

Xi unlimited: on Xi Jinping's presidential term

The Chinese Communist Party's proposal to abolish term limits on the presidency, and thereby allow [Xi Jinping to stay on in power beyond 2023](#) when his second term ends, is not completely unexpected. When he was re-elected party chief and President for a [second term in October](#), no one was projected as a potential successor. This was a break with tradition and triggered speculation about him remaining President beyond the second term. Mr. Xi is arguably the most powerful leader of China since Mao Zedong. At the 19th Party Congress in October, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" was written into the party charter, setting him apart from his recent predecessors. He does not just control the main pillars of the Chinese state — the party, the government and the military. In 2016, the party accorded him special stature by making him the "Core Leader". Just as Deng Xiaoping oversaw China's economic rise, Mr. Xi has raised its profile in global geopolitics. He has pursued a more assertive foreign policy in China's neighbourhood and launched massive infrastructure programmes across the world as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. But despite the power amassed, long-term projects launched and his own apparent ambitions, the constitution was seen as a limit to his stint in power. With the latest proposal on removing the term limit, which is certain to be endorsed by parliament, Mr. Xi may find greater room for manoeuvre in speeding up the next generation of economic reforms.

'World must now take note of Xi'

The timing of the announcement itself, however, has taken many by surprise. Mr. Xi was about to begin his second term as President next month, and so has five years to introduce the constitutional changes needed. But with a proposal moved to amend the constitution a week ahead of a People's Congress convention, Mr. Xi has made it clear he does not want to leave anything to chance while consolidating his position. At present there is no rival power centre within the Communist Party to challenge Mr. Xi. But the centralisation of so much power in one individual, which is the antithesis of China's professed commitment to 'collective leadership', may well impact the power dynamics, given the succession battles of the past. The party introduced the term limit in the post-Deng era principally to bring in order and stability at a time when China was becoming an economic powerhouse. Two of Mr. Xi's immediate predecessors stepped down after their second term, having groomed the next generation of leaders, including Mr. Xi. By breaking with this pattern, Mr. Xi risks taking China back to the days of personality cults, internal power struggles and possibly chaotic successions.

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