

ALC Newsletter



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Contributions by ALC Fellows, Alumni ,Staff and other stakeholders

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Editors Note

By Alfred Muteru

In one of his many [off-the-cuff remarks](#) at the opening of the 25th African Union Summit in 2015, President Robert Mugabe slammed the constitutional two-term presidential limit discourse in Africa. However, in reference to recent events in Burundi, he wittingly noted political upheavals that emerged when incumbents decide to extend their stay in office. Ironically, President Mugabe is serving his seventh term though his first under Zimbabwe's new constitution. This constitution

restricts him to two-terms.

President Mugabe's contradictory expressions highlight the numerous contentions over presidential term-limits on the continent. To-date, out of the 33 African countries who have constitutional term limits, 12 have successfully changed the provisions that have allowed incumbent presidents to extend their stay in power.¹ Though a number of them have been unsuccessful in changing the constitution, the lingering question is why these leaders are desirous of extending their stay in office? What are the consequences of their actions in each context where this occurs?

There is no simple answer to this question and the explanations for the quest for extra terms vary. The majority of these explanations have been extensively examined, although the trappings of power and quest for self-serving agenda seems to be a strong motivating factor for the leaders who seek to extend their tenure beyond constitutional term limits.

As a recent [Afrobarometer survey suggests](#), the fact of the matter is that although the majority of African citizens—73 per cent in 34 countries—favour limiting presidential mandates, the issue is very complex especially when one considers the arguments advanced for extending term limits or even why specific leaders are able to circumvent the term-limits and get re-elected.

Some leaders are simply able to exploit loop-holes in the legislation and the divisions within legislatures to effect such change. The lack of strong opposition or the suppression of the opposition, civil society and independent media also accounts for the change. Many facilitating factors therefore play a critical role and are at the heart of the debates on term-limits. But there is a leadership question at the heart of the dilemmas the term limits poses that is not given due attention.

To understand contestations around leadership transitions in these societies, we must go beyond the popular notions of leadership that view it from the perspective of personality traits, positions they occupy, or their achievement in society. To be certain the challenges with these attributes is that they hardly explain how these leaders interact with the followers,

¹ Dulani, Boniface Madalitso. *Personal rule and presidential term limits in Africa*. Diss. Michigan State University, 2011, 12.

for example, why they continue enjoying popular support for third terms when in fact their performance might be wanting.

We therefore have to understand the complexities of leadership in these societies by examining the leadership processes. How do leaders interact with the society and their followers in situations where term limits exist in order to extract or win acceptance for a third term? Is the situation mutual or does it involve levels of coercion of populations? Are referendums conducted to elicit popular opinion? How are they conducted? Where they are not conducted, how does the decision to go for a third term reached and who makes the decision?

Should the focus be on term limits or the situational factors that determine the leadership needed in these societies? These questions force us to alter our perspective on disputes around presidential term limits in Africa in some way by looking at process and focusing on society rather than the attributes of the leader. It also challenges how interventions by states or external actors in these societies are determined.

In this issue, contributors scrutinise some of the issues surrounding presidential term limits. George Omondi scrutinises the transitional and constitutional loop-holes President Pierre Nkurunziza has exploited in his bid for a controversial third term. He also highlights pitfalls in the attempted intervention by external actors in the ensuing political upheavals in Burundi. Anisha Hira examines the complexities of popular will and how this impacts contestations surrounding President Paul Kagame's intentions to go for a third term in Rwanda. Albert Mbiatem finally analyses the threats of instability that the Great Lakes region may potentially grapple with when the presidents decide to go against constitutional provisions on their term limits.

New Ph.D Programme at ALC

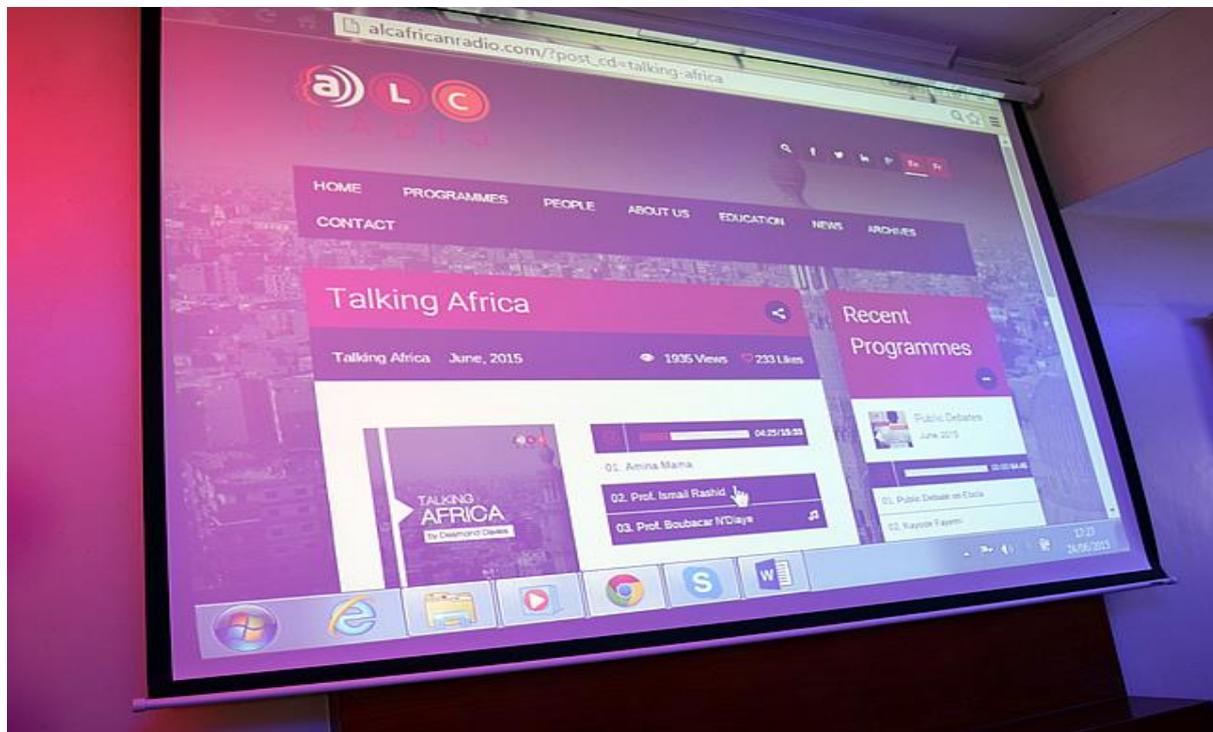
The ALC has announced the commencement of its new PhD Programme at Kings College London. The PhD programme titled *PhD Leadership Studies with reference to Security and Development* began in September 2015. It admitted its first cohort of student in 2015.



The PhD program is an addition to the existing Masters programmes MSc in Leadership and Development and MSc in Security, Leadership and Society established in the 2013-2014 academic year.

Discussions are progressing for the creation of a joint PhD programme between Kings College London and University of Nairobi as well as the University of Pretoria.

New ALC Radio Station Launched.



A new web-based radio station that aims to help shape the agenda on issues connected with leadership, peace and security in Africa was launched in June 2015 at the African Leadership Centre.

ALC Radio—alcafricanradio.com—will be an independent medium of analysis of African issues that is publicly available to all via the internet.

The station has been developed by ALC and will provide a forum to influence debate and policy development on the continent. The programme content will uniquely be informed by research and will draw on expert opinion from around the world.

ALC Debates held in June



The 2014/15 Fellows successfully held this year's second ALC Debate series in Nairobi. The first of these debates were held in February 2015.

The Debates whose theme was *African migration on the continent and in Europe: Local violence or structural racism* saw two captivating debates conducted on *Xenophobia in South Africa* and *Migrant boat deaths in Mediterranean*.

[The debates](#) are a core part of the ALC Fellowship programme. They are high level role-play sessions where Fellows debate and act out the role of personalities involved in the management of significant security situations in Africa.

The sessions provide an opportunity for the Fellows to display their analysis of current affairs from a variety of perspectives.

The Debates are recorded live and aired on the [ALC Radio](#).

Feminism Journal launched at ALC

A new feminist journal —[The Wide Margin](#)—has been launched at the ALC.

The journal was founded by a group of young African feminist graduate students based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi.



The quarterly on-line journal will feature a collection of critically thought through essays on social, economic, political and cultural issues with a feminist inclination.

The ALC hosted the launch of the journal's inaugural issue which is on the theme *Feminist while African*. The journal welcomes contributions from a wide cross-section of contributors.

Institute for Development Studies to commemorate 50th Anniversary

The Institute for Development Studies (IDS), an ALC strategic partner at University of Nairobi, will hold a conference dubbed [IDS@50](#) on 18th to 21st of November to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of its inception. The conference whose theme is *Rethinking Development and Development Studies in the Post-2015 Era* aims to converge scholars who will reflect on the nature of development thinking in the post-Millennium Development Goals era and discuss new ways of thinking about development in Africa. The Director of the ALC—Dr. Godwin Murunga - who is also a senior research fellow at the IDS, will be supporting various aspects of organising the conference which will be held at the University of Nairobi. The IDS was established in 1965 as part of the then University of East Africa. The institute currently produces knowledge and influences policy and practice on development issues.

ALC to hold Media Sensitisation workshop



ALC will be holding the second in a series of Media Sensitisation Workshop in October 2015. The first workshop took place in May 2014.

This year's theme will be "Reporting Regional Security from a Gendered Perspective" and will bring together early-career journalists from the East Africa Community member states.

The workshop will explore how theory drawn from feminist can illuminate and deepen reporting and analysis of regional security issues.

Through these media workshops, the ALC seeks to invest in a culture of reporting in East Africa that goes beyond the reporting of isolated and disconnected events to an analytical approach that pays particular attention to issues of regionalism, security and society.

The New Assault On Presidential Term Limits In Africa: Focus On Burundi.

By George Omondi



A woman stands against police water canon truck in Bujumbura, Burundi during a protest against President Nkurunziza bid for a third term. Source: Flickr, by: Igor Rugwiza.

Out of about 48 new constitutions in Africa, enacted in the 1990s, 33 of them provided for term limits for the office of the president. The limit is, for the most part, maximum two terms in office. Before that period of 'transition', only 6 African countries carried the presidential term limit in their constitutions. Interestingly, nearly 30 countries have contemplated the removal of term limits since 1998. In most of these countries, incumbents who had served two terms attempted to change the constitution to make themselves eligible for re-election for a third term, on the path to lifetime presidency. Some succeeded - for example Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and more recently Rwanda's Paul Kagame. Others, like Zambia's Fredrick Chiluba and Malawi's Bakili Muluzi did not succeed to effect necessary constitutional changes. Usually, the leaders do not extend their terms of office without an election. In most cases, elections are held and incumbents win with ease. Two issues are of interest. First, the negation of presidential term limits by amendment or interpretation of the constitution. Secondly, the management of elections with predetermined results. Our attention is directed at the first issue.

The case of Burundi is intriguing. After failing to achieve the constitutional amendment to allow him run for a third term, president Pierre Nkurunziza resorted to a self-serving interpretation of the constitution. Article 96 of the constitution of Burundi (2005) provides that a president shall be elected by universal suffrage for a mandate of five years, renewable one time. President Nkurunziza and his supporters maintained that the president's election in 2005 by parliament doesn't count in the two terms. They argued the president had only been elected once by universal suffrage and was eligible for a second election by the same process. The opposing argument is anchored on the Arusha agreement. The protocol on democracy and good governance within the Arusha agreement stipulates that the president shall be elected by universal suffrage, except in the first election of president after the agreement. It means that the agreement recognizes the first election of president as regular rather than transitional. In this interpretation, the first term of the president started in 2005. The question of whether opposition to the president's plan was in self interest of leaders or in national interest need not detain us. Presidential terms limits act restraints to overzealous action by politicians aspiring to be presidents. Uncertainty over the possibilities of leadership change bred political tension in Burundi since the dialogue between opposition and ruling party collapsed in 2012.

The pertinent question is this: how does the Arusha agreement relate to the constitution of Burundi (2005)? There are at least two ways of looking at this relationship. First, that the Arusha agreement was a transitional document whose life ended once the country enacted a constitution. It formed the basis for the development of governance institutions in Burundi in the post-conflict period, but it's life ended upon enactment of the constitution. The other view is that the agreement and the constitution have to be read together. The governance vision and aspirations in the agreement live alongside the constitution and remain a point of reference in governance debates and decisions. As has happened elsewhere - recently in Kenya, with the signing of the National Accord (2008) - peace agreements engrain governance principles and programmes that have to be implemented alongside the constitution. Granted, the constitution is supreme law, but it always has to be (re)produced to accommodate the imports of a peace agreement. In any case, the constitution of Burundi is not silent on the presidential term. Article 302 in the provisions for the first post-transition period is explicit that the election of the first president after the transition will be exceptional. The president would be elected by the national assembly and senate. That election, without any doubts, launches the first presidential term. Therefore, constitutional court erred in negating the Arusha agreement from current governance processes and in their finding that constitutional provisions on presidential term limits are vague.

There is an important element in the debate on presidential term limits brought out in the case of Burundi. It is the proposition that presidential term limit (or the lack of term limit) is a domestic policy issue. President Nkurunziza urged the international community to stay out of the issue and let the government and people of Burundi reach a sovereign decision. Not long after Burundi's elections in July 2015, president Yoweri Museveni of Uganda told a visiting Kenyan delegation, including Kenya's president Uhuru Kenyatta, that Uganda had gotten rid of term limits. In Burundi, just like in Uganda, control over both state and non-state

instruments of violence by the incumbent is the single most important factor in the enforcement of the leaders' insistence on third and more terms. Although divisions existed among the military ranks in Burundi, leading to the coup attempt, president Nkurunziza appeared to have succeeded in consolidating military support. The ruling CNDD-FDD party youth wing, the *imbonerakure*, sustained intimidation and violence against individuals and groups opposed to the president's third term manoeuvres. Additionally, the president relied heavily on his rural support base, casting opposition as urban-based. However, repression of civil society organizations and the media prevented possible popular campaign and mass nationwide revolt.

The East African Community (EAC) and the African Union (AU) missed momentous opportunities to strengthen the governance agenda in the region and the continent. In the summits held by both the EAC and the AU over/during the Burundi crisis, no strong and/or clear position was taken against extension of presidential terms. At the EAC, three out of the five partner states - Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda - have abandoned the practice of presidential term limits. This partly explains the EAC's inability to make a strong pronouncement on the matter. Similarly, the AU is hindered from decisive action on presidential term limits by the presence of many member states (and individual leaders) that have either scrapped off term limits from national constitutions or contemplate doing so. Ironically, the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance reigns. The AU suspends the membership of countries where coups occur and refuses to recognize regimes that come to power through such coups. That is a commendable ideal. Yet the AU has not taken a strong stance against extension of presidential term limits. There is more to it than rule establishment against term extensions. As the case of Burundi has shown, two other governance dimensions are key to building inhibitions and responses to term extensions at the national level. In the first place, safeguarding people's individual and collective rights and political freedoms. Secondly, promotion of free media and civil society. Although the civil society and media in Burundi mounted forceful resistance to president Nkurunziza's plans, the eventuality of a Nkurunziza third term is partly attributable to the limitations in the two sectors.

Presidential Term Limit Divide in Democratic Republic of Congo: Another Security Threat in the Great Lakes Region?

By Albert Mbiatem



Mr. Kabila mandate ends in December 19, 2016 D-Day 462' Source: Twitter: [cyrus nhara @cyrusnhara_4787](#).

The perennial manipulations of presidential term limits by incumbents is increasingly ebbing away hopes for democratic consolidation in Africa. Following several years of political instabilities characterised by civil wars in the Great Lakes region, a new security threat – disputes over presidential term limits – is beginning to emerge. After Uganda and Burundi, Rwanda as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) may join the trend of incumbent heads of state scheming to for additional, if not, unlimited terms. The fragility in these states and political antagonisms associated with the phenomenon of unlimited terms is becoming a potential security threat in the Great Lakes region as incumbent governments in the four countries seek to have more than two constitutional presidential terms. In Uganda and Burundi, the incumbents have so far succeeded to maintain themselves after “constitutional amendments or interpretation” that enable extending their terms. In Rwanda, the process to support President Paul Kagame’s third term mandate is in motion. In DRC, the government has so far struggled to set up a protective mechanism towards maintaining Joseph Kabila in power. But unlike Paul Kagame, an “extended or perpetual stay” of Joseph Kabila at the helm of the Congolese state is very likely to be a new trigger of insecurity in the country, region and beyond.

Beside the persistent quest by self-interested rulers and warlords toward the control of extensive natural resources in DRC, a dilemma over power maintenance or peaceful transition remains prevalent as Joseph Kabila has so far not declared that he is out of the 2016 presidential race. Having succeeded the father – Laurent Kabila – in 2001 following an

assassination, Joseph Kabila was elected democratically in 2006 and re-elected in 2011 amidst allegations of a fraudulent electoral process. With regard to unpopular attempts or decisions of his government, the current political trend in DRC suggests a probable constitutional amendment or other form of manipulation to render President Kabila eligible for a third term presidential mandate or even extend his stay in power. Still trapped in the complex web of structural problems and personal interests from within and beyond its borders, DRC seems to slide more towards greater fragility if President Kabila insists on vying for a third presidential term.

The constitution (Article 220) of the DRC clearly stipulates that the president cannot seek a third term after his second presidential mandate. Despite this position, President Kabila has attempted severally to extend his stay in power. One attempt was in January 2015 when he suggested that the presidential and parliamentary elections should be contingent upon compilation of a new electoral roll. His proposal provoked violent demonstrations that led to deaths of over 40 people after protesters violently clashed with police. Protesters were angry with the decision to carry out a national census ahead of the poll; a move that many considered could delay the polls for years thus allowing the president to postpone standing down. After cancelling this divisive proposal under popular pressure, President Kabila however struggled to organise a national dialogue with the opposition (although boycotted by some opposition parties) and the civil society with the intention to maintain himself at the helm of an eventual government of national unity. The other attempt was the increase in the number of provinces from 11 to 26 as of 30th June 2015 which has been described by many observers as a means to gain more political momentum from loyalists he has appointed to rule the new provinces and thereby weaken political opponents. Moreover, other scenarios to perpetuate his rule in DRC are predictable; he may decide to delay elections under the pretext of credible financial and logistic problems and, of course, security reasons.

The political contentions emerging from disputes on presidential terms in the Great Lakes region have potential implications not only to security but would also likely undermine development efforts. Previous experiences from repercussions of violent conflict in the DRC point to high possibilities that a political divide resulting from third term eligibility or re-election of President Kabila, would provoke upheavals or a possible return to armed conflict. Due to the porosity of borders and the landlocked nature of the region, political instability in a single state often affects the bordering countries in the region. For instance, the recent decision by President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi to run for a third term did not only provoke violent demonstrations and murderous/repressive government reaction; but it also led to the displacement of Burundians into neighbouring countries.

The high level of greed and corruption that prevails in the DRC tends to exacerbate an already unstable situation in the country. The Great Lakes states portray alarming features relating to electoral authoritarianism and political fragmentation with the ruling elites clinging to power and more often than not failing to respond to needs of the citizens. Citizens in these states are confronted with situations where personal interests of a few supersede collective goals. Their fundamental human rights in these contexts are often violated because rulers are bent on outsmarting members of the opposition and civil society in order to sustain

their selfish agenda. The fear is that the divide over presidential term limits in DRC would exacerbate the level of instability in the Great Lakes region that may lead to extensive loss of lives, displacement of civilian populations and economic regression. Despite some semblance of pro-government support in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and DRC, the strong opposition against unlimited presidential terms reveals elements of probable regional instability that the region might wish to guard against.

The term limit predicament in the Great Lakes region and DRC in particular has so far raised many contestations within the African continent and beyond. But the lack of concrete actions and decisions by regional and international organisations is alarming. The recent controversial election of incumbent president of Burundi has spoken to the low level of influence and determination of the main regional scheme – the Africa Union, the East African Community and indeed the UN. With such regional “leniency”, Joseph Kabila can expect to have his way in extending his stay in power despite popular condemnation and the recent disapproval by the US. Therefore, the situation remains precarious as long as leaders of the region tend to prioritise personal interests over collective goals; as long as they undermine the fact that peaceful and fair transfer of power is essential to political stability, justice, economic development, and peace.

Popular will or Constitutionalism: The dilemma of Presidential Term

Limit in Rwanda

By Anisha Hira



President Paul Kagame waves to a crowd in Gatsibo District, Rwanda in 2012. Source: Flickr, by: Paul Kagame.

The debate over extending the executive term limit to allow President Paul Kagame to run for a third term in the Republic of Rwanda has been framed as a clash between “exemplary leadership” on the one hand and “constitutionalism” on the other hand. Leadership under President Kagame can be reconciled with those constitutional values that encourage stability and security within the country. Presidential term limits do not necessarily guarantee democracy and good governance as proponents of amending the constitution claim. Indeed, as President Kagame himself points out, models of modern day liberal democracies, such as the UK and Germany, do not have any such provisions on term limits. In fact, leaders in both these nations have embarked upon three terms while maintaining a democratic state. Reformation of the constitution to allow for a further Presidential term would demonstrate strong leadership, and encourage stability, consistency and unity in Rwanda, it is argued.

In a 2003 referendum approximately 3.35 million Rwandans voted in favour of implementing a new constitution, which aimed to rebuild the country after the genocide. The 2003 constitutional reforms were instrumental in re-establishing institutions and addressing issues of identity and ethnicity in Rwanda. Like many other African countries, including neighbouring Burundi, Rwandans might be facing yet another referendum of constitutional and national significance. A petition, led by pro-government media outlets, and in favour of amending Article 101 of the constitution concerning Presidential term limits was signed by approximately 3.7 million citizens and presented to Parliament on May 27th 2015.

In July 2015, the Rwandan Parliament, by a landslide, supported a change to the constitution and launched public consultations with citizens across the country. The purpose of the consultations was to determine whether there is enough support in favour of a third term to carry out a national referendum regarding the constitutional amendment. Like many other African countries, including neighbouring Burundi, Rwandans are facing a referendum of constitutional and national significance that has major political implications.

Conversely, unlike these countries, Rwanda is a unique example of a nation that has had to re-establish its social, political and economic institutions in the wake of the genocide. As such, those in favour of allowing President Kagame to serve a third term have argued that the amendment would only apply in this situation to maintain Rwanda's 'stability'. Although there is adverse precedent for constitutional amendments and third, or more, terms across Africa, President Kagame would be setting a distinctive and possibly isolated precedent in Rwanda itself. It is not clear as yet how the constitution will reflect this exception and withstand political manipulation by leaders in the future.

Article 101 of the constitution explicitly states that the President of the Republic can hold a maximum of 2 terms of 7 years each. However, Article 193 states:

“...if the constitutional amendment concerns the term of the President of the Republic or the system of democratic government based on political pluralism, or the constitutional regime established by this Constitution especially the republican form of the government or national sovereignty, the amendment must be passed by referendum, after adoption by each Chamber of Parliament.”

The petition has sparked speculation as to how the constitution should be interpreted. Some claim that the provisions in Article 193 include increasing the number of Executive terms as well as the number of years in one particular term. Others strongly disagree and oppose any changes to the constitution as undemocratic and possibly catastrophic for the stability of Rwanda. In response to the petition, the opposition party, the Democratic Green Party (DGP) of Rwanda, recently challenged any such amendments before the Supreme Court.

The petition has been portrayed as a manifestation of popular will and has since been approved by the appropriate institutional channels. President Kagame himself has endorsed the debate around the petition and referendum for the sake of democratic discussion and has been outwardly ambivalent about seeking a third term. As the former Finance Minister, Manasseh Nshuti claimed, "It is irrational to change exemplary leadership and more so in [this] context even in the name of constitutionalism". Although the petition demonstrates how citizens associate President Kagame with stability in post-genocide Rwanda and are in favour of consistent leadership, critics of Kagame question the validity of the signatures. Firstly, there have been claims that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) had forced or pressured people into signing the petition. Secondly, a large number of petitioners are apparently prisoners, who were convicted for acts of genocide, and no longer possess the right to vote. Nonetheless, the will of prisoners should not be discounted as separate from popular will merely because they cannot form a part of the electorate.

Yet, there are other factors of constitutional significance that can be upheld by amending the constitution to allow President Kagame to serve a third term. Primarily, Article 98 of the

2003 constitution states that the President is the “guardian of the Constitution and guarantees national unity. He or she guarantees the continuity of the State, the independence and territorial integrity of the country and respect of international treaties and agreements”. Economist, Dambisa Moyo, proposes that in order to kick-start their economies, African countries require a decisive and authoritative leader. Once economic growth takes off, the state will transition into a multi-party democracy that is not dependent on external actors, such as foreign aid donors, which are encapsulated by Article 98. Of course, there are other positions that challenge Moyo’s argument especially some within the developmental state model who think that there is no necessary trade-off between democracy and development.

The RPF and many citizens of the country paint their President as a symbol of national unity. This stems from his role in bringing the genocide to an end and his efforts to rebuild the country since then. The new flag and national anthem, in addition to the constitution, were both instituted under Kagame to prevent the promotion of ‘genocide ideology’ and ‘eradicate’ ethnic divisions in the country. Moreover, the government has amended the Law on the crime of genocide ideology Law 84/ 2013 to make it more accessible and transparent, in accordance with recommendations made by the International Service for Human Rights. This image of President Kagame fits well with Article 98 of the constitution, where citizens can trace ideas of national unity and a respect for international organisations. As a leader, President Kagame embodies the idea of ‘Kwibuka’ so that Rwandans can remember the past, and build a better future that is free from ethnic tensions.

Under his Presidency Rwanda has evolved both socially and economically to maintain “continuity of the State”, “independence” and “integrity”. Rhetoric of good governance and development are often cited in conjunction with Rwanda. In 2014, Rwanda’s real GDP growth rose to 7.0 per cent from 4.7 per cent in 2013. Rwanda has demonstrated rapid technological and infrastructural advancement in the region. For example, the Rwandan Development Board benefitted 1500 people through buses that were equipped with computers and the Internet that transported digital services, including E-governance, and imparted ICT skills to rural communities. The level of economic growth and development remains indicative of decisive management and institutional recovery that will further propel Rwanda in the global market.

The international community has lauded President Kagame’s regime for Vision 2020, a greater number of female than male MPs and an exponential economic recovery. In 2013, the World Bank named Rwanda as the easiest and most cost efficient African country in which to invest and carry out business. In 2014, the World Economic Forum rated Rwanda the 7th most efficient government in the world due to a ‘low level of waste in government spending’. Kagame’s links with leaders and country’s across the world have placed Rwanda firmly on the international stage. Aside from being a model for efficient and effective use of donor aid, Rwanda has become a model for strong and less-corrupt institutions.

In the past, President Kagame has been criticised over human rights abuses and his role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). However, the Westminster Magistrate Courts recently dropped an extradition case against General Karenzi Karake on the grounds that he is not indictable under British Law. The arrest and verdict have proven to be contentious. In the eyes of critics of President Kagame the decision represents tacit support for the regime and the actions carried out by officials now and in the past. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that President Kagame has been able to form the requisite relationships and allies that will benefit Rwanda in the long-term. Despite the size of the country and its economy in the Great Lakes Region, President Kagame appears to be in a position of influence as an African leader who is both lauded and challenged by the West.

These factors ring in stark contrast to Rwanda's past, and to the rest of the continent. For many post conflict zones, particularly in Africa, the State has seldom been able to generate substantial economic and political reform, as well as enjoy regional influence and international attention. Yet, there is still much to be done in terms of post-conflict reconstruction. The World Bank classified Rwanda as a low-income country because 44.9 per cent of the population lives under the poverty line and the Gross National Income per capita remains well under the average taken across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Presently Rwanda does not have a strong opposition party or Presidential contender, something that explain both the nature of the leadership currently in the country but also why voices against the third term are not as loud. The DGP has been unsuccessful in blocking an amendment to the constitution in the Supreme Court because they were unable to find sufficient legal representation. Considering the relative size of the DGP and its ability to compete against the RPF in the political arena, Rwandans do not have many options to choose from. Furthermore, a change in leadership potentially risks de-stabilising or weakening the state and its progress in the last 20 years. Furthermore, the testimony of experience on the continent and elsewhere demonstrates that institutions, including the constitution, can easily be manipulated and distorted without stable and decisive leadership.

Over the past 21 years, President Kagame has proven to be a positive force in re-building and recovering the country. At such an early stage of its recovery, Rwanda needs to sustain this trajectory of growth and show of strong leadership. Despite the uncertainty about altering the constitution, the likelihood is that the result of the referendum will permit the constitutional amendment and President Kagame will continue to lead Rwanda. How that will unfold and if it will indeed push Rwanda away from the scars of its past remains to be seen.