

Ecuador's Correa says he won't end reelection limits

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NEW YORK --

Ecuador's leftist president said he would not follow the lead of his close ally, Hugo Chávez, and seek to abolish limits on his reelection, vowing he had no interest in perpetuating himself in power as part of sweeping constitutional reforms.

Ecuadoreans will vote Sunday for a 130-member special assembly that will rewrite the constitution to reduce the power of political parties President Rafael Correa blames for the Andean country's problems. He has said the assembly should have the power to dissolve congress and other elected officials.

The process mirrors the constitutional overhaul pushed through eight years ago by Venezuela's Chávez. Critics say both presidents are part of a wave of Latin American leaders who have tapped into frustration among the poor to dismantle democratic systems and amass dictatorial powers.

Chávez recently proposed another set of constitutional changes that would allow him to be reelected indefinitely.

But in an interview with The Associated Press on Monday, Correa vowed he had no plans to follow suit, impatiently shrugging off suggestions that his own reforms are inspired by Chávez. Ecuador's new constitution, Correa said, should allow two consecutive four-year terms, a change from the current system that allows only one.

"Because the opposition is so mediocre, they have focused . . . on accusing Correa of seeking indefinite reelection and trying to be dictator for life," Correa said in New York ahead of the U.N. General Assembly meeting. "These elections and the process for the constituent assembly is the most democratic process that Ecuador has had in its entire history."

Correa, who took office in January, proclaims himself part of a new generation of Latin American leaders steering their countries away from U.S.-prescribed capitalism.

But he does not describe his policies in the same grandiose terms as Chávez, who says he is leading a "revolution" for Venezuela's poor and following in the footsteps of South American liberator Simón Bolívar. Correa is an avowed socialist, but promises Ecuador's constitution would not "impose any kind of ideology."

Envisioning two consecutive terms in power is hugely optimistic in a country whose past three elected presidents failed to make it through one. But Correa, 44, has remained intensely popular since taking office in January, helped by high crude prices that have kept

the oil-based economy stable. In an April referendum, an overwhelming 82 percent of voters approved the need for the constituent assembly.