



Highlights

- Africa has seen a [reversal in term limit norms since 2015](#). Since that time, leaders of 13 countries have evaded or overseen the further weakening of term limit restrictions that had been in place:
 - Algeria
 - Burundi
 - Chad
 - Comoros
 - Côte d'Ivoire
 - Democratic Republic of the Congo
 - Egypt
 - Guinea
 - Republic of the Congo
 - Rwanda
 - South Sudan
 - Togo
 - Uganda
- Despite these setbacks, the trend is not uni-directional. Several African countries have strengthened or upheld term limits since 2015. These include Benin, Liberia, Mauritania, Senegal, and the Seychelles. They are part of a group of 21 African countries that continue to uphold term limits. Moreover, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, and The Gambia have held or will hold constitutional referendums to institute term limits.

- There is a notable regional variation in the upholding of term limits. Countries in southern and western Africa have demonstrated the greatest adherence to these norms, while swathes of northern, central, and the Horn of Africa have failed to do so.
- The lack of effective term limits has resulted in Africa having 10 leaders who have ruled for over 20 years and two family dynasties that have been in power for more than 50 years:

Country	Leader	Years
Gabon	Bongo dynasty	53
Togo	Gnassingbé dynasty	53
Equatorial Guinea	Teodoro Obiang	41
Cameroon	Paul Biya	38
Eswatini	King Mswati III	34
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	34
Chad	Idriss Déby	30
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki	27
Republic of the Congo	Denis Sassou-Nguesso	23
Djibouti	Ismail Omar Guelleh	21
Morocco	King Mohammed VI	21
Rwanda	Paul Kagame	20

- This erosion of term limits is a setback for good governance in Africa:
 - Leaders in countries with term limits have been in office, on average, for 4 years. Those that have modified or eliminated term limits have been in power for a median of 10 years.
 - Recent years have also seen the ouster of long-ruling African leaders by their erstwhile political allies, resulting in a continuation of the existing power structure. If these regimes—Algeria, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Zimbabwe—are included, then the median time in office for countries without term limits jumps to 17 years.
 - Nine of the 10 African countries facing civil conflicts (excluding insurgencies by militant Islamist groups) are those without term limits.
 - Of the 10 African countries that are the largest source of [Africa’s 29 million refugees and internally displaced populations](#), 8 are countries lacking term limits.
 - Corruption is a challenge in many African countries, though it is particularly pernicious in countries without term limits. For countries that have modified or eliminated term limits, the median ranking on Transparency International’s annual Corruption Perceptions Index is 145 out of 180 countries. This is 57 places lower than the average ranking for African countries that have adhered to term limits.
- [Africa has 34 presidential elections](#) scheduled between 2019 and 2021. In roughly one-third of these elections the issue of leaders challenging term limits has been central. The often controversial means by which these leaders are extending their terms undermines the legitimacy that these electoral processes are intended to generate.
- The [institutionalization of term limits in Africa](#) is part of a reform effort started in the 1990s to address the legacy of overconcentrated power in the executive. Term limits are seen as an especially important element of checks and balances in Africa given the relative weakness of independent democratic institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, civil service, security forces, media, public protector, and central bank.