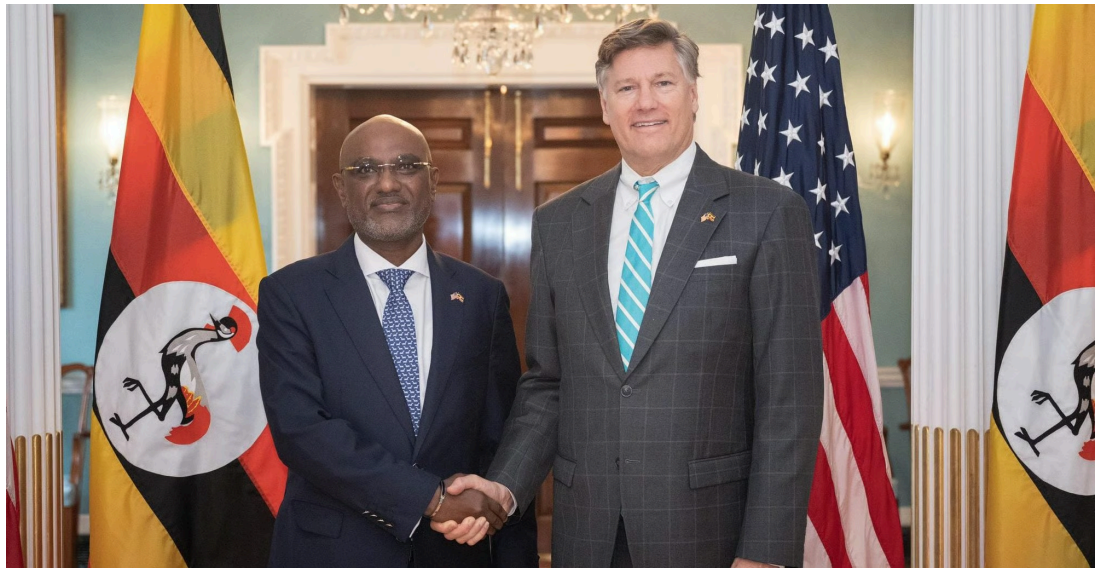
FEALTY TO THE FLAG

Dual nationality in Africa: When a second passport becomes a political weapon

From presidential hopefuls barred from elections to ministers forced out of office, a second nationality can make or break political careers across the continent. The Africa Report examines a contentious issue where the rules are not always applied equally, raising questions about who gets punished and who gets a pass.

By Laura Angela Bagnetto Political Editor



Uganda Foreign Minister Adonia Ayebare with US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau. © X/@adoniaayebare

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Disputes over dual citizenship have reignited debate across Africa over national loyalty and who should be allowed to hold public office. While some countries welcome dual nationals for the skills and investment they bring, others restrict their political ambitions.

In Uganda, Foreign Minister Adonia Ayebare was recently sworn into office after months of delays over his US citizenship, in an appointment fraught with questions over his loyalty to the nation.

Ayebare had been given US citizenship six months prior but renounced it just days before his 11 August investiture as a minister, along with fellow cabinet member and former dual citizen Shartsi Kutesa Musherure.

The debate dates back to the introduction of multiparty democracy in the 1990s, when African countries began relaxing citizenship laws, says Bronwen Manby, a nationality law expert and author of *Citizenship Law in Africa: A Comparative Study*. Multiparty democracy "brought a liberalisation of dual citizenship and then simultaneously put restrictions on public offices holding dual citizenship", she tells *The Africa Report*.

Manby says governments can exploit citizenship restrictions for political purposes. "It's a sort of weaponisation of an ambiguous situation," she says, noting that second passports are more commonly from Europe, the US, Canada or Australia, but potential dual nationality with other African countries can be attacked even if the person has never sought documentation of that nationality.

Dual nationality involving two African countries is generally linked to mixed parentage, she explains, largely because naturalisation remains difficult across the continent.

Citizenship status is also rarely public knowledge. "Unless you started ferreting around, you wouldn't know if a person had dual citizenship or not," she says. This lack of transparency can complicate questions of loyalty and eligibility for public office.



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Presidency problems

Can dual citizens run for president or hold senior government, judicial or military positions in Africa? In many countries, presidential candidates must be citizens by birth and hold no other nationality. Several political hopefuls have fallen foul of these restrictions.

In the Central African Republic, 2025 presidential hopefuls Anicet-Georges Dologuélé and Crépin Mboli-Goumba were disqualified over their French and US citizenship, respectively.

In Côte d'Ivoire, main opposition leader Tidjane Thiam was barred from the October 2025 presidential election over his former French nationality.

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In Senegal, opposition candidate Karim Wade, son of ex-president Abdoulaye Wade, was struck from the list of presidential candidates in 2025 for his French nationality, even though he had renounced his passport three days before.

Moise Katumbi, an opposition contender for the presidency in the DRC in 2023, was prevented from running due to his dual Italian citizenship. Nobel Peace Prize laureate and presidential candidate Denis Mukwege was accused online of being Burundian; he nevertheless ran and lost.

In contrast, Guinea's 2025 draft constitution allows presidential candidates to hold a passport from a foreign country, which the opposition claims favours leader General

Mamadi Doumbouya, who allegedly holds a French passport.

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The Africa Report takes a look specifically at whether dual citizens can run for elected office, namely as a representative or member of parliament, as reflected in this infographic.

Rules governing dual nationality and access to political office across African countries

Permitted With exceptions Not permitted

Search in table

Country	Dual citizenship	Political office	Exceptions
Algeria	Permitted	Not permitted	
Angola	Permitted	Not permitted	
Benin	Permitted	With exceptions	Afro-descendant status without naturalisation excludes political rights
Botswana	With exceptions	Not permitted	Eligible for dual nationality if foreign parents naturalise and register the child before age 21
Burkina Faso	Permitted	Not permitted	
Burundi	Permitted	Not permitted	Barred from running for office even if second nationality is renounced
Cabo Verde	Permitted	Permitted	Early proponent of dual nationality in Africa; only lusophone country that does not require language proficiency for naturalisation
Cameroon	Not permitted	With exceptions	MP candidates barred from elections due to second nationality; however, current Housing Minister Célestine Ketcha Courtès has dual French nationality, as do others
Central African Republic	Permitted	Not permitted	
Chad	Permitted	Permitted	
Comoros	Permitted	Permitted	
Republic of the Congo	Permitted	Permitted	
Cote d'Ivoire	Permitted	With exceptions	Can only run for office if Ivorian by birth

Democratic Rep of Congo	🔴	🔴	
Djibouti	🟢	🟢	
Egypt	🟢	🔴	
Equatorial Guinea	🔴	🔴	
Eritrea	🔴	N/A	Parliament has not held a session since 2002
Eswatini	🟢	🟢	
Ethiopia	🔴	🔴	
Gabon	🟢	🟢	Two parliament seats are reserved for diaspora Gabonese
Gambia	🟢	🔴	
Ghana	🟢	🔴	Offers Afro-descendant citizenship. The draft constitution allows for dual citizens to run for public office
Guinea	🟢	🟡	If naturalised by marriage, must be in the country for 5 years before running; in other cases must wait 10 years
Guinea-Bissau	🟢	🟢	Offers Afro-descendant citizenship
Kenya	🟢	🔴	
Lesotho	🟢	🟢	Cannot run for a high-ranking position or serve as an ambassador
Liberia	🟡	🔴	Only natural born citizens of Negro descent may have dual nationality
Libya	🟢	🔴	Also cannot hold high office if spouse is a foreigner
Madagascar	🔴	🔴	Citizenship stripped if another taken
Malawi	🟢	🟡	
Mali	🟢	🟡	Dual citizens can run for MP if they are also a citizen of another African country*

African country			
Mauritania	🟢	🔴	
Mauritius	🟢	🟢	Naturalised Mauritanians must give up other citizenship
Morocco	🟢	🟢	
Mozambique	🟢	🟡	MPs, diplomats and high military officers must be Mozambican by birth
Namibia	🟢	🟡	Only native Namibian dual citizens can run for office
Niger	🟢	🔴	
Nigeria	🟢	🟡	Naturalised Nigerians forfeit Nigerian citizenship if they acquire another citizenship; MPs must be Nigerian by birth
Rwanda	🟢	🟢	
São Tomé e Príncipe	🟢	🟢	
Senegal	🟢	🟢	
Seychelles	🟢	🔴	
Sierra Leone	🟢	🟡	Afro descendant and Afro golden passport citizenship offered; can run for MP
Somalia	🟢	🟡	Although allowed, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has pushed ministers to surrender their second passports, and some have
South Africa	🟢	🟢	
South Sudan	🟢	🟢	
Sudan	🟡	🟡	Allowed unless the other citizenship is South Sudanese
Tanzania	🔴	🔴	
Togo	🟢	🟡	Naturalised citizens must be in the country 5 years to run for office

Tunisia	🟢	🔴	The 2022 constitution allows only those with Tunisian parents and paternal and maternal grandparents to run for office
Uganda	🟢	🔴	
Zambia	🟢	🟢	
Zimbabwe	🟡	🟡	Dual only if Zimbabwean by birth

Excludes presidency/vice-presidency

*Mali rules according to the International Parliamentary Union
Various sources, including https://citizenshiprightsafrica.org/

the africa report

Not all dual citizenships are equal, and restrictions sometimes apply; however, African countries can benefit from remittances linked to dual citizens and experience an economic advantage in allowing multiple nationalities.

At the same time, academics argue a balance must be sought, such as in the case of Liberia, where then-president George Weah signed a dual citizen bill into law in 2022.

Robtel Neajai Pailey, author of *Development, (Dual) Citizenship and Its Discontents in Africa: The Political Economy of Belonging to Liberia*, denies any correlation between the enactment of dual citizenship and increased economic contributions from those abroad. Dual citizenship "must extend rights while also extracting responsibilities", she says.

Where war comes into the picture

Conflict further complicates dual citizenship. In Somalia, many cabinet members hold foreign passports after years spent abroad following the civil war of the early 1990s. Former president Mohamed 'Farmaajo' Abdullahi Mohamed, a dual US citizen, is an exception that would not be allowed after the 2026 constitutional changes.

> 'International and African human rights law recognise nationality not as a political favour that can be withdrawn'

In South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan in 2011, civil war and displacement have further complicated citizenship. Sudan permits dual nationality, but not with South Sudan.

One controversial case involves Animu Athiei, born in Juba in 1983. Her family fled to Uganda shortly afterwards, where she acquired citizenship, before returning to South Sudan around 2005. She surrendered her Ugandan passport after independence in 2011 and became a speechwriter for First Vice President Taban Deng Gai in 2016. Two years later, she was dismissed after questions about her citizenship surfaced online.

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After winning a precedent-setting court case at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2025, Athiei still hasn't been given her South Sudanese passport back and remains stateless.

"International and African human rights law recognise nationality not as a political favour that can be withdrawn at will, but as a fundamental human right that may only be interfered with in accordance with the law and following due process," said Michael Gyan Nyarko, Deputy Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA).

Burundi's 2018 constitutional referendum barred dual nationals from running for office, even after renouncing their second citizenship. The restriction also affected exiles who participated in East African Community-led peace mediation following the 1993-2005 civil war, drawing criticism from those involved in the peace process, according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

The Gambia, an example

In The Gambia, dual citizenship is legal, but it can cost you a seat at the cabinet table. Section 71(2) of the 1997 Constitution bars anyone holding another nationality from serving as a minister, a restriction that has repeatedly raised uncomfortable questions about appointments under successive governments.

Former information minister Amadou Scattred Janneh served under then-president Yahya Jammeh despite retaining his US citizenship. Their relationship ended

spectacularly. Arrested in 2011 and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment for treason, Janneh was accused by Gambian authorities of secretly passing government information to Washington through the US embassy in Banjul, which he later admitted to.

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Controversy also haunted President Adama Barrow's government in 2024 when education minister Haddy Jatou Sey resigned and communications minister Ousman Bah was dismissed.

Media reports suggested both had refused to renounce their US citizenship, although the government never confirmed this as the reason for their departures. Bah had served for more than two years and Sey for just under six months. The situation in The Gambia underlines the inconsistency in treatment of dual citizenship and enforcement of the rules.

Afro-descendancy comes to the fore

Several African countries have taken the lead to welcome Black Americans, whose ancestors had been brought to the US from Africa and enslaved between 1619 and 1865, encouraging them to procure an African passport.

"It provides a sense of belonging ... but there are controversies, especially regarding land and allocating land to the Afro descendants," says expert Manby.

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In Ghana, controversy over Afro-descendant passport holders being awarded land has created animosity within the country.

Sierra Leone allows for those with Afro-descendant citizenship to run as a member of parliament, but in Benin, which offers more of a residency status, you are not allowed to vote or run for office.

Presidential whims

Despite constitutional restrictions, the treatment of dual nationals often depends on political will.

Cameroon's diaspora has pushed for dual citizenship since 2004, but the issue remains unresolved despite resurfacing during the 2019 Great National Dialogue. "The government's unwillingness to pass this law is indicative of the political use of this bill," wrote political scientist Eugene Arnaud Yombo Sembe in *Report on Citizenship Law: Cameroon*.

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In 2020, Cameroonian politician and businessman Hervé Emmanuel Nkom was disqualified from legislative elections over his French citizenship, while other dual nationals, including Urban Planning Minister Célestine Ketcha Courtès, faced no such restrictions.

In some cases, foreigners are fast-tracked for dual citizenship while nationals remain in limbo. In Equatorial Guinea, Justice Minister Salvador Ondo Nkumu said in 2021 that the government might consider allowing dual nationality. Yet later that year, 10 foreigners, including nationals of Serbia, Lebanon and Nigeria, were granted dual citizenship while Equatorial Guineans seeking the same right continued to wait.

At Foreign Minister Ayebare's swearing-in, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni made his position on dual citizenship clear, insisting that national loyalty must come first. "On dual citizenship, I stressed that while the arrangement was introduced to address Uganda's difficult history, people must be clear about where their loyalty lies," he said.

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Political Editor

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