

## The life of Xi

When [Xi Jinping was elected the leader of China](#) and the Communist Party five years ago, many had predicted that he would become the most powerful leader since Deng Xiaoping, the architect of the country's economic rise. They may be wrong. With the 19th party congress, which concluded on Tuesday and has written his name and ideas into the party constitution, Mr. Xi now appears to be the strongest leader since Mao Zedong. This amassing of Mao-like powers could also allow Mr. Xi to stay in power beyond the usual two terms. Two of Mr. Xi's predecessors had stepped down after two terms to ensure an orderly transition in the party and the government, where there is no dearth of talented and ambitious leaders. The practice has been for the mid-term party congress to choose the likely successor of the incumbent and groom him over five years to eventually take over the reins. However, the party doesn't seem to have chosen anyone this time. All five new faces in the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, the highest decision-making body in China, are in their 60s, which lends credence to speculation that Mr. Xi is not planning to step down when his second term ends in 2022. Even if he does step down from the government, given the stature he has already achieved within the party, he could retain a Deng-like sway over policy matters.

### Xi Jinping unveils China's new leadership lineup

In Mr. Xi's world view, China has passed two eras — the revolutionary era launched by Mao and the economic reforms spearheaded by Deng. The "Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era" that has been written into the party charter marks "a new era". This one is about making China economically stronger and geopolitically more influential. In his three-and-a-half-hour speech at the congress, Mr. Xi placed great emphasis on strengthening the military and resisting "the whole range of erroneous viewpoints". The message is that the era of "peaceful rise" is over. The more combative foreign policy Mr. Xi's administration is pursuing will continue, perhaps more aggressively, while at home he will consolidate more power. But this doesn't mean it will be a cakewalk. If China takes a more aggressive, militaristic view of its neighbourhood, it could trigger an aggressive response from neighbours such as India and Japan. North Korea remains as much a foreign policy problem for Mr. Xi as for President Donald Trump. China's export-oriented economy is still not free from the global economic whirlwinds. Mr. Xi will have to factor in global market concerns while taking key economic decisions at home. Besides, though the transition in the Communist Party has been orderly at least in the last 30 years, it was not free from troubles. Mr. Xi would be mindful of how he projects his own power, lest it triggers a backlash. The challenge before him is to find a balance between his ambitions and the realities that China confronts today.

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