



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

## CHINA March 2018

### **China's one-party political system draws on the tools of democracy**

Western analysts have expressed strong concern about the amendment to the Chinese Constitution abolishing the two-term limit on the office of state president as if such change signifies a regression and a threat to China's future.

As a matter of fact, the political capacities that matter most in China are those of the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission which President Xi also invested with and are not bound by a term limit.

By itself, China's presidency is essentially a formal appointment lacking the power conferred upon the presidencies of Western countries such as the United States or France. At home, the head of the Chinese nation speaks as party leader and it is only while travelling abroad that his formal role as president becomes prominent. Hence the amendment is an adjustment of a constitutional inconsistency rather than a shift toward authoritarianism as it is being described in Western media.

The fact is that China's political system cannot be measured with that upheld in the West where power is periodically contested by competing and often antithetical political parties. Since its inception, the People's Republic of China has embraced a one-party system of government which, in the last four decades, has been gradually transformed giving rise to China's own idea of communism, a far cry from the defunct model of the Soviet Union.

China is not a rigid dictatorship but a work in progress as to how to best meet the needs and aspirations of its 1.3 billion people. As suggested by John Keane, a political scientist of the University of Sydney – author of the book *When Trees Fall, Monkeys Scatter* – China is “a political laboratory structured by methods of government that contradict all the standard [Western] textbooks of political science.”

Though Western analysts often brand China's political system as undemocratic, it actually draws largely on the tools of democracy. Local towns and villages elect their own leaders, vote on issue of their concern and the party run opinion polls widely and constantly to read public opinion and the public mood. In

Beijing, for instance, before introducing new public transport fares, there was extensive polling to ensure that people were ready to put up with the increases.

The party knows that it needs to stay connected to the people in order to sustain its primary role in the government of the nation. The Chinese are not as quiescent as many Western people tend to believe. Every year there are an estimated 150,000 protests, rallies and demonstrations across the country and it's high priority for the party that they remain manageable and localised. And where possible, the party tries to respond to public concerns. For this reason someone has formulated a new expression to describe China's political approach: "respondocracy".

There are, of course, limits to the party's responsiveness to people's criticism and claims. One cannot question the leading role of the party nor disparage its top leadership yet, according to the above-quoted John Keane, the Chinese Communist Party, is kicking the habit of keeping the lid on everything so that, both in its thinking and its practice, the CCP grows smarter by learning to be "a learning party".

So, instead of stigmatising the constitutional amendment extending the tenure of China's President indefinitely, Western analysts should concentrate on the weaknesses of the Western model of democracy. Perhaps the West has something to learn from the efforts of China's one-party system to constantly fix itself and open new horizons on the future.

If Western democracies will keep on being self-complacent and on boasting its alleged political and moral superiority, one wonders which system will ultimately prevail.

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