

**THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY
POLITBURO COLLECTIVE STUDY
SESSIONS**

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Executive Summary

1. The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has since early 2002 held regular “Politburo Collective Study Sessions” (PCSS) on diverse subject matters. The PCSS is part of the CCP’s effort to “build a learning party” and has become a fixture of the political process at the top echelon of the regime.
2. The stability of the Chinese regime, the historical legacy of the CCP, the Chinese tradition of scholar-officials and the urgent need of state officials for new knowledge and skills created by the rapid transformation of the world under the Fourth Industrialisation may have contributed to the emergence of PCSS in China.
3. PCSS topics, such as Marxist theories, the law, international relations, the frontier of development in science and technology, defence and national security, media, governance and so on, are closely related to policymaking and reforms in various areas, as well as party building.
4. The normal venue is Huairen Hall inside the Zhongnanhai compound that houses both the headquarters of the government and the ruling party. The attendees are Politburo members (around 25) and other relevant senior officials.
5. The lectures are conducted by experts or practitioners in the subject fields who are invited from around the country. Each session takes around two hours, following a format of 80 minutes of lecturing, 30 minutes of Q&A and in-class discussion, and 10 minutes for concluding remarks by the chairman—usually the general secretary of the CCP.
6. The CCP’s Central Policy Research Office (headed by Wang Huning, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, who was replaced by his deputy recently), decides on the topics apparently with the final approval of the general secretary and the logistics are coordinated by the Central General Office of the CCP. It may take months and concerted effort by many parties to bring a lecture to fruition.

7. Under Chinese President Xi Jinping, the PCSS has increasingly become a platform for Xi to push through his policy ideas and shore up his authority.
8. Xi significantly reduced the number of lecturers from the scholarly community and increased the lectures by party-state officials based on their departmental experiences. Sometimes no lecturer is invited. The class conducts reading and discussion amongst themselves or take a field trip to engage in onsite learning.
9. Xi's domination of the PCSS has to do with both his personality and his political objectives. In contrast to his predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin who adopted the Dengist mode of "crossing the river by feeling for steppingstones", Xi is confident of what he wants to do and where he is leading China.
10. As a result, the PCSS is becoming more of a venue for policy signalling or political charade than a genuine collective learning exercise as it was intended to be.