

**CHINA'S CENTRAL COMMISSION
ON COMPREHENSIVELY
DEEPENING REFORMS:
SEVEN YEARS ON**

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Executive Summary

1. The Central Commission for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (henceforth Reform Commission) is the top coordination body that serves as the clearing house for all reforms. An upgraded version of the 2013 Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (henceforth Reform Leading Group), it is part of a major move by China's President Xi Jinping to centralise power.
2. Members of this body consist of top-level officials from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the State Council, the National People's Congress, the military, the Supreme Court and Supreme Procuratorate, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, as well as key party-state bureaucracies.
3. Over the seven years of its existence, this body had by February 2021 met 58 times and processed 420 reform bills. Its operation reflects closely Xi Jinping's determined and meticulous personality and detail-oriented work style. Nevertheless, the meetings are still ad hoc in their agenda.
4. The reform programmes deliberated are mostly drawn up by the usual line bureaucracies and policy specialists; the role of this body is to screen, balance and endow them with the highest authority to overcome possible resistance down the line.
5. Given the many reform bills presented at each meeting, the depth of deliberation is questionable. Some of the bills are very specialised and technical, while others are rather trivial and hardly deserving of such a top-level forum; presumably the endorsement by the Reform Commission would increase their weight when it comes to implementation.
6. True to its name, the reforms tackled are comprehensive. However, how in-depth they are to a large extent will be determined by whether Xi and his colleagues can overcome the obstacles and resistance.

7. The establishment of the Reform Commission at the top and the insistence that all reforms must have a legal basis have considerably constrained the discretionary power at lower levels—the lively scene of local experiments and local models characteristic of the Deng era has ended.
8. The reforms pushed by the Xi regime entails considerable redistribution of power and resources, as well as the disentanglement of the vested interests of many parties. The environment of “rising tide lifting all boats” of the Deng era is gone. Reforms inevitably run into obstacles and meet with resistance.
9. The lack of motivation on the part of local officials in implementing reforms has led to cadre passivity and what in the Chinese political parlance called “bureaucratism and formalism”. Sometimes diverse interest groups form coalitions to resist or reshape the reform measures by manipulating public opinion through social media or online channels of communication.
10. The scope, comprehensiveness and depth of reform programmes evidently bear the stamp of Xi’s personality, style and approach. Most of the reforms discussed at the meetings of the Reform Commission are necessary from a non-political perspective.