

XI JINPING TO RULE BEYOND 2023

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Executive Summary

1. Chinese lawmakers were nearly unanimous in their approval on 11 March 2018 of changes to the state constitution that included removing the term limit on the presidency and vice presidency. It allows Chinese President Xi to remain in power beyond his scheduled departure in 2023.
2. The constitutional change was a momentous break from intra-party rules in the reform era that emphasised term limits of top leaders and collective leadership within the Party.
3. Other changes included a new sentence stressing the Party's leadership over the country, the establishment of supervisory commissions and the inclusion of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.
4. As early as in October 2017, there was speculation that Xi might stay in power for more than two terms when the Party Congress did not install an heir apparent in the apex Politburo Standing Committee.
5. The two-term limit, introduced in the 1982 Constitution, came in the wake of excesses of the Mao era. Drawing lessons from the Cultural Revolution, Deng and his colleagues institutionalised intra-party systems like term limits and collective leadership to prevent Maoist dictatorship.
6. In contrast, other top-ranking posts in the state, such as the premier, vice-premier and state councillors did not see their term limits (also not beyond two terms) removed.
7. The removal of the term limit for the vice president would allow Wang Qishan, the formidable former anti-corruption tsar, to remain to assist Xi as the vice president for the longer term.

8. Xi Jinping Thought advocates a more systematic approach and a new ideological consensus to push China's development to the next stage. The ideology calls for increasing Party influence in all areas.
9. Questions still remain on whether President Xi intends to extend his tenure to a lifelong one, or settle for a new term limit past 2023.