

ORCA SPECIAL REPORT 4

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FOREWORD BY RAHUL K. REDDY, SENIOR RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, ORCA



Over the past decade, corruption and anti-corruption have stood at the very heart of China's political life. The launch of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign in 2013, anchored in the Eight Central Regulations, marked one of the most ambitious governance initiatives in the history People's Republic of China. Beyond its immediate political resonance, has redefined campaign relationship between the Party, the state, and Chinese society, while also reshaping the norms of political conduct and institutional discipline.

This Special Report, Ten Years of Anti-China: Patterns Corruption in Investigations and Punishments. provides timely and rigorous examination o f this decade-long effort. By drawing together historical context, ideological foundations, and analysis, quantitative the unpacks not only the mechanics of corruption and its curbing in China, but also the broader political and social consequences thereof. It traces how corruption has been understood and addressed in China, before turning data-driven exploration investigations and punishments carried out under the campaign.

The findings presented here shed light on evolving trends, the scale and depth of disciplinary measures, and the implications of sustained political oversight. In doing so, the report invites readers to consider the longterm impacts of the campaign-not only on governance and policy, but also the trajectory of Communist Party of China itself.

As China enters its second decade of this defining initiative, this report offers valuable insights into what the campaign has achieved, what it has changed, and where it may be headed.

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A decade of data on China's anti-corruption campaign says a lot about how the Party governs itself and stays in power. Underway since 2013, Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign is the most defining feature of political life in China and an inescapable reality of elite party politics within the Communist Party of China (CPC). This Special Report on anti-corruption is an exploration and analysis of a decade of data on the Eight Central Regulations, the fountainhead of China's anti-corruption campaign.

The Eight Central Regulations are political regulations and a moral code of conduct. They are designed to cultivate the correct moral character, reshape work styles and orient the virtue system of officials in China. They are about self-regulation as much as they are about Xi Jinping's design for political control. Focusing on the "four evils" of formalism, bureaucracy, extravagance and hedonism, the Regulations investigate violations and hand out punishments to officials at all levels of the Party-State structure. Over a decade, the investigations and punishments have evolved not just in focus, but also in intensity, direction and depth to reflect the shifting political landscape of domestic Chinese politics.

From high-ranking ministerial-level officials to township and village level cadres, the campaign has covered every corner of the Party. However, millions of lower level officials have been ensnared in the campaign, while higher-level officials are relatively untouched. The Party has increasingly focused on specific violations of work style, punishing failures to fulfill basic duties with harsher punishments and cracking down on giving and receiving gifts. The Special Report delves into such patterns and trends revealed by data on investigations and punishments, analysing why such changes have emerged over time. The Report also assesses the impact and implications of these patterns on party politics and policy making in China.

The report is divided into six sections, beginning with an introduction to the concept of corruption in China, followed by a history of corruption, anti-corruption efforts and a detailed assessment of the regulations, ideology and implementation governing the anti-corruption work. Next, the report analyses trends in investigations and punishments related to the Eight Central Regulations over the last decade. The last section discusses the implications of the campaign, its outcomes and what to expect next in elite party politics.





All institutions, big or small, public or private, endure corruption, and China is no exception. As in most developed and developing countries, the abuse of power is one of the most pressing problems confronting the domestic political system in China. It is pervasive at all levels of the administrative hierarchy and has persisted throughout Chinese history. But the intensity and visibility of corruption has waxed and waned with changes to the political and economic environment, and the fight to manage it has been subject to the will and whims of leaderships. Intertwined with the power struggles of self-interested political actors, perceptions of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) legitimacy and the day-to-day hustle of millions of Chinese citizens, corruption exerts a direct, powerful influence on the lives and fortunes of citizens and political elites.

Corruption conditions the policy environment too, shaping development outcomes, prospects of upward social mobility, accessibility and availability of public goods and profitability of enterprise operations. It is a compounding variable, inserting functional complexity into governance dynamics. It includes the active participation of individuals, companies and organisations, networking a wide web of actors and institutions to produce distortive as well as legitimising social and economic outcomes.

As with any cross-cultural phenomenon, fraud, graft and other forms of abuse of power take on localised variations unique to the political geographies and cultural contexts they inhabit. In China, corruption is absorbed and accepted into social and political life in distinct ways, serving a variety of legitimate social norms and governance functions. It is a part of state and wealth-building, representing informal rules and socialisation practices to build mutually beneficial and lasting relationships. Historically, it is reflective of the health and condition of regimes, with rampant corruption considered to represent the decay of political systems and immorality of leaderships. Much like dynasties of the past who lost the Mandate of Heaven for rampant economic and moral corruption, modern China's leaders have often worried about the survival of the CPC as it grapples with widespread corruption.

Defining Corruption

Corruption has been both easy and difficult to define. Defined narrowly or broadly, legally or generally, corruption typically involves actors, motives and gains. Academic studies have defined corruption as "the misuse of public power for private gain" (Rose-Ackerman, 1999), "exchange of power for personal gain" (Fisman & Golden, 2017), "usurpation or misuse of authority delegated by a

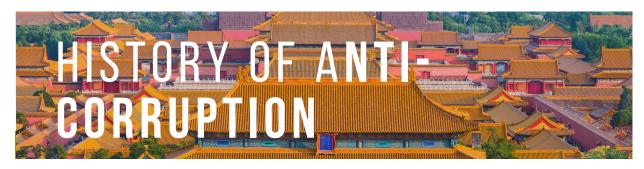
principal to an agent to seek personal gains" (Wedeman, 2022), "public officials' misuse of public office for private gain" (Shin & Lui, 2022), "misuse of entrusted power for private benefits" and "behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding gains" (Harding, 2014).

At the same time, defining corruption has been a fraught task, with scholars arguing that some definitions miss the social and political significance of corruption. Expansive definitions that attempt to include all kinds of offences and consequences may refer to actions that are not corruption per se, or are other forms of abuse of power. Corruption is also a matter of perception by a specific group, normative expectations of social relationships and depends on moral articulation by actors. Academic and legal definitions that include the idiosyncrasies of China's social and political context have been helpful, offering some clarity on what we mean when we speak of corruption.

Thus, an inquiry into the definitions, history, trends and impacts of corruption and anti-corruption work in China is important from an economic, social and political standpoint. Corruption is considered the biggest problem of development, given its impact on degrading or contributing to the efficiencies of policy implementation and institutional outcomes. Corruption has frequently been framed as a drag on economic growth, leading to resource misallocation, market distortions and lower confidence in the public sector. It is also held responsible for weakening institutions and public trust, compromising law enforcement and judicial outcomes, as well as social stability in general. On the other hand, it is argued that, in a variety of ways, it also exerts an enabling influence on economic performance and serves a functional purpose.

Given its extensive impact and enduring presence, corruption is a highly sensitive issue for the Party Centre and its legitimacy in China. Its significance is confirmed by warnings issued by various General Secretaries of the Party, who have framed it as an existential threat to the Party's survival and China's stability.





Corruption in China is as old as governance, given its long history of bureaucratic culture. It has impacted every dynasty in Chinese history and so, every leader in China has attempted, in varying measure, to eliminate or contain it. The early Chinese dynasties of the Xia, Shang and Zhou had written records of laws and regulations punishing officials for bribery and corruption. (Liu, 2016) By the time of the Han dynasty, the Censor-in-Chief of the Imperial Censorate (yushitai, 御史臺) was one of the highest positions in the Imperial Court (Theobald, 2012).

Disciplinary institutions in charge of managing corruption were integrated early in the Party's history. The first attempt to integrate anti-corruption work within the Party's activities took place at the first and second National Congress in 1922, where the Party adopted its constitution which included a chapter on discipline, albeit without a specialised agency for enforcement (Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision, 2015).

However, due to the civil war in China, these supervisory organs were not established and enforcement of discipline was constrained by various external and domestic factors (Zhang, 2016). When the civil war came to an end in 1949, the Party decided to establish the Commission for Discipline Inspection with Zhu De as Secretary (Zhu De, the first secretary, 2016).

Corruption Under Party Rule

The limited impact of the discipline inspection agencies in the early years of the Party's rule of China is evidenced by the Gao Gang-Rao Shushi scandal (Sullivan, 1984). Mao Zedong's Three-Antis, New Three-Antis and Five-Antis campaigns purged large numbers of party members, but remained ineffective in containing corruption and other disciplinary violations (Sheng, 2006).

For a short time, the Supervisory Committees carried out anti-corruption work, but it did not last long, as the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution disrupted governance and anti-corruption work (Sichuan University School of Marxism, 2011).

The anti-corruption apparatus of the Party was restored in 1977, and in 1978 Chen Yun was appointed the first Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) (Shu, 2015). The significance of the CCDI was heightened by the stipulation that its chief must be a member of the Politburo Standing Committee (Guo, 2014a). The first Plenary Session of the CCDI was held in Beijing to formulate "Some Principles of Political Life Within the Party"

(Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1980), targeting enforcement of collective leadership, unhealthy practices and arbitrary decision making. Disciplinary functions of agencies were significantly institutionalised at the 12th National Party Congress in 1982, when an amendment of the Party Charter was tabled (Li, 2015) and Article 44 of the Party Charter authorised the CCDI to rectify work styles and inspect implementation of Party policy and decisions.

A dual leadership system was instituted, allowing anti-corruption work to be led by local units of the CCDI, under the supervision of the corresponding party and higher-level disciplinary committees committee (Hualing, Additionally, the CCDI replaced ad-hoc inspection teams with 21 dedicated government departments and agencies (Guo, 2014b). In 1983, the CDIC issued the "Rules on the Jurisdiction to Approve Sanctions against Party-members Who Violated Party Discipline", which concentrated power in the hands of an executive body and undertook organisational restructuring to streamline anti-2016). The impact of work (Li, expanded institutionalisation was visible in the results of the rectification campaign from 1983 to 1986, during which 33,896 people were expelled from the Party (Dickson, 1990).

Post-Deng Era

But once again, the anti-corruption work of the Party was constrained when General Secretary Zhao Ziyang argued that the CCDI "should not be involved in any cases related to the legal (faji, 法纪) and administrative (zhengji, 政纪) violations of its members, but rather should only focus on Party discipline and assisting Party committees to improve the Party's work style" (Guo, 2014c). As a result, most discipline inspection groups were abolished and the CCDI chief was no longer assured a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee.

The Tiananmen Square incident quickly refocused attention back onto the anti-corruption work. Moreover, a decade of economic liberalisation created several opportunities for corruption to fester and grow. At the Party Congress in 1992, fighting corruption was declared a prominent goal of Party activities. In the following year the Party sent inspection teams to central party organs and government departments and in 1994, the CDIC was authorised to practice coercive measures during investigations, like search and seizures (Fu, 2016).

Regulations like the "Regulations on Disciplinary Punishment of the Communist Party of China", were trialed for implementation in 1997 (Central Committee issues Regulations, 1997), and the Office for Circuit Inspection Work was established in 2003 to observe local party and government officials (Li & Wei, 2007). From 1992 to 2009, 2 million personnel were sanctioned for disciplinary violations (Li, 2016b).

In spite of the significant institutionalisation of discipline inspection, corruption remained a major problem as evidenced by Hu Jintao's speech at the 90th anniversary of the CPC in 2011, warning that rampant corruption was one of the challenges facing the Party and was more strenuous and pressing than

ever before (Hu Jintao's speech, 2011).

The Rise of Xi

The same concern was echoed by Xi Jinping as he took over from Hu Jintao as General Secretary of the Party in 2012. The 18th Party Congress marked a significant turn in the history of China's anti-corruption campaign. In his speech at the Congress, Xi said, "our Party faces many severe challenges, and there are many pressing problems within the Party that need to be resolved, especially problems such as corruption and bribe-taking by some Party members and cadres" and that these problems "must be addressed with great effort" (USC U.S.-China Institute, 2012). China's state media published reports of Xi's plans to combat corruption and made references to the existential crisis presented by rampant corruption (China Media, 2012).

The build-up to Xi Jinping's position as General Secretary was paved with scandals that also underlined the necessity of anti-corruption efforts. The Bo Xilai scandal came to light in February 2012, while in February 2011, China's High-Speed Railway czar, Liu Zhijun, had been placed under investigation for "severe violations of discipline" (Former railways minister expelled, 2012). High-profile scandals and a general consensus within the Party that corruption was extensive laid the foundations for an exhaustive anti-corruption effort that has continued for more than 12 years.



Eight Central Regulations

A significant part of the work on anti-corruption under Xi Jinping is based on the Eight Central Regulations (八项规定), issued by the Politburo on 4th December 2012. The "Eight Regulations on Improving Work Style and Keeping Close Contact with the Masses" were issued after Xi Jinping emphasised combating corruption within the Party at the 18th Party Congress (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2012). The 600-word Regulations have become the cornerstone of anti-corruption work, emphasising frugality and healthy work styles. At their core, the Regulations are measures to reform the work style of officials, by eliminating unhealthy tendencies and behaviours.

They include streamlining documents and briefings, standardizing visits abroad, strictly controlling the number of accompanying personnel, avoiding road closures when officials travel, improving news reporting and other restrictions on the use of cars and attendance of banquets (Sheng, 2019). The Party has since issued more than 30 new anti-corruption regulations to implement the Eight Central Regulations and strengthen discipline (Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2022).

The centrality of the Eight Central Regulations is evidenced by the fact that they are referred to by Xi Jinping at every political meeting, inspection tour and event since 2012. Most recently, during Xi Jinping's inspection tour of Guizhou in March 2025, he detailed the importance of fighting excesses and corruption, referring to the Eight Central Regulations (Xi Jinping's inspection in Guizhou, 2025). The Party also launched a 4-month long party education campaign on the Eight Central Regulations just after the third session of the National People's Congress in March 2025 (CPC rolls out education campaign, 2025).

The significance of the Eight Central Regulations is evidenced by the fact that they have been termed "Iron Rules" (Eight-point decision on Party conduct, 2022), and were written into the Party's third Historical Resolution in 2021 (State Council, 2021).

Execution of Anti-Corruption Work

The guidelines governing implementation of the Eight Central Regulations are explained in the "Detailed Rules for Implementation of Eight Point Regulation", issued in 2012. They require that Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo officials improve their investigation of problems, engage deeply with grassroots issues and officials, and avoid formalistic research of problems (CCDI, 2022a).

They mandate that high-level officials should be accompanied on travel by a limited number of central and local officials and state that welcoming formalities should not include banners, flowers, performances, banquets, tourism and other excessive displays (CCDI). The travel of officials should not inconvenience the public in the form of traffic controls, closure of public facilities and restriction of business activity. Officials are expected not to hold elaborate, expensive and large seminars, conferences and meetings without the authorisation of the General Office of the Central Committee and State Council. (CCDI). The Implementation Rules have been updated and revised periodically since 2012 to expand the scope of anti-corruption work.

Ideological Foundations

The ideological foundations of the anti-corruption campaign have been laid down in slogans and coinages that capture the intention of disciplinary rules. The "Four Winds" or "Four Evils" is a term coined by Xi Jinping at a work conference on the Party's mass line education campaign in June 2013, which addresses problems in the work culture of party cadres and officials (The Party's mass line education, 2013). The "Four Winds" refer to formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism and extravagance, which Xi Jinping claims evoke the strongest reaction from the public and the main source of damage to the Party's image (Work Conference on the Education and Practice, 2013).

These four unhealthy tendencies are considered a prelude to serious corruption problems; in a speech made at the First Round of Special Inspections in June 2015, Xi stated, "A person's corruption and violation of the law all start from small problems in life, eating and drinking, and violations of the eight regulations" (Excerpts from Xi Jinping's discourses, 2016). The Party has stated that although the "Four Winds" problem has been restrained on the surface, the effort must be continuous and updated to reflect new trends and situations (Guo, 2025). This continued emphasis on work style problems as a mainstay of the anti-corruption campaign has been underlined by Xi Jinping in various speeches (Huangfeng, 2025).

Besides addressing problems of work culture within the Party, the anticorruption campaign is also designed to enforce loyalty to the Party's core and Xi Jinping. The "Four Consciousnesses" (四个意识) is an ideological coinage underpinning the anti-corruption campaign which reinforces the centrality of the Party core and Xi Jinping, as well as adherence to the policies and decisions of the Party (Firmly establish the Four Consciousnesses, 2016).

Like other Xi Jinping slogans, the "Four Consciousnesses" construct discipline and integrity as loyalty to Xi Jinping. Introduced at the Politburo Meeting in January 2016, it refers to consciousness of politics, consciousness of the general situation, consciousness of the Party core, and consciousness of alignment (SCIO, 2021). Political awareness refers to having the correct political ideology, adherence to the political direction and strictly following the discipline of the Party.

Overall situation awareness requires knowledge of the issues, problems and implementation of matters important to the Party, as well as implementing the decisions and arrangements of the Party Central Committee (Remember the Four Consciousnesses, 2020). Core consciousness refers to ideological conformity and organisational obedience to the Party core (Ruowei and Lin, 2016). Alignment awareness refers to conformity with the Party's theories, policies, decisions, responding to the Central Committee's arrangements and not violating the Party's prohibitions. Simply put, the "Four Consciousnesses" are directives to cultivate loyalty and adherence to Xi Jinping's words and actions (Jinping, 2016).

Similarly, the "Two Upholds" (两个维护) are to "resolutely uphold General Secretary Xi Jinping as the core of the party center, the core position of the entire party and resolutely uphold the authority of the party center and centralized, unified leadership". The "Two Upholds" are considered to be the concentrated expression of the "Four Consciousnesses" and are meant to advance the Party's political construction, ideological construction, organizational construction, style construction, and discipline construction (Zhihong, 2020). They are clear requirements of discipline and concern political loyalty more directly. In the context of discipline and work culture, they make criticism, disobedience, violation and ignorance of Xi Jinping and the Central Committee's decisions and authority a form of political corruption (Wanbo, 2019).

Intra-Party Regulations and Rules

Xi Jinping's vision of anti-corruption is codified in several intra-party regulations and laws passed by the Party and State. The most significant set of Party regulations is the "Regulations on Disciplinary Actions of the Communist Party of China", which has been revised in 2015, 2018 and most recently in 2023 (State Council, 2023). The Regulations have 158 Articles that detail rules for application of disciplinary actions in the case of violations relating to political discipline (zhengzhi jilu, 政治纪律), organizational discipline (zuzhi jilu, 组织纪律), integrity discipline (lian jie jilu, 廉洁纪律), mass discipline (qunzhong jilu, 群众纪律) and life discipline (shēnghuó jìlù, 生活纪律).

Political discipline refers to the conduct Party members and organisations are expected to abide by, as outlined in the Regulations. It is the foundation for overall discipline, and considered the leading form of discipline (CCDI, 2024). Violations include behaviours not consistent with the Party central committee, publication of articles and speeches that oppose the Party's reform and denigrate the image of the Party.

Articles 53 and 54 prohibit secret groups within the Party and forming cliques, factions and gangs. Violations of political discipline also include formalistic behaviours, spreading rumours, interference with inspections and supervisions, participation in protests and belief in religion and superstitions. Violations of political discipline are considered serious charges and are mostly dealt with serious warnings, probations and expulsions from the Party.

Organisational discipline refers to conduct that regulates the relationship between party organisations and members at all levels, which maintains the Party's centralised and unified leadership (CCDI). Violations include not following procedure, arbitrary decision making, refusal to carry out decisions, canvassing for votes and support, seeking personal benefits for recruitment and appointments, travelling without approval, and fraud. Such violations are handled with warnings, probations and expulsions, depending on the specific violation.

Integrity discipline is the conduct of power that organisations and members of the Party are required to abide by while executing official duties. It regulates the use of power and authority. The Regulations focus on illegally seeking profits, impartial performance of official duties, illegally handling weddings and funerals, illegal profit-making activities, using public power for personal gain, squandering public funds and engaging in power-for-sex or money-for-sex transactions (CCDI).

Work discipline is conduct that pertains to the execution of duties and responsibilities. Duties include propaganda, education, organization, discipline inspection, mass work and united front work conducted as part of the normal functioning of the Party. Violations are mainly formalism and bureaucracy, failure to take responsibility, causing adverse effects, statistical fraud, and interfering with law enforcement (CCDI).

Life discipline is the conduct that is expected to guide the daily life and social interactions of party members. They are meant to inculcate morality, core socialist values and traditional virtues. Violations include extravagance and hedonism, improper sexual relations and family values, negatively impacting public order, and improper morals.

Mass discipline refers to conduct relating to people-centered development philosophy and the relationship between the Party and the masses. Violations relate to infringements on the interests of the masses, causing losses to people's property, illegal distribution and issuance of welfare and subsidies, use of gangs and clans for protective umbrellas, and passively responding to the demands and interests of masses (CCDI).

Codification of Cadre Conduct

The spirit of China's anti-corruption campaign is not just observed in intraparty regulations, but also in the Code of Conduct for Integrity and Self-discipline of the Communist Party of China. The Code came into effect in 2016 and in its 8 Articles requires that Party members put public interests before private interests, resist corruption and be honest in life and work, adhere to frugality and avoid extravagance, endure hardships and make sacrifices, be honest in politics, use power honestly, cultivate integrity and self-discipline, improve ideology and manage the family and its values well (Central Committee of CPC, 2015).

Similarly, the "Regulations on Intra-Party Supervision of the Communist Party of China" are designed to uphold the Party's leadership and strengthen intra-Party supervision. The Regulations state that there is no area or exception for supervision, which will increase the responsibility of officials in the exercise of power (CCDI, 2016). They emphasise the implementation of centralised leadership at the Party core, implementation of the Eight Central Regulations and regular education and study sessions for leading cadres. They lay down the procedures and practices applicable to Party Committees and Disciplinary Committees in the process of conducing inspection and undertaking supervision.

A variety of other regulations like, "Regulations on the Inspection Work of the Communist Party of China", "Regulations on the Work of the Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China" and "Opinions of the CPC Central Committee on Strengthening the Party's Political Construction" are responsible for shaping China's anti-corruption work.





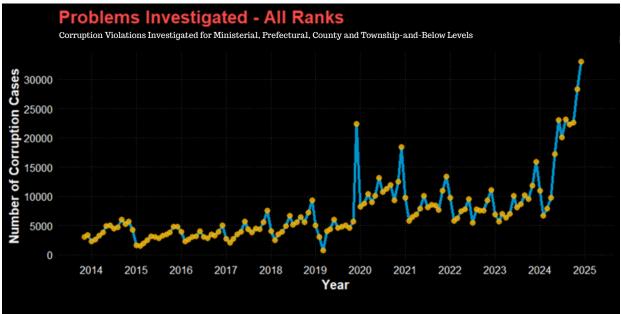
Analysis of corruption and anti-corruption in this report is based on national-level corruption data relating to the Eight Central Regulations, released by the CCDI. This report analyses monthly corruption data, starting from November 2013 to December 2024. The data reveals trends, drivers and dynamics underlying the anti-corruption campaign that has emerged as the dominant feature of the political environment in China. Analysis of quantitative data on corruption cases will be supported by qualitative assessments and anecdotal examples. It is important to note that the methodology for reporting corruption cases has changed a couple of times over the last decade. Changes in variables and time periods are clearly detailed where relevant.

Trends and Composition

The number of corruption cases reported by the CCDI is indicative of the direction and intensity of anti-corruption work since 2013. Corruption cases reported for all ranks have been on the rise consistently since 2013 (Figure 1). It also shows that the campaign can be classified into three phases. In the early stages of the campaign, total investigations remained below 10,000 cases every month until late 2019. After January 2020, cases frequently touched the 10,000 cases mark and in March 2024, for the first time, jumped past 20,000 cases per month and even surpassed 30,000 cases per month in December 2024.

First, it can be inferred that the anti-corruption campaign has had three phases so far and each new phase was marked by a significant increase in average violations investigated. The first phase, from November 2013 to late 2019, had an average of 4,125 cases per month. The variation in cases, measured as a difference between the highest and lowest number of cases per month during that period, was 8,537 cases. The second phase began in December 2019, marked by a large spike in cases, and ended in May 2024. The increase in cases after 2019 is mainly a result of including violations relating to formalism and bureaucracy in reporting violations of the Eight Central Regulations. This period had an average of 9,485 cases every month, double the monthly average of the previous period, and variation in cases during this period was 19,967. Stage 3 of the campaign began in February 2024 and is similarly characterised by a large spike in cases in the months after August.

Figure 1 *Investigations into Violations by All Ranks*



although China's anti-corruption work become institutionalised over the last decade, phases of the campaign have become increasingly frequent and more volatile. The first phase lasted 6 years, the second just over 4 years and the third is currently underway (Figure 1). Moreover, the increase in variation between two phases, along with new record number of cases per month in every phase, suggests greater volatility in the The intensification of the anti-corruption drive is supported by Peng Xinlin, director and chief expert of the Beijing Integrity and Rule of Law Collaborative Innovation Base, who states that, "The growth in data directly reflects the continuous increase in the intensity of the anti-corruption struggle ... and sends a clear signal to society that the high-pressure anti-corruption situation will not change" (China Daily, 2024). This pattern of periodic intensification, as well as increasing volatility, is also reflected in the punishments/treatments of corruption like criticism and education, disciplinary sanctions handed out to corrupt officials.

It is important to highlight that the total number of punishments including criticism and education, and sanctions, outweigh the number of violations investigated, possibly because the number of violations records an instance of corruption, even if that might involve multiple individuals.

The pattern of punishments confirms that the anti-corruption campaign had three phases, with each phase marked by an increase in the total and average number of punishments (Figure 2). It also confirms the increasing intensity of the campaign in every new phase; in phase one, from 2013 to 2019, the average number of punishments was 5,764 and in phase two from 2019 to late 2024, it was 13,472. The variability in the highest and lowest points of each phase, also increased dramatically. In phase one, the difference between the highest and lowest monthly punishments was 11,335, while in phase two, it doubled to 23,033. Based on these observations, it can be inferred that the campaign has intensified over time, and displayed greater variability in its outcomes.

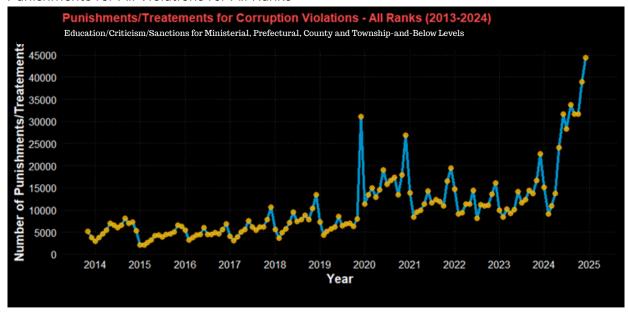


Figure 2 *Punishments for All Violations for All Ranks*

The punishment of corruption takes the form of criticism and education, and party discipline and administrative sanctions. Article 5 of the "Regulations on Disciplinary Actions of the Communist Party of China", details that punishments in the form of criticism, self-criticism, talks, reminders, education, and admonitions that result in "red faces and sweating" must become a norm (CCDI, 2023).

Violations are also treated with party discipline and administrative sanctions. Article 8 of the "Regulations on Disciplinary Actions of the Communist Party of China", state that there are five types of disciplinary sanctions against Party members which include, a warning, serious warnings, removal from Party posts, probation, and expulsion.

Administrative sanctions are punishments imposed by supervisory organs on public officials who violate the law. Article 7 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Administrative Sanctions for Public Officials details six types of administrative sanctions; a warning, recording a demerit, recording a serious demerit, demotion, dismissal from office, and expulsion (State Council, 2020).

Disciplinary and administrative sanctions were applied relatively less until 2018, after which they were applied more commonly (Figure 3). This is possibly because more corruption cases emerged in every new phase of the anticorruption campaign. Moreover, after 2018, there are significant and sudden increases in the application of sanctions. On average, disciplinary and administrative sanctions were applied to 3,693 cases in phase one of the campaign while in phase two this number tripled to 9,123. By 2024, sanctions had spiked sharply, indicating a massive crackdown on violations through the use of harsher punishments like expulsions and warnings.

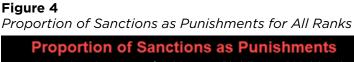
Disciplinary and Administrative Sanctions - All Ranks
Incidence of Disciplinary and Administrative Sanctions for Ministerial, Prefectural, County and Township-and-Below Levels

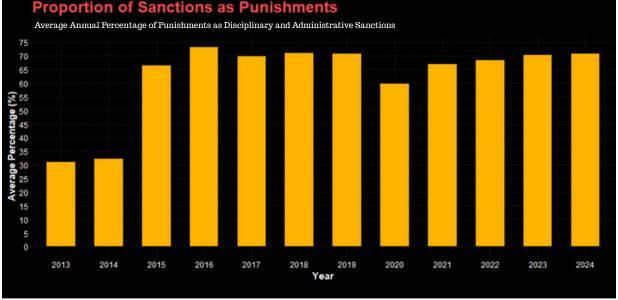
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Year

Figure 3Disciplinary and Administrative Sanctions for All Violations by All Ranks

The proportion of punishments for violations of Party discipline also indicates that sanctions are the most commonly applied treatment, and there has been a slight but steady increase in their application since 2021 (Figure 4). Although the Party states that criticism and education must become the norm, disciplinary and administrative sanctions are clearly preferred. Disciplinary and administrative sanctions accounted for only 30% of annual punishments in 2013 and 2014, but increased dramatically to 65% by 2015 and dropped slightly to 60% of all punishments in 2020. Since 2020, sanctions have grown more common, to account for 70% of all annual punishments in 2024.



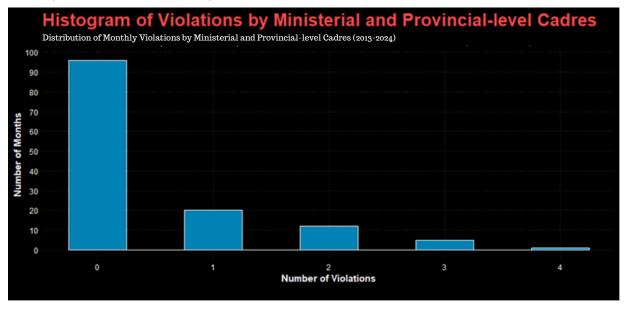


Rank-Based Patterns of Investigations

Trends relating to investigations and punishments vary depending on the rank of officials. For instance, higher level officials are investigated less often, compared to county level or prefectural level officials. However, some studies have found that high-level officials receive harsher punishments than lower-level officials, perhaps in order to strengthen the deterrent effect (Zhu, 2015).

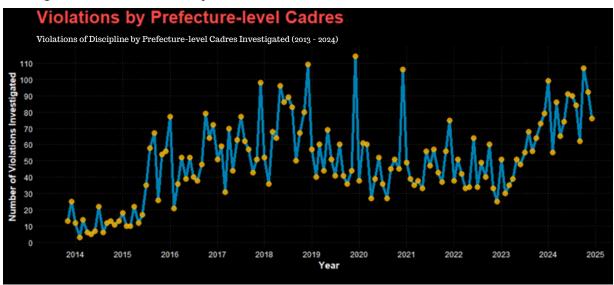
At the Ministerial and Provincial level, investigations are very few and infrequent. For several months consecutively, there are often no violations reported, and in others there are only one or two cases reported. As the graph below indicates, the number of months in which there are no investigations is significantly higher than the number of months where investigations are reported. For almost 100 months of recorded data, there were 0 reported violations at the ministerial and provincial-level (Figure 5). It reveals that the frequency of investigations into ministerial and provincial-level cadres is very low for violations of the Eight Central Regulations, compared to other ranks.

Figure 5
Investigations into Violations by Ministerial and Provincial-level Cadres



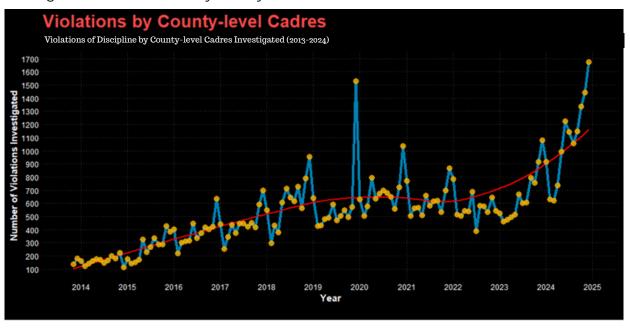
At the prefecture-level, the number of violations reported has increased marginally since 2013 (Figure 6). The number of violations first increased sharply in mid-2015 and began to stabilise and decline slightly in 2019, until 2023. The increase in investigations at the prefecture-level in 2015 is likely to have begun after former CCDI chief, Wang Qishan, at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CCDI, announced that the Party would deepen its clean-up of prefecture level units, strengthen inspections of prefectures and cities and target coordination and consultative bodies at the prefecture level (Wang Qishan's work report, 2015).

Figure 6 *Investigations into Violations by Prefecture-level Cadres*



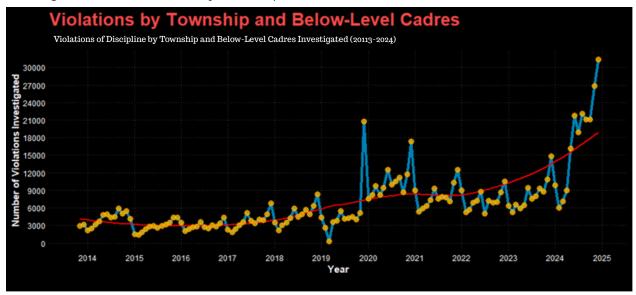
At the county level, violations have steadily increased between 2013 and 2019, with monthly cases increasing 3 times compared to 2013 (Figure 7). They do not display the same monthly variation that prefecture-level investigations do, indicating more stability and consistency. This is possibly due to the focus on county-level officials early in the anti-corruption campaign, a plan implemented after the 18th Party Congress to train county party secretaries at the Central Party School and increase scrutiny of behaviours relating to the Eight Central Regulations (Liang, 2015). After the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, violations registered a sharp increase and reached all-time-highs in December 2024, reaching almost 1700 cases. The increase is likely a direct result of efforts outlined in the Work Plan of the Central Anti-Corruption Coordination Group (2023-2027) to extend the anti-corruption campaign to the grassroots level (Head of the Office of the Central Anti-Corruption Coordination Group, 2023).

Figure 7
Investigations into Violations by County-level Cadres



Township and below level cadres were not very prominent in terms of investigations in the early stages of the anti-corruption campaign. The investigations remained below 6000 per month for nearly 7 years, until 2019 (Figure 8). All other ranks had already witnessed a steady increase in cases by that time. This is possibly because the inclusion of formalism and bureaucracy violations in 2019, which relate to harming the interests of the masses and people's livelihoods, would have unearthed corruption at the lowest levels of the Party. A brief increase in violations was recorded between 2019 and 2021, when cases crossed the 12,000 per month mark. The increase stabilised in mid-2022, after which there has been a massive increase in the number of cases. The campaign against village level officials since 2023 is responsible for this increase, with cases hitting an all-time-high at over 37,000 per month in December 2024.

Figure 8
Investigations into Violations by Township and Below-level Cadres



Although it is provincial and ministerial rank cadres that make headlines when they are investigated or disciplined for violations of corruption rules, the anticorruption campaign investigates significantly more lower-ranked officials than higher ranked ones. This seems fairly logical given that there are far more lower-level officials than there are ministerial and provincial-level ones.

Cadres at the lowest level of the Party are also investigated more frequently than others, perhaps in the interest of leadership stability, which requires higher level cadres to not feel threatened, in order to avoid policy paralysis or opposition to the anti-corruption campaign. As a result, the average annual percentage of violations by township and below ranked cadres has always remained above 87% of all violations from 2013 to 2024 (Figure 9). When the campaign began in 2013, grassroots level officials accounted for almost all violations, but this share began to drop slightly in 2015, declining until 2018 to 87%. But the share of township and below cadres has risen back to 92-93% since 2020. Violations by ministerial and provincial level cadres have barely constituted 1% of all violations recorded over 11 years of the campaign.

Percentage Share of Disciplinary Violations by Rank (2013-2024) Percentage Share of Average Annual Violations by Ministerial, Prefectural, County and Township Level Cadres 100% Percentage of Annual Violations 75% 50% 25% 0% 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2020 2021 2024 Year

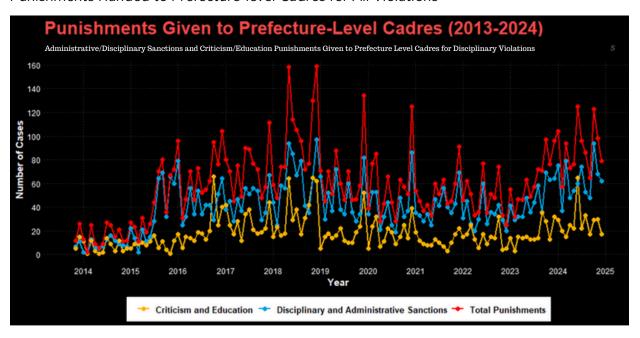
Figure 9
Proportion of Disciplinary Violations by All Ranks

Rank-Based Patterns of Punishments

The distribution of punishments for various ranks shows that disciplinary and administrative sanctions are the preferred method of punishing officials. Criticism and education as punishments are comparatively less preferred. They were almost similar in frequency to sanctions in the early stages of the campaign, when both types of punishments were deployed equally to handle corrupt officials. But after 2015, the Party has preferred to handle cases using disciplinary and administrative sanctions.

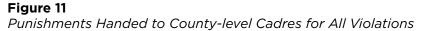
County Ministerial_and_Provincial Prefectural Township_and_Below

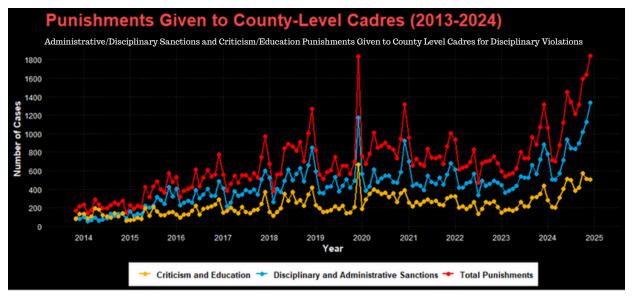




In the case of prefecture-level officials, disciplinary and administrative sanctions have emerged as the dominant form of punishment (Figure 10). Although criticism and education punishments were used more than sanctions for certain months in 2013 and 2014, by 2015 disciplinary sanctions were preferred. There were only 4 months over 9 years when the number of criticism and education punishments were greater than the number of sanctions. By 2021, the gap between the number of cases receiving sanctions and those receiving criticism and education widened significantly. In 2014, disciplinary sanctions accounted for 59% of all punishments given to prefecture level cadres, but this increased to 78% by 2021 and stabilised around 71% in 2024.

For county-level cadres, the preference for disciplinary and administrative sanctions has been consistent since 2015, but criticism and education has remained significant (Figure 11). Sanctions accounted for 45% of punishments in 2013 and 2014, increased sharply to 63% in 2015 and climbed steadily to 70% by 2019. It increased in subsequent years, reaching 67% in 2024. The proportion of sanctions has increased significantly while the number of criticism and education punishments has remained stagnant. This pattern differs from the trend observed for prefecture level cadres, because nearly half the county-level cadres are still handled using education and criticism punishments, more so than prefecture level ones. Criticism and education are more relevant tools at the county-level than at the prefecture level.



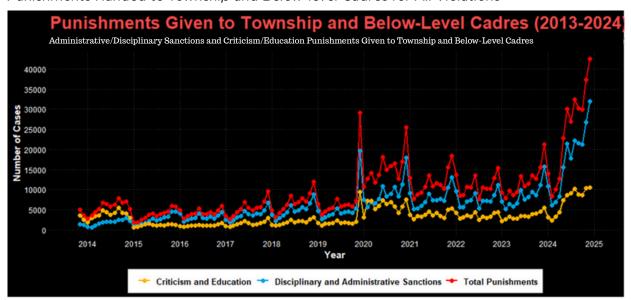


At the Township and below-level, just like for other ranks, the first two years of the anti-corruption campaign saw punishments mainly take the form of criticism and education (Figure 12). This trend came to an end in 2015 and by 2016, sanctions were preferred. However, the difference between the number of cases that received sanctions and those that received criticism/education remained comparatively small. The gap began to widen in 2019, possibly due to an expansion of the Eight Central Regulations. In 2024, as a result of the anti-corruption campaigns stated focus on grassroots levels officials, punishments

took the form of sanctions to reflect the Party's willingness to use harsher punishments. Moreover, the monthly variation remains lowest at the grassroot level, reflecting a consistent application of punishments, except for the latter half of 2024.

This possibly suggests that when the CCDI initiates a campaign against a specific rank, disciplinary sanctions can be expected to rise significantly, while the cases that receive criticism/education remain the same or decrease as a proportion of all punishments applied. Township and below cadres received more sanctions compared to criticism and education in the early years of the campaign. But by 2015, 66% of cases were punished with administrative and disciplinary sanctions, up from 31% in 2014 and 2013. This number rose further to 71% of annual cases in 2018 and settled at 70% in 2023 and 2024.

Figure 12Punishments Handed to Township and Below-level Cadres for All Violations



These broad trends suggest that the treatment of corruption offences varies by rank, but also demonstrates some similarities. All cases below the provincial and ministerial level were increasingly treated with sanctions after 2014, rising sharply for a few years before declining, but rising back up in the months after the 20th Party Congress. The rising trend in 2023 and 2024 indicates a significant intensification of the anti-corruption campaign, as it deepens its focus on county and township officials. While criticism and education treatments of corruption have also increased, they haven't increased at nearly the same pace as sanctions. For some ranks, they have even stagnated or declined. It perhaps suggests that the Party increasingly relies on the deterrent effect of sanctions to force behavioural changes rather than the persuasive effect of criticism and education.



Formalism and bureaucracy violations are considered to be the biggest enemy of the Party because they hinder the decision-making and deployment of Central Committee decisions, result in wastage of resources, undermine the centralised leadership of the Party, limit the development of institutional advantages, infringe on the interests of the people and erode the Party's mass base (CCDI, 2023b). They are considered to be particularly stubborn, repetitive, hidden and variable, rebounding and mutating issues, harming the political ecology within the Party (Beware of the five dangers, 2019). The emphasis on formalism and bureaucracy came from Xi Jinping at the onset of the anti-corruption campaign, when he stated on November 15, 2012 that the problems of formalism and bureaucracy must be solved urgently with great efforts (Communist Party Member Network, n.d.).

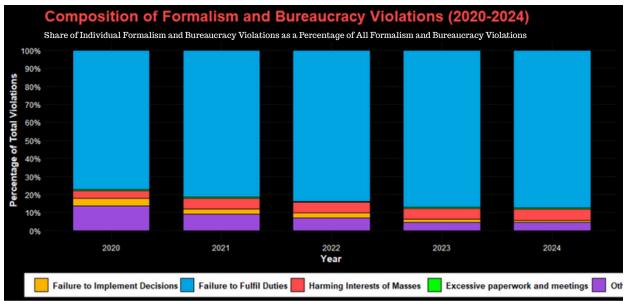
One definition of formalism states that, "Formalism is a metaphysical viewpoint, method, and style that unilaterally pursues superficial images while ignoring the solution of practical problems" (Zhang, 2013). Bureaucracy, according to Liang Jun, Professor at the School of Marxism at Xi'an Jiaotong University, refers to a leadership style that is divorced from reality, divorced from the masses, has serious official-centred thinking, and is corrupt (Liang, 2020). Following a notice issued by the General Office of the Party Central Committee, titled "Notice on Solving the Formalism Problem and Reducing the Burden on Grassroots Level Officials", formalism and bureaucracy violations were included in the CCDI's Eight Central Regulations reports for the first time in December 2019 (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2019).

Violations of formalism and bureaucracy include:

- Failure to implement the Party Central Committee's major decisions and arrangements despite orders and prohibitions, or making high-sounding statements but taking few actions and implementing them poorly, being divorced from reality and the masses, and causing serious consequences. (1.1)
- Failure to fulfil duties, serve economic and social development, and protect the ecological environment, and thus seriously affect high-quality development. (1.2)
- In the process of contacting and serving the masses, they were passive, cold and hard, and inefficient, which harmed the interests of the masses and caused strong public reaction. (1.3)
- Excessive paperwork and meetings; the style of paperwork and meetings is not true and correct, and there are too many and too frequent inspections and assessments, which leave too many records and impose a serious burden on the grassroots. (1.4)

Composition

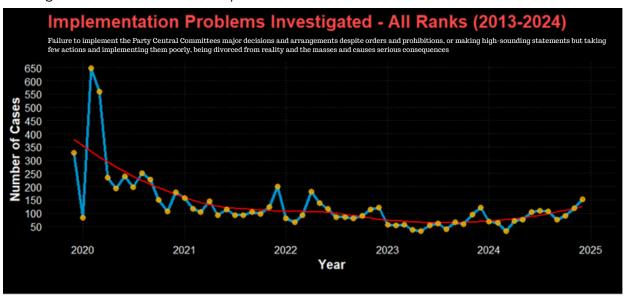
Figure 13Composition of Formalism and Bureaucracy Violations by All Ranks



Of the individual violations classified as Formalism and Bureaucracy, the Failure to Fulfil Duties is the most significant, accounting for 77% of all cases in 2020 and increasing to 87% by 2024 (Figure 13). This increase would suggest that such problems are becoming the main focus of the effort to tackle formalism and bureaucracy. Other violations such as the failure to implement decisions have decreased from 3.99% to 0.9% in 2024 and violations that directly harm the interest of the masses have increased slightly from 4.3% to 6.45%. On the other hand, violations of excessive paperwork have remained the same over the last 4 years, suggesting that the Party has not intensified its campaign to root out excessive paperwork violations.

Violations and Punishments

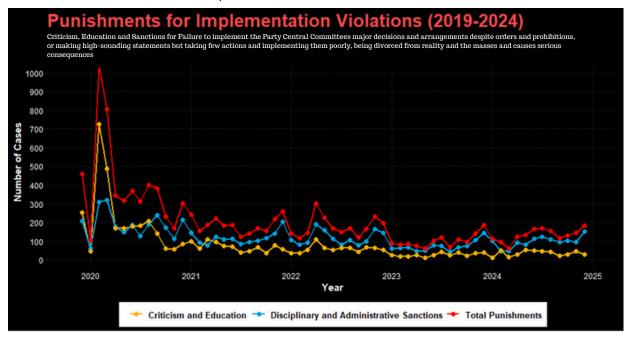
Figure 14 *Investigations into Violations of Implementation for All Ranks*



The trend for investigations into violations of implementation (1.1), reveal that cases have steadily declined after an initial high in February 2020 (Figure 14). The decline is likely to have been a result of waning Covid-19 cases, following the two waves in 2020 and 2021, when the Party punished officials for insufficiently containing the spread of the virus. However, there is a minor increase in the number of cases at the end of 2024, which is likely to continue, driven by Xi Jinping's emphasis on eliminating formalism at the grassroots, discussed at a Politburo meeting in July 2024 (Politburo held a meeting, 2024).

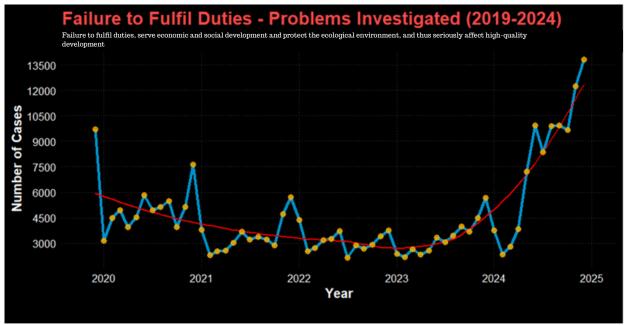
Treatment of such violations have largely taken the form of disciplinary and administrative sanctions (Figure 15). From 2020 to 2023, the gap between types of punishments was moderate, but began to increase after 2023. Notably, sanctions display greater variation through the year than education and criticism. Overall, it can be inferred that the Party has preferred to deal with such violations using disciplinary sanctions, but applies education and criticism too.

Figure 15Punishments for Violations of Implementation for All Ranks



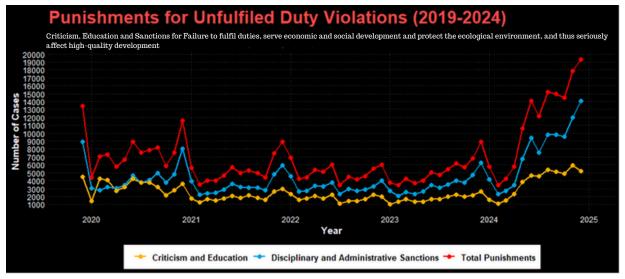
Violations that concern failure to fulfil duties (1.2) relate to failures of promptly resolving issues, shirking responsibility, being lazy or inefficient and wrangling with the demands of the mases which are in line with existing policy (Liu, 2025). Such violations have developed a different trend compared to violations relating to implementation of the Party's decisions (Figure 16). While problems of implementation seem to have declined over time and stabilised, violations relating to failures to fulfil duties (1.2) have increased sharply in 2023. The increase demonstrates an intensification in the search for such violations after the emphasis on high-quality development was laid down by the Party core. Moreover, the number of such violations are significantly higher than any other kind formalism and bureaucracy violation.

Figure 16 *Investigations into Violations of Failure to Fulfill Duty for All Ranks*



Punishments for failure to fulfil duty are mainly handled through disciplinary and administrative sanctions, which have been increasingly preferred since 2020 (Figure 17). Moreover, when there is a significant increase in the number of violations, the number of cases treated with disciplinary and administrative sanctions increases, compared to other punishments. For example, in 2024, a large spike in cases was dealt with sanctions, while the number of cases receiving education and criticism remained almost the same.

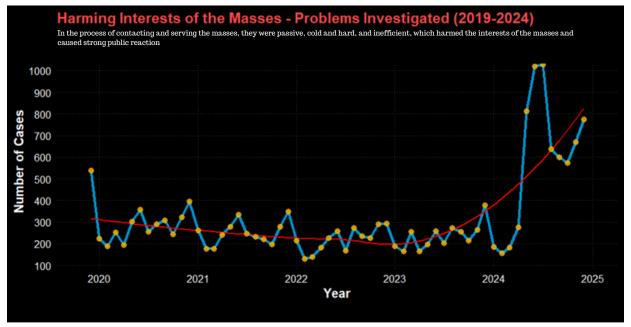
Figure 17 *Punishments for Violations of Failure to Fulfill Duty for All Ranks*



Actions that harm the interests of the masses (1.3) are closely related to the work style of cadres (Debin, 2013), and refer to inaction of officials who procrastinate when encountering problems, are indifferent to concerns of citizens and do not solve problems in a timely manner (Liu, 2025b). Violations are concentrated around people's livelihoods; education, medical care, employment, pension and ocial security (Fuzhou Municipal Commission for

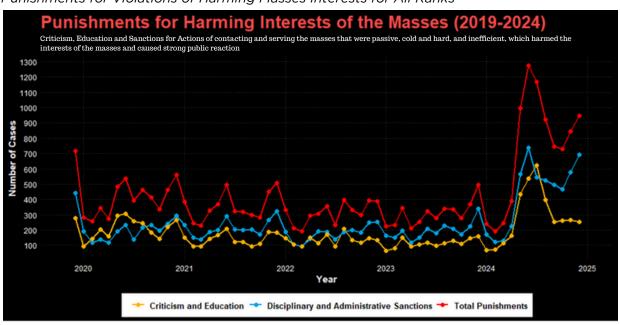
Discipline Inspection and Supervision Research Group, 2020). Investigations remained constant since 2020, and declined slightly until 2023 (Figure 18). It indicates that "people-centric" issues weren't a priority of the anti-corruption campaign until 2024.

Figure 18 *Investigations into Violations of Harming Masses Interests for All Ranks*



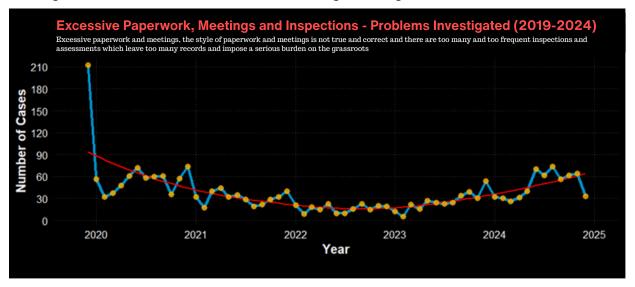
The number of punishments for violations of harming the interests of the masses (1.3) have remained almost the same since 2020, only increasing sharply in 2024 as a result of the micro-corruption campaign (Figure 19). Although sanctions were applied to handle violations for most months, the application of education and criticism punishments are more common than for other violations of formalism and bureaucracy. Both punishment types are more evenly utilised for this violation (1.3).

Figure 19 *Punishments for Violations of Harming Masses Interests for All Ranks*



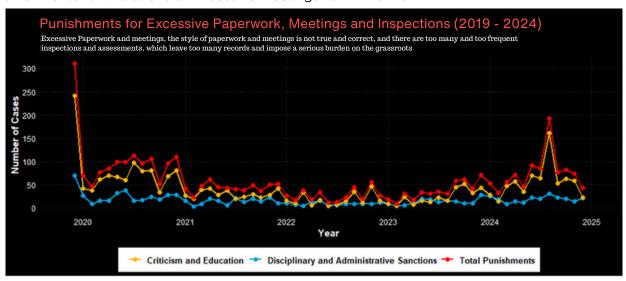
Problems of excessive paperwork have remained at a relatively low level compared to other violations of formalism and bureaucracy (Figure 20). It could mainly consist of officials at the provincial and prefecture level, since they engage with grassroots level officials through meetings and inspections. The cases of excessive paperwork (1.4) declined after a large spike in 2019 until 2022 and continued to remain at the same level until 2024.

Figure 20
Investigations into Violations of Excessive Meetings Investigated for All Ranks



Punishments of violations of excessive paperwork (1.4) reveal that the Party does not consider such violations too serious, given that most cases are dealt with criticism and education (Figure 21). Disciplinary and administrative sanctions are a very small fraction of the total punishments for such violations. Moreover, any sharp increase in the punishments/cases are mainly handled using criticism and education. It is possible that the Party considers this work style problem rectifiable with education and self-criticism.

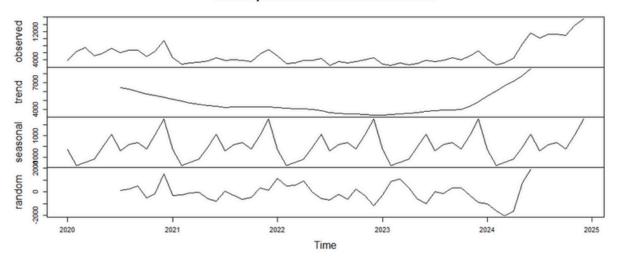
Figure 21Punishments for Violations of Excessive Meetings for All Ranks



Decomposition

Figure 22Decomposition of Formalism and Bureaucracy Investigations for All Ranks

Decomposition of additive time series



Investigations into problems of formalism and bureaucracy have clear patterns that can be explored by examining a decomposition of the data since 2020 (Figure 22). Problems of formalism and bureaucracy have a trendline that declined gradually in the initial stages after the Party decided to include them in the Eight Central Regulations in December 2019. This suggests that the Party's discipline inspection apparatus responded strongly to the Party's emphasis on reducing formalism and bureaucracy in the initial stages. However, this effort waned within a year, which is evidenced by the declining trendline until 2022. By 2022, problems per month fell to the 3000-4000 cases range. The trend for formalism and bureaucracy cases remained at the same level until 2023 when cases began to increase again. The trendline by the end of 2023 and early 2024 shows a very sharp upward swing, which indicates that formalism and bureaucracy charges are on the rise as China's top leadership renews its emphasis on these violations.

Formalism and bureaucracy cases have a seasonal pattern that repeats itself annually. Cases reported for formalism and bureaucracy increase sharply every year in July, August and September, drop back down in the last months of the year, before picking up again in January, February and March. The spike in cases in the second half of the year could be due to increases of budgetary spending that occur in the second half of the fiscal year. Moreover, the political calendar in China could also be responsible for dictating the seasonality of corruption investigations. The increase in cases around February and March could be a result of the CCDI's effort to increase investigations just before the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in March every year. Most importantly, it is highly likely that there is a lag period in investigations and punishments, as well as recording of investigations and conclusion of the investigations, which could complicate any seasonal explanation of corruption data.



Violations classified as hedonism and extravagance are at the heart of the Party's emphasis on the Eight Central Regulations. They refer to excesses, indulgences and pleasure-seeking behaviours of cadres, which the Party has identified as the source of corruption, the beginning of the decline of a political party, a regime and country (Qidong Party Building, 2014). The Party believes that the root cause of hedonism and extravagance is the result of lack of beliefs, distorted values, inadequate supervision and lack of effective learning and education.

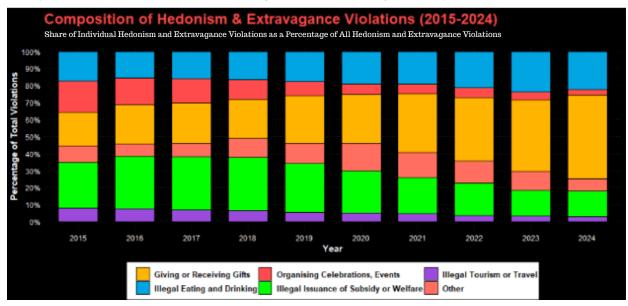
Hedonism refers to party leaders that are not enterprising, pursue fame and fortune, accept bribes, buy and sell official positions, are greedy for comfort, indulge in ostentation and playfulness, have low wills, wavering beliefs, and pursue material enjoyment in sensual pleasures. Extravagance is a manifestation of hedonism and refers to the pursuit of excessive enjoyment by spending a large amount of money and social resources (CCDI, 2014). Examples include eating and drinking with public funds, traveling with public funds, wastage of money, misappropriation of funds to give bonuses, buy cars, and build buildings (Zhao & Ye, 2013).

Violations of hedonism and extravagance include:

- Improper Receipt and Delivery of Valuable Specialty Products, Gifts and Monetary Gifts (2.1)
- Violations of Eating and Drinking (2.2)
- Violations in organizing weddings, funerals, and celebrations (2.3)
- Illegal Issuance of Subsidy or Welfare (2.4)
- Violations related to Travel and tourism using public funds (2.5)
- Others (which includes illegal allocation and use of public vehicles, problems with buildings and facilities, providing or accepting receptions that exceed the standard, organizing or participating in high-consumption entertainment and fitness activities paid for with public funds, accepting or providing fitness and entertainment activities that may affect the impartial performance of official duties, illegal entry and exit of private clubs, and housing violations by leading cadres) (2.6)

Composition

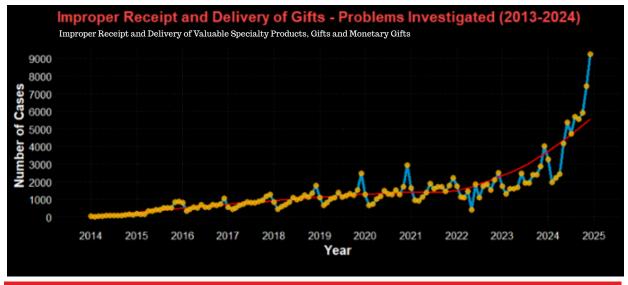
Figure 23
Composition of Hedonism and Extravagance Violations by All Ranks



Of the various specific violations that constitute hedonism and extravagance, Giving and Receiving Gifts (2.1) has increased steadily and significantly to become the most common violation, accounting for 49.29% of all problems investigated in 2024, increasing by more than twice since 2015 when it accounted for only 19.45% (Figure 23). On the other hand, Illegal Issuance of Subsidy and Welfare (2.4) has surprisingly reduced since 2015, from 27.17% to 14.95% of all cases. The same declining trend is observable in the case of Organising Events and Celebrations (2.3), which has decreased from 18.57% to 3.13% in 2024. The proportion of individual violations suggest that giving and receiving gifts has become the single most significant issue, while most others except illegal eating and drinking have declined over time.

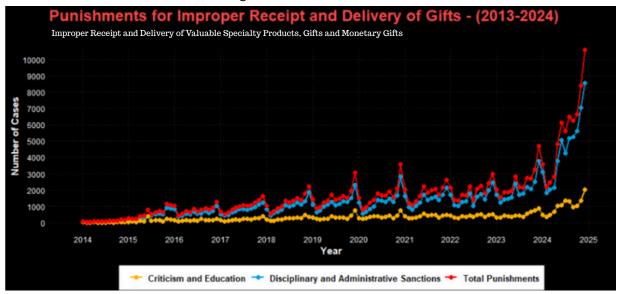
Violations and Punishments

Figure 24 *Investigations into Violations of Gifting Investigated for All Ranks*



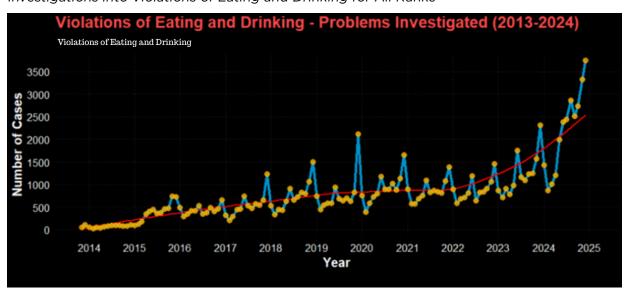
The investigations into improper receipt and delivery of gifts (2.1), have seen a steady increase since 2014 (Figure 24). Such cases have maintained a steady upward progression between 2013 and 2019, displaying seasonal fluctuations; increasing in November every year, and falling in December. This could be due to seasonal factors like festivals. Interestingly, such violations have increased significantly since 2023, reaching all-time highs in November 2024.

Figure 25 *Punishments for Violations of Gifting for All Ranks*



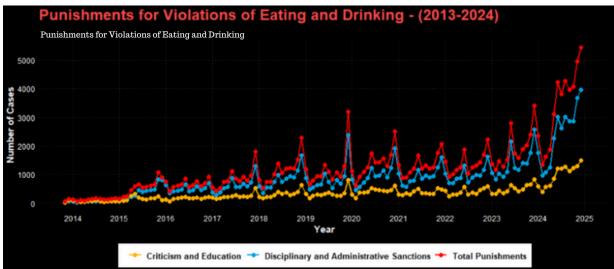
Punishments for improper gifting have majorly been dealt with disciplinary and administrative sanctions because the Party considers these cases serious violations (Figure 25). The number of criticism and education punishments has been above 1000 until mid-2024, nearly 10 years after the campaign started. Sanctions have risen sharply, suggesting that any increase in violations creates an increase in sanctions. The sharp increase in punishments in 2024 indicates that the latest campaign against "micro-corruption" has unearthed a significant number of cases that relate to improper gifting.

Figure 26 *Investigations into Violations of Eating and Drinking for All Ranks*



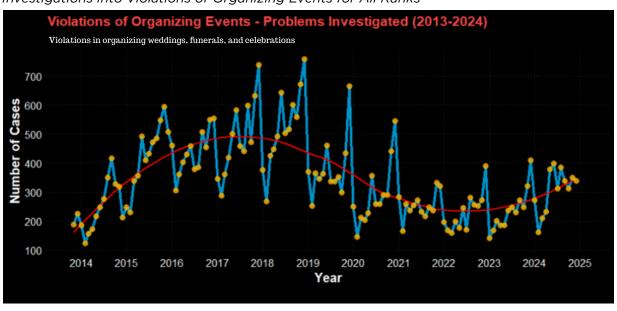
Violations relating to eating and drinking (2.2) are a major part of the Party's fight against extravagance. There has been a steady increase in such investigations until 2019 (Figure 26). They registered a further increase since 2022 reaching an all-time high in 2024. Such violations generally take place around Party and People's congresses and political gatherings where officials host banquets and are reimbursed with public funds (Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2022). The Party also acknowledges that such forms of corruption are an avenue for officials to form gangs and cliques (Xu, 2025).

Figure 27 *Punishments for Violations of Eating and Drinking for All Ranks*



Punishments for such violations are handled using disciplinary and administrative sanctions (Figure 27). It suggests that they are considered serious violations and handled with more severe forms of punishment. Moreover, punishments show a sudden and sharp increase twice every year, around May and November. This is likely because occasions like the Dragon Boat and May Day festivals are opportunities for the spread of "holiday diseases" like illegal eating and drinking (Gu, 2024).

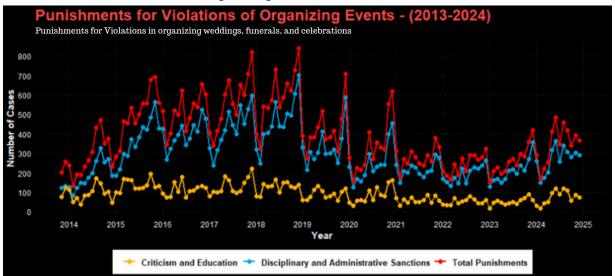
Figure 28
Investigations into Violations of Organizing Events for All Ranks



Unlike most other violations of the Eight Central Regulations, violations related to organising events like weddings, celebrations and funerals (2.3) peaked in 2019 and declined until 2023 (Figure 28). Surprisingly, the microcorruption campaign of 2024 had almost no impact on event-related violations.

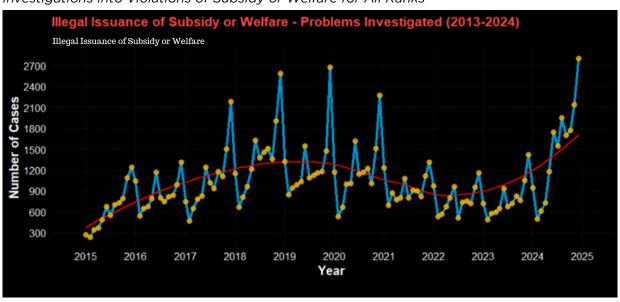
Punishments for violations relating to organising events have been mostly handled with disciplinary and administrative sanctions (Figure 29). The use of education and criticism punishments declined steadily since 2013, and dropped to less than 50 cases after 2020.

Figure 29Punishments for Violations of Organizing Events for All Ranks



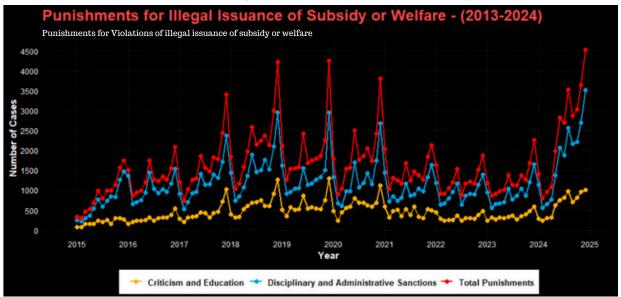
Violations of illegal issuance of subsidy and welfare (2.4) are a big part of anti-corruption work. Since 2015, such cases increased until 2019 before surprisingly, beginning to decrease until 2023 (Figure 30). The brief decrease could be attributed to cadres finding new ways of illegally distributing subsidies, which the Party's discipline inspection apparatus has since increasingly recognised.

Figure 30
Investigations into Violations of Subsidy or Welfare for All Ranks



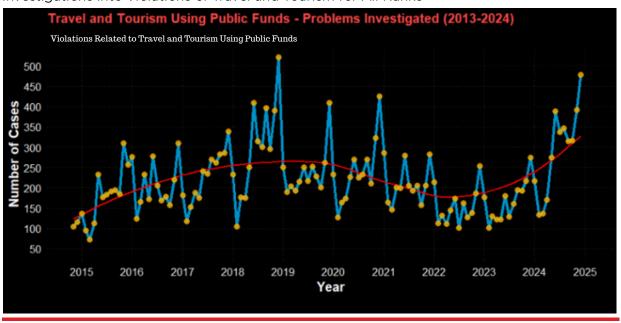
Violations of illegal issuance of subsidy and welfare are mostly dealt with disciplinary and administrative sanctions (Figure 31). They were preferred because such violations are directly related to embezzlement and monetary corruption, which is treated with harsher punishments than other violations. Moreover, subsidies and welfare are directly related to the livelihoods of citizens, which affects the image and legitimacy of the Party. As a result, the campaign against micro-corruption in 2024 produced a very sharp increase in such cases and punishments (Yu, Guo & Hou, 2020).

Figure 31Punishments for Violations of Subsidy or Welfare for All Ranks



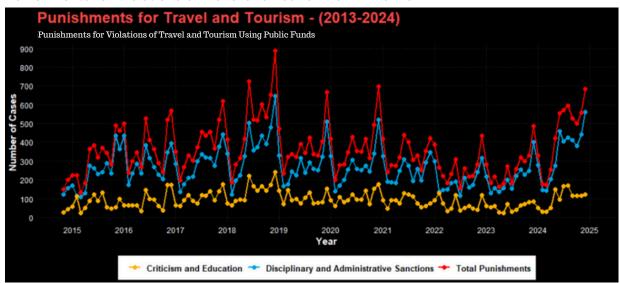
Violations relating to travel and tourism using public funds (2.5) increase during holidays and festivals. Such cases increased after 2015 until 2019, and decreased until 2023, after which it increased again in 2024 (Figure 32). Cadres have violated this regulation in the name of travel for study tours, red education tours, investment attraction tours and other administrative exchanges.

Figure 32
Investigations into Violations of Travel and Tourism for All Ranks



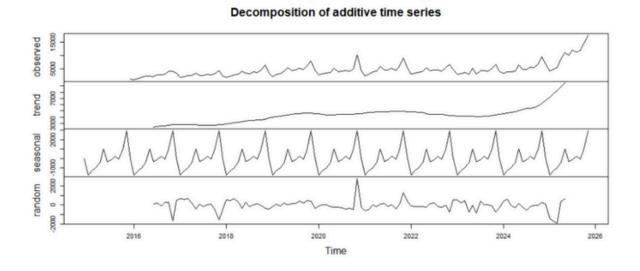
Punishments for violations of travel and tourism are mainly disciplinary and administrative sanctions, which have always been the preferred mode of handling such violations. Criticism and education punishments have rarely gone above 150 cases per month, while sanctions are deployed to handle a large portion of such violations (Figure 33). Besides seasonal increases in violations and punishments, the level of punishments for illegal tourism and travel are relatively low compared to other forms of hedonism and extravagance. The Party considers that tourism and travel violations are an indication of powerfor-money transactions or power-seeking tendencies, which ought to be handled with sanctions, rather than education and criticism (Chai, 2023).

Figure 33 *Punishments for Violations of Travel and Tourism for All Ranks*



Decomposition

Figure 34Decomposition of Hedonism and Extravagance Investigations for All Ranks



The trend and pattern of cases categorised as hedonism and extravagance suggests that such cases have a strong seasonal component as well as a clear trend over the last 9 years (Figure 34). From 2015 onwards, the number of investigations into problems of hedonism and extravagance has risen gradually, increasing approximately every five years. This also coincides with the terms of Xi Jinping's tenure as General Secretary of the Party. The Eight Central Regulations were announced at the beginning of Xi's first term and registered an increase in 2018 and continued to increase very slowly until 2022. Following the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, the number of investigations increased once again, this time very sharply in 2024 to reach all-time highs. The tail end of the trendline indicates a very serious and sudden increase in investigations, which also correlates with increases in investigations into formalism and bureaucracy. China's campaign targeting micro-corruption at the grassroots explains this sudden and sharp increase in 2024 and suggests an intensification of the campaign in 2025.

The investigations into hedonism and extravagance also display a clear and consistent seasonal pattern. Cases reach their peak every year around June and July, before quickly falling in the next few months, only to rise again to their peak in October, November and December. The seasonality suggests that the CCDI's investigations perhaps increase as a response to corruption that occurs around major festivals like the Mid-Autumn Golden Week and National Day Golden Week during which officials accept and give gifts as well as indulge in luxury purchases.



The Eight Central Regulations have been the primary framework for anticorruption work under Xi Jinping, and a continuous effort over 12 years to reshape the organisational culture of the Communist Party of China, and work style of officials. At their core, the Regulations emphasise frugality of lifestyle, obedience in implementation and proper conduct in engaging with the public. They are measures to shape the work style of cadres, which has become inseparable from corruption itself. At the Fourth Plenary Session of the CCDI, Xi Jinping stated, "we must adhere to the integration of rectifying work styles, strengthening discipline, and combating corruption, and eradicate the common roots of corruption and style", suggesting that the work style of party members is fundamentally linked to the broader problem of corruption as embezzlement and violations of political discipline (State Council, 2025).

This perspective is endorsed by academics as well; Huang Guiying, Professor of the School of Political Science and Law, Northeast Normal University argues that, "the Four Evils are the main source of corruption" (Huang, 2025) and Wu Haihong, Researcher at the Shanghai Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era argues that, "To combat corruption, we must also eradicate the work style problems behind it" (Wu, 2025). With work style framed as an entry point for serious violations of corruption and corruption itself, the centrality of the Eight Central Regulations for Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign is brought into sharp focus.

Anti-corruption work in China has focused on enforcing the correct moral outlook and lifestyle of Party officials. By targeting manifestations of extravagance, luxury and formalism, the Party has chosen to enforce a code of conduct for Party members that cultivates austerity and frugality. Similarly, investigating formalism and bureaucracy is meant to enforce obedience and implementation of the Party core's decisions. Together, these prongs of the Eight Central Regulations manifest Xi Jinping's vision for the Party, with members expected to be loyal to the authority of the Party core and have a revolutionary and virtuous character and spirit.

Shifting Emphasis

The Party's initial emphasis on hedonism and extravagance between 2013 to 2019 was broad and evenly spread, with annual investigations distributed squarely across violations. Over the course of the campaign, certain violations have decreased in importance, seen in their declining share of annual investigations. For instance, violations relating to organising celebrations and events, illegal tourism and travel and illegal issuance of subsidy and welfare, as a proportion of all cases have declined considerably.

However, these cases have not seen any decline in absolute numbers, suggesting that the campaign has not had the deterrent effect it was slated to have. For instance, in the case of organising celebrations and events, the number of cases in 2024 has increased from the number of cases in 2014. Even in the case of travel and tourism using public funds, the number of cases in 2023 (discounting the large spike in 2024) is at roughly the same level as cases in 2015. It would suggest that the campaign has not produced any meaningful decrease in the

number of cases for certain violations over 10 years. At the same time, the campaign has shifted its emphasis to more "serious" violations. In the case of hedonism and extravagance, violations relating to giving and receiving gifts and eating and drinking with public funds/illegally have become the largest components of all investigations.

This could mean that the Party has moved away from its stated emphasis on cultivating frugality to targeting violations of extravagance that are framed as threats to authority, unified leadership and political stability. Giving and receiving gifts and eating and drinking violations are associated with relationship building and are part of how officials at most levels network with colleagues, private sector stakeholders and superiors. They are part of how officials participate in power-for-money transactions, form cliques and factions, and build up patron-client relationships with subordinates and superiors. The formation of such cliques and power bases are a direct threat to the Party's unified authority and Xi Jinping. As a result, the anti-corruption campaign has refined its focus away from violations of personal gratification to those facilitating the creation of independent political power.

The shifting emphasis is visible in violations related to formalism and bureaucracy as well. Violations of excessive paperwork and others have declined considerably, while failures to implement decisions have increased. The failure to fulfil duties is by far the most common violation, which has increased as a proportion of all violations since 2020. It is a form of disobedience and dereliction of duty that undermines the authority of the Party and is likely to have been construed a challenge to the Party core, its policies and decisions, and thus, received greater attention.

Another factor driving this shifting emphasis is that party officials, facing slowing economic growth and rising fear of corruption charges, have increasingly become wary or inactive in their response to emerging challenges. Policy paralysis and "lying flat" has manifested due to these pressures, forcing the Party to increase its vigilance over such tendencies. The Party's shifting emphasis is made clear in the Work Report of the Fourth Plenary of the CCDI, which states that the Party will "punish corruption cases that are intertwined with political and economic issues" and focus on dereliction of duty and illegal decision making (State Council, 2025).

The shifting emphasis of the anti-corruption campaign isn't just reflected in the nature of violations, but also in the kind of officials the Party is targeting. Grassroots level officials have become the focus of investigations since the Work Plan of the Central Anti-Corruption Coordination Group (2023-2027) was announced by the General Office of the Central Committee (China Communist Party News Network, 2023). Although lower-ranked officials at the county and township levels have always constituted the majority of cases, the increase in cases at the lowest levels of the Party since 2023 has been unprecedented. For instance, the number of problems investigated at the township-and-below levels increased by 113% in 2024, compared to 2023 (Reddy, 2025).

Notable increases have also surfaced in the punishments meted out to lower-level officials as well; criticism and education of such officials have increased by 106% in 2024 and disciplinary sanctions increased by an alarming 107% in 2024. The focus on corruption at people's doorsteps is also an attempt to reinforce the Party's and Xi Jinping's political authority among the masses.

Implications for Policy and Politics

The widespread and intensifying anti-corruption campaign is set to further its reach during the campaign against micro-corruption. Its future trajectory suggests that policy implementation, which was characterised by a high degree of experimentation and creativity in deploying solutions is likely to be restricted as party officials become wary of falling afoul of the anti-corruption campaign. As inspections and supervisions search every corner of the Party and reach all time highs, officials are unlikely to risk experimentation. This is likely to reinforce the top-down policy design that the Party core has envisioned. With bottom-up solutions to economic and social challenges less likely to gain widespread adoption, the Party will rely on policy solutions coming from a small group of leaders at the highest levels of the Party.

Additionally, corruption is considered to serve an economic function, of facilitating transactions and building networks that benefit both participating groups. Without facilitative exchanges and interactions, local officials may find it harder to secure benefits, contracts and investments for their region. In the pursuit of cultivating virtue and the correct "spirit" in officials, the Party risks dampening the experimental and entrepreneurial energies that officials deployed to navigate economic and social challenges.

In the political domain, the anti-corruption campaign has often been described as a plan to purge Xi Jinping's rival factions. The fall of several high level officials like Bo Xilai, Zhou Youngkang, Xu Caihou, Ling Jihua and others in the early stages of the campaign set the tone for such an assessment. High level officials across the Party and State apparatus have continued to fall, especially after the 20th Party Congress, with a widespread purge of the PLA Rocket Forces, along with officials like Qin Gang, Li Shangfu, Miao Hua and He Weidong.

One of the latest high-ranking officials to be removed for corruption is Tang Renjian, former Minister for Rural Affairs, which correlates with the campaign against micro-corruption in rural China. Although ministerial-level officials account for a very small portion of all officials investigated and punished for corruption, their numbers have been much higher than under previous leaders, giving credence to the assessment that the anti-corruption campaign, partly and in its early stages, targeted Xi Jinping's rivals.

Conclusion

Emerging as the starting point of the anti-corruption campaign under Xi Jinping, the Eight Central Regulations have endured as the most pressing effort to shape the work culture of cadres and assert moral authority in Party politics.

The "Iron Rules" have only gained in importance over the last 12 years and their application has extended to all domains of policy, elite politics and social relations. They embody the values and virtues that Xi Jinping believes are an ailment to the problem of corruption and could spell the downfall of the Communist Party of China and the country.

Anti-corruption work in China has intensified periodically, measured in terms of investigations and punishments. Moreover, as Xi Jinping's power expanded since 2013, enforcement of the Eight Central Regulations have also become more prominent. Investigations entered a new phase almost every five years with greater number of cases against party and state officials. The campaign also become more severe; punishments over the last decade have increasingly become dominated by disciplinary and administrative sanctions. The campaign has further intensified since 2023, focusing on grassroots officials and searching for violations in the domains of people's livelihoods. The new phase, beginning in 2023, is going to take the anti-corruption campaign to new heights in the years ahead.

The nature and emphasis of the campaign has also evolved to focus on specific formalism and bureaucracy priorities. For violations, investigations predominantly target failures to perform duties, inactivity or laziness, performance-related issues and insufficient actions to advance high-quality development. The previously highlighted aspects of Xi's campaign like excessive paperwork or implementation failures have faded almost completely. In terms of extravagance and hedonism, which are more closely related to correcting the moral character of party officials, the political controls exerted by the party become clearer. Violations of illegal gifting and consumption have become the two main priorities, reflecting the Party's interest to curb political networking as well as Xi's interest to subdue activities and actions that allows rivals and factions to emerge or gain ground.

Although it has been argued that eliminating rivals is the main focus of the anticorruption campaign for Xi Jinping, the overwhelming focus of punishments and investigations has been on county and township-level officials. However, the emphasis on lower-level officials may shift towards higher-ranked ones as the Party approaches the 21st Party Congress in 2027. While Xi Jinping's political future may be the focus of speculation at the upcoming Party Congress, it is almost certain that the Eight Central Regulations will continue to shape political dynamics within the Party in the years ahead and become a significant part of Xi Jinping's legacy.



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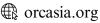
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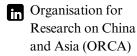
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