

## Xi's party

China's rise as an economic power over the last four decades owes to the foundations laid by Deng Xiaoping. In addition to opening up his country's economy and embracing aspiration — “to get rich is not a crime”, Deng told his people — he also laid down structures that have helped the Communist Party of China (CPC), and by extension China's polity, to establish its considerable presence in a globalised world. That legacy has been eroded somewhat by widespread corruption and a perceived decadence among the ruling elite in China. The CPC, which began the process of returning to a more individual-centric authoritarianism during the 19th Party Congress in October last year, is continuing on that path. On Sunday, the party's central committee recommended that the two-term limit for China's president and vice-president be removed — in effect, Xi Jinping could lead the country indefinitely. The country's parliament, constituted by CPC loyalists, will likely rubber-stamp the decision.

A series of measures by the CPC has made it clear that Xi Jinping is among the party's most important leaders, perhaps second only to [Mao Zedong](#). At the 19th Party Congress, Xi's “Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era” was included in the country's constitution and earlier last year, he was given the status of “Core Leader” — only Mao and Deng have been honoured this way. The reported rationale for abolishing the term limit is that “the current structure of the party and state institutions was not good enough to meet the requirements for various tasks in the ‘New Era’.” This overt consolidation of power behind Xi is, of course, a show of strength and a signal that the aggressive postures he has taken, both in domestic and foreign policy, are unlikely to change. With an anti-corruption drive as his shield, Xi has removed from politics CPC leaders once thought to be very powerful. The “great firewall of China” and systems of censorship and surveillance like the “Social Credit System” are also part of Xi's “new era”. His desire to have China take up a more aggressive role in world affairs, particularly in Asia, is also a cause for worry.

But Xi's consolidation of power is also symptomatic of a structural weakness. By setting term limits under Deng, the CPC tried to send out the message that China's politics, though not liberal or democratic, was nonetheless governed by structures. The edifice that was built by Mao, the argument went, did not need great leaders to flourish. For India, which had to deal with an aggressive China in Doklam, and manoeuvre against its rising influence in South Asia, the lack of checks and balances on Xi Jinping is a worrying sign.

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