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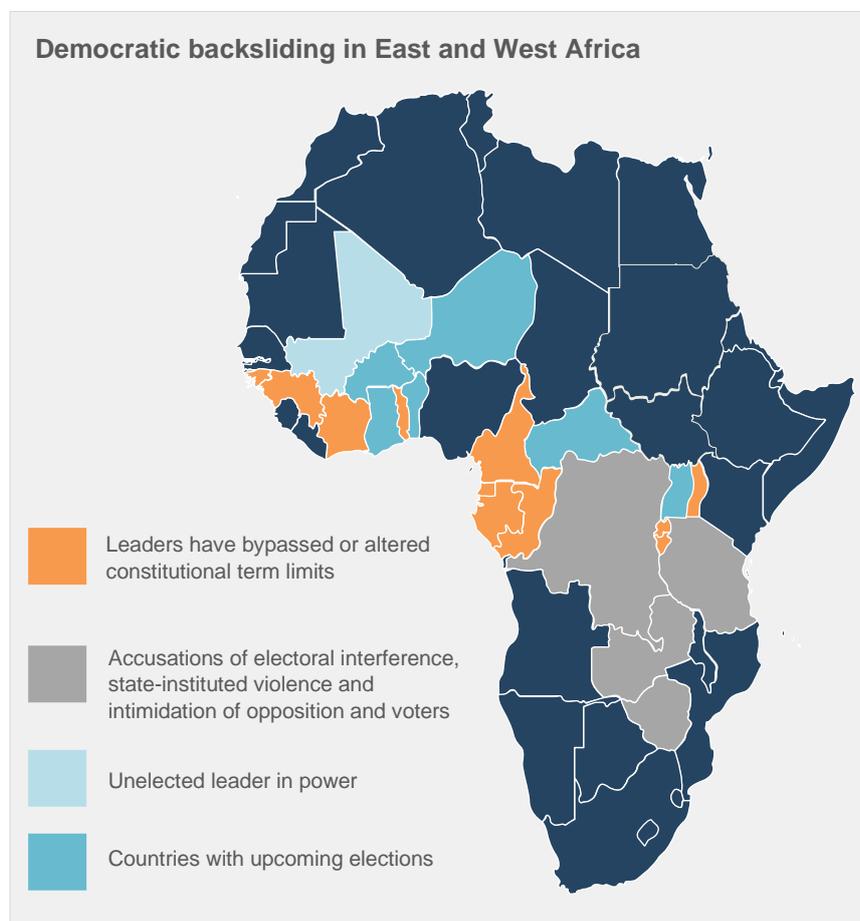
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Clusters of democratic regression in sub-Saharan Africa

Democracy weakened in Ivory Coast, Guinea and Tanzania due to electoral interference

Elections in **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Tanzania** and **Guinea** show a further erosion of democracy in sub-Saharan **Africa**. All three elections were marred by accusations of interference including ballot tampering, state harassment of voters and opposition candidates, violence and intentional internet slowdowns. In [Tanzania](#), internet, mobile communication and social media networks were “throttled” or blocked in the days leading up to the election. In Côte d'Ivoire, 40 of 43 opposition candidates were stopped from running. The Presidents of [Guinea](#) and [Côte d'Ivoire](#) breached two-term constitutional limits to remain in power.

This adds to an apparent [trend](#) of democratic setbacks in sub-Saharan Africa that have been clustered in two regions – East and West Africa. Election-related violence and internet shutdowns have been seen across both areas. Leaders of **Zimbabwe** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo** have been accused of election fraud. Leaders in **Uganda**, **Rwanda**, **Burundi** and the DRC have altered the constitution to abolish or extend term limits. In **Togo** and **Cameroon**, constitutions have been bypassed by presidents to stay in power. The military coup that overthrew the elected president in **Mali** in August is a further example of democracy being eroded. Networks of corruption, weak rule of law, a lack of economic opportunities and the manipulation of local ethnic tensions are common drivers of political instability across the two regions. Four further [countries](#) in sub-Saharan Africa are heading to the polls before the year's end. Their outcome may place the strength of democracy in Africa under further strain, risking deeper instability.



Region anxiously watches the results of the US election

A Biden victory is not universally preferred

With the election result still somewhat up in the air, much is at stake for the Indo-Pacific region. Certainly, there are elements of President **Trump**'s policy that have won favour – at least privately – with regional leaders. Former President Obama's failure to act after **China** seized the Scarborough Shoal – located in the South China Sea – from the **Philippines** in 2012 was widely seen as undermining US credibility. So was Obama's relative inaction when Beijing violated its [promise](#) not to militarise the South China Sea. Trump's muscular approach to China has – at least [according](#) to some seasoned observers – undone some of this damage. One online poll conducted in **Vietnam** [suggested](#) that Trump was the preferred presidential candidate there by a considerable margin.

However, whilst some have been relieved to see great usage of hard power, other aspects of **US** statecraft – namely trade and diplomacy – have taken a back seat. Nor has the Trump administration always been attentive to the needs of its allies. US disputes with **Japan** and **South Korea** over military basing costs is an example. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's recent whirlwind tour was illustrative of many of these complaints. Pompeo's tough rhetoric on China and his [call](#) for countries to pick sides or publicly criticise China made for awkward scenes from Jakarta to Colombo. The signing of a US\$750 MoU between **Indonesia** and the US Export Import Bank and the extension of Jakarta's Generalized System of Preferences' [status](#) was undoubtedly welcome. However, it pales in comparison to the figures attached to Chinese and Japanese investment. While protectionist sentiment remains strong in the US, the region will be hoping that whoever emerges as President opts for a more nuanced, empathetic and multidimensional regional policy.

First signs emerge from China's plenum meeting

Outcomes appear to reflect several different policymaking drivers

The communiqué from last week's plenum in Beijing and several other associated developments yields some signals of **China**'s future direction. Innovation, technology and domestic consumption were key themes of the communiqué which sketches out policy priorities for China 14th Five Year Plan (2021-2025). Specifically, “upholding the central role of innovation”, “becoming a globally leading nation in innovation”, “accelerating the development of a modern industrial system” and forming a “strong domestic market” were all [listed](#) as priorities.

However, as China's semiconductor industry knows all too well, decreeing objectives in five year plans does not guarantee that they will be realised. To this end, it was interesting to see the release of an implementation plan that will grant Shenzhen – the original posterchild of China's rapid industrialisation – more autonomy and, at least in theory, allow easier access for foreign investors. Paramount leader Xi Jinping's recent tour of the Greater Bay Area – of which Shenzhen is a core part of – confirmed the renewed impetus flagged earlier. Foreign companies may also take solace from recent drives to increase punishment for patent violations.

Other policy initiatives – namely the Export Control Law and Personal Information Protection law – are something of a mixed bag. Both laws appear to be politically motivated and allow for retaliation against companies or countries seen to have violated China's interests. The data law in particular will likely raise compliance costs and make it more difficult for foreign companies to transfer data out of China.

Chinese projects in Pakistan face growing security risks

The security situation adds to the list of problem facing China's grand vision for Pakistan

China is betting big on Pakistan. The US\$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the Belt and Road's flagship investments and of the six official “corridors”.

Pakistan sees CPEC as crucial to upgrading its ailing infrastructure while China wants to use the port of Gwadar to bypass the Strait of Malacca – which is likely to be dominated by the **US** in the event of a conflict. As it stands, CPEC may be more vision than reality. Pakistan's parlous finances and Beijing's increasingly cautious attitude towards capital outflows help explain why only one-third of total CPEC projects have been completed. Individual projects – like an overland oil pipeline from Gwadar to Xinjiang via the Himalayas – seem to [defy](#) economic sense.

Another emerging challenge is Pakistan's complex domestic security situation. In late July, separatists from Pakistan's Baluchistan and Sindh provinces [announced](#) an alliance ostensibly aimed at attacking CPEC. Baloch separatists have previously successfully attacked Chinese targets in Pakistan, such as the 2018 attack on China's consulate in Karachi. Also worrying China is the recent [reunification](#) of the Pakistani Taliban. The Pakistani Taliban have also previously attacked Chinese nationals in Pakistan and have strongly condemned Beijing's treatment of the Uighur minority. Increasing security costs may further complicate the economics of potentially already marginal projects.

COVID19 elections – the benefits of incumbency

Just how long incumbents will continue to benefit is unclear

Throughout **Australia**, COVID19 appears to have been a blessing in disguise for incumbent governments. Labor's re-election in Queensland over the weekend marks the third state or territory election won by an incumbent, after Labor governments were also re-elected in the ACT and Northern Territory. The same phenomenon occurred across the ditch in **New Zealand** some weeks ago.

In Queensland and to a lesser extent in the Northern Territory, border restrictions have appealed to parochialism. Border closures and the associated 'strong on health' message also appears to have allowed Queensland Labor to peel away older voters from One Nation – whose vote has collapsed. Populist parties appear to be an early casualty of the pandemic, with New Zealand First – a former member of the previous governing coalition – failing to win a single seat.

At the national level, Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** has also been [rewarded](#) for Australia's low case numbers and an economy that – at least by global standards – is faring relatively well. As has occurred with opposition parties at the state level, the federal Labor opposition has struggled to cut through – with the media's attention squarely focused on the government response. At a time of national crisis, any criticism of government policy risks being perceived as unnecessarily partisan. However, with elections not due for at least a year and federal support measures such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker slowly being wound down, there is no certainty that dynamics will continue to favour incumbents.