to facilitate business deals.

Senior-level Corruption

Specific instances of corruption among more senior CCP leaders are particularly difficult to determine from the outside, despite indications that corruption remains widespread. One academic study of criminal corruption cases in China found that corruption at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy was very high and, of those charged with a crime, more than 80 percent of the charges involved bribery.

Pervasive government censorship and the absence of rules regarding public disclosures of leader finances contribute to a lack of transparency regarding personal wealth in China. Even so, journalistic research published in 2012 identified that the families of senior leaders, including then-Premier Wen Jiabao and then-incoming President Xi Jinping, had amassed significant wealth.

- Wen’s family—such as his mother, wife, son, and siblings—controlled assets of at least \$2.7 billion in 2012. Similarly, Xi’s siblings, nieces, and nephews held assets worth over \$1 billion in business investments and real estate.
- This research did not identify investments specifically linked to the leaders themselves, nor did it uncover any direct influence from the leaders contributing to a growth in family investments. However, their senior-level positions would have granted access to privileged information and both private and state-owned enterprise actions could have advantaged family holdings due to their connections to persons with political power. Following publication of this research, China tightened information controls and limited access to many foreign news organizations, which continues to challenge public research on issues of senior leader corruption or personal wealth.
- Xi may have urged family members to divest holdings as he came into power. However, industry research provides evidence that, as of 2024, Xi’s family retains millions in business interests and financial investments. While the available data

does not link the investments directly to Xi, it is possible that these holdings are managed indirectly on Xi's behalf.

Open-source research shows corruption cases within the CCP Central Committee span leading officials overseeing a range of portfolios and projects.

- In 2020, Zhang Wei, a Chinese businessman, was arrested on charges of organizing, leading, and participating in organized crime; illegal detention; and illegal possession of firearms and ammunition. He was also found guilty in 2021 of illegally absorbing public deposits.
- Chen Gang, a former member of the Leading Party Members Group of the China Association for Science and Technology, was accused in 2019 of accepting over \$18 million in bribes—at least some of which was likely associated with his role in overseeing citywide construction projects for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.
- In April 2024, Yao Qian, Director of the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CRSC) Department of Technology Supervision, was investigated for “serious violations of discipline and law,” possibly for his role in China’s Central Bank Digital Currency initiative. The CCDI has investigated at least 16 individuals within the CRSC, with six of those investigations occurring in 2024.

The anticorruption campaign has targeted rampant leadership corruption and has not shied away from purging high-level officials within the ranks of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)—which have included a culture of pay-for-promotion that continues even a decade after the anticorruption campaign’s launch. In 2024, Xi stressed during a speech to military commanders that “the barrels of guns must always be in the hands of those who are loyal and dependable to the Party,” further emphasizing his commitment to Party loyalty and expectations of the same from the military, especially. His focus on corruption in the PLA may also reflect concerns that corrupt practices will prevent the military from acquiring the capabilities and readiness he has directed it to achieve by 2027, in preparation for a potential conflict over Taiwan.

- In 2023, China removed General Li Shangfu, then-Minister of National Defense, investigating both Li and his predecessor after arresting the commander of the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) and at least nine other current or former PLARF personnel.
- In 2024, Beijing launched an investigation of Admiral Miao Hua, then-director of the Central Military Commission’s Political Work Department and in charge of political loyalty within China’s armed forces.
- Both Li and Miao were accused of Party discipline violations, and both were considered proteges of Xi, demonstrating the seriousness of the CCP’s concerns regarding loyalty and effectiveness—particularly within the PLA—and the scope of the regime’s approach to corruption.