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How China is ruled

CHANGING CHINA In Depth

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Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party has ruled the country since 1949, tolerating no opposition and often dealing brutally with dissent.

The country's most senior decision-making body is the standing committee of the politburo, heading a pyramid of power which tops every village and workplace.

Politburo members have never faced competitive election, making it to the top thanks to their patrons, abilities and survival instincts in a political culture where saying the wrong thing can lead to a life under house-arrest, or worse.

Formally, their power stems from their positions in the politburo. But in China, personal relations count much more than job titles. A leader's influence rests on the loyalties he or she builds with superiors and proteges, often over decades.

That was how Deng Xiaoping remained paramount leader long after resigning all official posts, and it explains why party elders sometimes play a key role in big decisions.

The politburo controls three other important bodies and ensures the party line is upheld.

These are the Military Affairs Commission, which controls the armed forces; the National People's Congress, or parliament; and the State Council, the government's administrative arm.

Click on the boxes in the diagram to read more about how China is ruled.



Pomp and secrecy are central to Party rule