Democratic Republic of Congo President Félix Tshisekedi has signed a law establishing procedures for constitutional referendums, reopening debate over whether changes to the country's constitution could allow him to remain in power beyond 2028.

The law, promulgated on November 9 and announced on state television two days later, provides for referendums on a proposed new constitution or amendments to existing constitutional provisions.

It was approved by parliament in October, amid protests and opposition criticism that the initiative could be used to remove presidential term limits and extend Tshisekedi's stay in office.

Tshisekedi, who became president in 2019, is serving his second five-year term, which is due to end in 2028. The current constitution limits presidents to two terms and protects the number and duration of presidential mandates from revision through the ordinary constitutional amendment process.

Opposition figures fear the new law could provide a route to change those provisions through a referendum. They have accused the president of seeking to remain in office beyond his constitutionally permitted terms.

Tshisekedi has denied seeking a third term. However, during a news conference in May, he said he would accept another mandate if the Congolese people wanted it.

The new legislation establishes procedures for initiating and organising referendums, including the campaign period, voting process and announcement of results. It allows a referendum initiative to come from the president, government, members of parliament or citizens through a petition.

The law does not itself amend the constitution or call a referendum. No date has been announced for a vote.

The debate is unfolding as eastern DR Congo continues to face conflict, particularly in North and South Kivu, where armed groups control territory.

In May, Tshisekedi said elections scheduled for late 2028 might not take place as planned if the conflict continued and parts of the two provinces remained under rebel control.

The prospect of constitutional changes has added another point of political tension as the country approaches the end of Tshisekedi’s second term.