

LOCAL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION IN CHINA

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Executive Summary

1. In preparation of the 18th Party Congress, all four levels of China's local governments—township, county, municipal, and province—had replaced their leadership teams by July 2012. Each team is helmed by a party standing committee—the local equivalent of the Politburo Standing Committee in Beijing.
2. The 2011-2 round of local leadership succession has produced 404 party standing committee members at the provincial level, 4,384 at the municipal level, 30,028 at the county level and 275,205 at the township level. These 310,021 individuals comprise the core of China's local government for the next five years.
3. An elaborate system of six major components was used to produce them: “democratic nomination”, “democratic assessment”, “public opinion poll”, “analysis of actual achievements”, “individual interview”, and “comprehensive consideration.”
4. Coordinated by the organization departments of local party committees, these six components constitute a half-hearted “elite democracy” of sort. Despite the word “democratic”, they are carried out mainly among the selected cadre groups in the local political establishment, with little direct public input.
5. While the six procedures do pose considerable constraints, the final personnel decisions rest in the hand of the relevant party committee. The intense jostling and horse trading that often precede it means that decision has been made before the formal meeting of the party committee. A similar process also produces the next Politburo Standing Committee.
6. This system is carefully crafted to both institutionalize cadre promotion and to preserve the discretionary power of the party, which can intervene in the

process at multiple points. Such power often leads to abuses and corruption such as the buying and selling of official posts.

7. The system is intended to make promotions more rule-based, fairer, and more consensual. It also allows the CCP to impose certain standards and select the types of cadres that meet the political and other needs of the current regime. It has ensured smooth power transitions, maintained political stability, and produced a younger, better educated and broadly experienced cadre corps.
8. However, given the preponderance of the power of party chiefs in the Chinese political system, the CCP has a long way to go before genuine intra-party democracy, which alone may have a realistic chance to curb corruption inside the party, could be achieved.