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International IDEA, Strömsborg, 103 34 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone +46-8-698 37 00, Fax: +46-8-20 24 22
E-mail: info@idea.int Web: www.idea.int

CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 5

When citizens can recall elected officials

Definitions

135. The recall is a direct democracy procedure that allows the appropriate authority and/or a specified number of citizens to demand a vote for the electorate on whether an elected holder of public office should be removed from that office before the end of his or her term. This definition implies that the recall must fulfil a set of requirements, which distinguish this procedure from others aimed at terminating an elected official's period in office, such as impeachment. To be considered an instrument of direct democracy, the process of legally interrupting the period in office of an elected official must involve the initiative and/or the vote of the electorate. When the initiative and the decision to do this come exclusively from the legally established authorities, such as the legislative or the judicial branch, and do not require the voters' involvement at any phase of the process, the procedure is more properly called impeachment.

136. In contrast, a recall requires citizens' intervention, whether it be to support or to reject through a vote in a referendum a decision taken by an authoritative body (as in Austria, Iceland, Palau, Romania), or as the initiators of the request which may then be processed and approved by an authoritative body (as in Uganda). These could be considered mixed recalls. The procedure is most participatory when both the initiative and the approval of the recall require the direct intervention of the citizens, first as the initiators of the request and second by expressing their support for or rejection of the initiative by casting their votes in a referendum (see tables 5.1 and 5.2). We define this procedure as a full recall. Some countries provide for a mixed recall for the highest executive officials and a full recall for members of national legislative bodies, as is the case in Palau.

137. The subjects of the recall are elected officials working at the local, regional or national levels. However, some countries provide for the possibility of removing appointed officials from office through procedures that involve citizens' participation

(Peru and many US states). In Peru, officials appointed by the central and regional governments at the regional, state, provincial and municipal levels, except for military chiefs in areas in a state of emergency, can be removed if 50 per cent of the electorate of the corresponding electoral district request their removal. The Peruvian constitution and legislation distinguish between recall and removal, and apply the first to elected officials and the latter to appointed officials. A recall procedure is more coherent with a presidential system of government (with a directly elected executive official) than with a parliamentary system of government. A recall of individual legislators seems to be more in line with an electoral system of single-member constituencies rather than with a system of proportional representation.

138. In contrast to impeachment, the initiators do not need to support the demand on legal grounds in order to begin the process of recall. It is a political instrument through which the electorate in a particular electoral jurisdiction can express their dissatisfaction with a specific official. When a justification is required, the acceptable charges can often cover a wide range, for example, corruption, incompetence, criminality and so on. In Ecuador, a recall can be activated at any point of an official's term in office. Even though the recall does not generally require a legal justification, the procedures for calling for a recall can be complex and have to be followed in order to activate the instrument and to proceed to the voting phase, as well as to provide for the selection of a replacement for the recalled official.

Provisions and usage

139. Among the procedures of direct democracy, the recall is the least widespread, and consequently the least applied. Only a few countries have included the recall, either the mixed or the full types, in their constitutional and legal systems (see table 5.2). The broadest application of the recall is found in Venezuela, where the full recall applies to all elected officials, including the president. The attempted recall of the president of Venezuela in 2004, which was initiated by 2.4 million Venezuelan citizens, remains one of the most prominent examples of the use of the recall mechanism at the highest level. In that instance, 40.6 per cent of the voters supported the recall, and the president remained in office (see the case study following chapter 1).

140. The pioneering countries in the conception and implementation of the recall at the local and state levels were Switzerland at the end of the 19th century and the USA around the late 19th to the early 20th century. Throughout the 1990s, Latin America became the region of the world where the recall increased its presence, in the new constitutions enacted, following a growing trend to combine representative democracy with participatory democracy. Some of these new constitutions have included the recall mostly for local and regional authorities, and commonly less for national elected officials. As in the rest of the world, other forms of direct democracy have a greater presence in Latin American constitutions than the recall.

141. The constitutions of some countries (e.g. Ecuador, Ethiopia, Peru, Taiwan) contain generic statements about the possibility of revoking the mandate of elected officials as a right of the people in those countries. However, in each case the specific design of the recall, the legal rules, and the level of and opportunity for the citizen's involvement differ significantly. In Venezuela, recalling elected officials is a substantive feature of the form of government, as government is defined in the constitution as 'democratic, participatory, elective, decentralized, alternative, responsible, pluralistic, *and with revocable mandates*'. The Peruvian constitution calls the right to revoke and remove officials a 'fundamental right of the person'. The constitution of Taiwan establishes that 'A person duly elected may be recalled by his constituency in accordance with law'; however, this only involves citizen participation to endorse, through a referendum, a petition initiated by the legislative body. The Cuban constitution contains a similar statement inspired by the 'principles of socialist democracy', according to which 'those elected must render an account of their work and may be recalled at any time'. However, the mechanisms for revoking the mandate are not defined. The constitution of Ecuador also establishes that the people will enjoy, among other political rights, 'the right to revoke the mandate conferred to elected officials'. Similarly, the Ethiopian constitution states that 'The people may recall any one of their representatives whenever they lose confidence in him. Particulars shall be determined by law'.

Table 5.1. Recall in the USA: recall provisions at the state level*

State	Year adopted	Positions	Signature requirements
Alaska	1959	All but judicial officers	25% of votes cast**
Arizona	1912	All	25% of votes cast
California	1911	All	State-wide officers: 12% of votes cast, 1% from each of 5 counties. Others: 20% votes of cast
Colorado	1912	All	25% of votes cast
Georgia	1978	All	15% of eligible electors,*** and 1/5 from each congressional district
Idaho	1933	All but judicial officers	20% of eligible electors
Kansas	1914	All but judicial officers	40% of votes cast
Louisiana	1914	All but judicial officers	If over 1,000 eligible electors – 33% of eligible electors; if fewer – 40% of eligible electors
Michigan	1913	All but judicial officers	25% of votes cast
Minnesota		Executive, legislators, judicial officers	25% of votes cast
Montana	1976	All	State-wide officers – 10% of eligible electors; district officers – 15% of eligible electors

State	Year adopted	Positions	Signature requirements
Nevada	1912	All	25% of votes cast
New Jersey		All	25% of registered voters in the electoral district of the official subject to recall
North Dakota	1929	All	25% of votes cast
Oregon	1908	All	15% of total votes cast in officers' districts for all candidates for governor in last election
Rhode Island		Governor, lieutenant-governor, secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general	15% of votes cast for the office in the last general election
Washington	1912	All but judicial officers	State-wide officers: 25% of votes cast; others: 35% of votes cast
Wisconsin	1926	All	State-wide officers: 25% of votes cast; others: 25% of votes cast for president in the last election

* States may not recall their members of Congress regardless of the state law.

** Votes cast for office in previous election.

*** Eligible electors in previous election.

142. Recall provisions also exist in many of the US states (see table 5.1), although they are used less often than the other forms of direct democracy, such as citizens' initiatives or legislative referendums. In all, 18 US states have provisions for recall at the state level, and 36 have provisions for the recall of local officials. (States may not recall their members of Congress regardless of the state law.) The use of the recall is more extensive at the local level than at the state level. About three-quarters of recall elections in the USA take place at the city council or school board level. Recall attempts at the state level have generally been unsuccessful. Prior to California's 2003 recall of Governor Gray Davis (see box 5.1), the only successful recall of a state governor took place in North Dakota in 1921, when voters removed the governor from office (as well as the attorney general and the commissioner of agriculture). California voters have initiated 32 gubernatorial recall attempts since 1911, but the 2003 recall was the first to ever to reach the ballot in that state. Few recall attempts get so far, because signature requirements are generally set quite high – typically at 25 per cent or more of the votes cast for a particular office in the last election (see table 5.1). An important issue in the US recall model has been the method of selecting a replacement for the recalled official. In most states, a special election must be held subsequent to the recall to select a replacement, although the rules and procedures for such special elections vary. In a few states there are provisions by which a successor to the recalled official may be appointed. In the 2003 California recall, the governor was removed from office by a vote of 55 per cent, and his replacement (Arnold Schwarzenegger) was elected to serve the balance of his term at the same time. Five other states have similar laws providing

for the simultaneous election for a replacement of the official removed from office in the recall.

Box 5.1. The California recall of 2003

The 2003 recall in California of Governor Gray Davis and simultaneous election of actor Arnold Schwarzenegger provided Americans with a view of a very powerful yet little-used tool of direct democracy – the recall. Governor Davis, a Democrat, faced a plethora of problems. In his five years in office (he had been re-elected in November 2002, defeating his Republican opponent by 47 per cent to 42 per cent), California's financial situation had turned from boom to bust. Davis inherited a 9 billion USD budget surplus, which in five years had turned into a 38 billion USD deficit. He and the Democratic legislature had to raise college fees, close health clinics and triple the automobile licence fee. Electricity shortages gripped the state, resulting in rolling blackouts, and the cost of electricity soared. The voters had had enough.

The recall effort gathered steam when Republican Congressman Darrell Issa, a car alarm millionaire, contributed 1.6 million USD of his own money to pay people to gather signatures on petitions to recall Governor Davis. The army of paid signature gatherers gave discontented voters an outlet for their anger: they were able quickly to gather more than the necessary 900,000 valid signatures to force the vote. California law requires signatures numbering at least 12 per cent of the number of those who voted in the last election to qualify a recall.

Under a unique provision of California law, there would be only one election to decide whether to recall the governor and also to name his replacement should voters recall him. The election would only require a plurality to win. To qualify as a replacement candidate, one could either file signatures or pay a 3,500 USD filing fee. One hundred and thirty-five Californians filed to run for governor.

During the (by US standards) short campaign, two candidates emerged from the field – Republican Schwarzenegger and Davis' Lieutenant-Governor Cruz Bustamante, a Democrat. There were numerous court challenges to the election, causing it to be put on hold by the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and then finally allowed to proceed by the same court.

In the end, a very decisive majority of 55 per cent voted to recall Governor Davis. Turnout was high at 61 per cent of registered electors. Schwarzenegger received 49 per cent of the vote, compared with 32 per cent for Bustamante. Interestingly, because of the high interest and turnout in the recall election, Schwarzenegger received 650,000 more votes in his election than Governor Davis had received when he was re-elected 11 months earlier.

143. From a conceptual point of view, the procedure of the recall is associated with the idea that representatives must remain accountable to the people who elected them. Thus the voters should be able to choose to terminate their mandate before the end of their term if the representatives are falling short of the citizens' expectations. The adoption of the recall in several US states at the beginning of the 20th century was associated with the so-called 'progressive era'. The movement to adopt recall and other instruments of direct democracy was triggered by the objective of displacing elected officials who were perceived as too closely connected to powerful economic interests (see, e.g., the case study on Oregon following chapter 4). Elected officials seemed to be more responsive to the interests and pressures of economic groups than to those of the electorate. The recall was conceived as a mechanism to induce representatives to be more sensitive to the electorate's demands.

144. From the critics' perspective, the recall is considered a highly polarizing mechanism that triggers serious confrontation and disrupts the normal work of elected officials during their mandate. It is also viewed as a mechanism that creates incentives for opposition groups to attempt to displace elected officials. The supporters of the recall consider that the procedure encourages close oversight of elected officials on the part of the citizens, and creates effective mechanisms of vertical accountability that establish a close relationship between the electorate and their representatives. However, the recall is still considered highly controversial, and international experience with its application is still very limited, particularly at the national level. This explains why it is the least common among the instruments of direct democracy.

Types of recall

145. There are two main types of recall according to the level of involvement of the citizens in the process:

- (a) full recall – recalls that require citizens' involvement both at the phase of initiation and at the approval or rejection of the recall; and
- (b) mixed recall – recalls that require citizens' involvement either in initiating the process or, at the approval stage, through a popular vote.

Both kinds of recall can be used at the national, regional and local levels, and both types can be used for either officials of the executive branch or elected members of the legislature.

Table 5.2. Countries with provisions for recall, by type of recall

Recalls initiated and approved by citizens – national level	
Country or state	Officials
Belarus	Deputies
Ecuador	President, governors of autonomous regions, deputies, mayors, <i>prefectos</i>
Ethiopia	Members of the Chamber of Representatives
Kiribati	Members of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu
Kyrgyzstan	Deputy of Legislative Assembly or Assembly of People's Representatives
Liechtenstein	Entire legislature
Micronesia, Federated States of (Chuuk, Pohnpei, Yap)	Governor, lieutenant-governor, senators, representatives
Micronesia, Federated States of (Kosrae)	Governor, lieutenant-governor, justice of the State Court, senators
Nigeria	Members of Senate or House of Representatives
Palau	Members of the Olbiil Era Kelalau
Venezuela	All elected officials, including the president
Recalls initiated and approved by citizens – regional and local level	
Country or state	Officials
Argentina	Local elected officials
Colombia	State governors, mayors
Cuba	Delegates to municipal assemblies
Germany (<i>länder</i> – Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Rhineland-Palatinate)	Entire legislature
Peru	Mayors, <i>regidores</i> , regional elected authorities, elected <i>magistrados</i>
Taiwan	Local and regional legislators, municipal city councillors, municipal city and county mayors, county (city) councilmen and township (city) chiefs
USA (18 states)	Local and state officials
Recalls initiated by authorities, approved by citizens	
Country*	Officials (authority)
Austria	President (Federal Assembly)
Germany	Mayors (local councils)
Iceland	President (members of the Althing)
Palau	President and vice-president (members of state legislatures)
Romania	President or vice-president (Chamber of Deputies and Senate)

Serbia	President (National Assembly)
Taiwan	President and vice-president (members of the Legislative Yuan)
Turkmenistan	President (Peoples' Chamber)
Recalls initiated by citizens, approved by authorities	
Country	Officials (authority)
Uganda	Members of parliament (Electoral Commission)

* Bolivia also has a law which applies to the current administration. It provides for a mixed recall, called by authorities and decided by the electorate. It is not known whether it will apply in future.

146. *Full recalls.* These are found at the national level for the executive and/or legislative branch (see table 5.2). At the regional, state and local levels, the full recall is found in a number of US states and in some provinces in Argentina. The full recall has also been adopted in countries such as Colombia for state governors and mayors, and in Peru for mayors, members of municipal councils and regional authorities. The recall is generally conceived and used to remove individual elected officials before the end of their full term in office, but in a few cases, for example Liechtenstein and the German *länder* of Berlin and Baden-Württemberg, it can be applied to the entire parliament (see box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Recall of a state legislature in Berlin

According to the constitution of the city-state of Berlin (article 63), a recall of the complete legislature can be initiated by 20 per cent of the registered electors. For a valid referendum vote a turnout of 50 per cent of registered electors and a majority of the voters participating are required.

During a political crisis in January 1981 the Christian Democratic opposition started a citizens' initiative to recall the legislature (Abgeordnetenhaus). Within a few days, 300,000 signatures – more than the quorum required – had been collected. In March, the parliament decided to call an early election in May 1981, without waiting for the referendum vote. Since the goal of the initiative had been reached the petition was withdrawn.

In other German *länder* the requirements for a valid referendum vote are higher (e.g. 50 per cent plus one of registered electors). There, the recall procedure has not been used.

147. *Mixed recalls.* In some countries (e.g. Austria, Iceland, Taiwan) the mixed recall initiated by the authorities is used to remove higher elected officials such as the president and vice-president from office before the end of their term. In the countries that provide for this form of recall, the need for the people's endorsement of the authorities' decision contributes to citizen participation, but also turns such an important decision into a more difficult process. In the case of Uganda, where it is applied to remove members of parliament (MPs), the process is reversed. At least two-thirds of the registered electors of an electoral district can promote a recall against an MP and present the petition to the speaker. If the Electoral Commission judges the request to be valid, the representative is removed from office. One well-known case of the use of the mixed recall is the attempt by the Romanian parliament to remove President Traian Basescu from office (see box 5.3).

Box 5.3. Recall in Romania: a vote for the president

On 19 April 2007, by a vote of 322 to 108, members of the Romanian parliament decided to remove President Traian Basescu. The resolution to remove him was backed by the members of the Socialist Party, the Greater Romania Party, the Conservative Party, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania, and the ruling National Liberal Party; there were ten abstentions. Basescu's years in office had been marked by harsh confrontation with the parliament and his former ally, Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu.

According to the Romanian constitution, if the president has committed grave violations of the provisions of the constitution, s/he may be suspended from office by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, in joint session, by a majority vote of both, and after consultation with the Constitutional Court. After examination of the allegations filed by the parliament, which included abuse of power, interfering with the law and protecting private economic interests, among others, the Constitutional Court ruled that Basescu had not committed serious acts against the constitution, but allowed the parliament to make its own decision regarding his removal. The president was suspended from office and Nicolae Vacariou, the speaker of the Senate, was appointed interim president.

The constitution establishes that, if the proposal for suspension from office is approved, a referendum shall be held within 30 days in order to remove the president from office. On 24 April 2007, the parliament set the date for the referendum, which took place on 19 May 2007. This was the first time in Romania's history that such a referendum was held. The question printed on the ballot paper was 'Do you agree with the removal of the president of Romania, Mr Traian Basescu, from office?'. The results favoured President Basescu, who returned to office. The 'No' side obtained 75 per cent of the vote (6.1 million

votes), the 'Yes' side 25 per cent of the vote (2 million votes), and turnout was 44 per cent. Throughout the process, opinion polls showed that the likelihood of his being removed was very low, not because he was popular (although he had strong popular support), but because the electoral law establishes that at least 50 per cent of the registered electors have to participate in the referendum in order for it to be valid. Basescu had been elected in a run-off election on December 2004 and had obtained 5.1 million votes. In the referendum his support increased by almost 1 million votes.

148. As with electoral systems and the other instruments of direct democracy, the recall can vary widely in terms of different legal and structural aspects, all of which may have an impact on the ability of the recall mechanism to serve its purpose. At least three main categories of issues have to be taken into account in deciding to include a recall in a specific institutional arrangement, and in the process of designing this instrument – the legal framework, the signature requirements and the approval quorum that determines whether the vote has been passed.

The legal framework

149. The recall can be enshrined in the constitution or in specific electoral laws and regulations. In the case of unitary countries, the right of recall may be established in the national constitution or in legislative acts. In federal states, such as Argentina, the Russian Federation and the USA, the recall is established in the individual state constitutions. The electoral laws define the different aspects of the recall. In some countries, the recall is provided for in detail in the constitution, as in the case of Venezuela, but in most cases it is only broadly defined in the national constitutions and the electoral laws specify the procedural aspects. In the case of mixed or full recalls that are used to remove high-ranking officials such as the president and vice-president or the equivalent, the conditions of the recall are established in the constitution.

150. One of the most important aspects of the legal framework is defining to which elected officials recall may be applied. Theoretically, once the right to recall elected officials is enshrined, it could be applied to any elected official. In practice, except in the case of Venezuela, the use of the recall is restricted to a number of elected officials, usually of local authorities. The decision to include national or sub-national, lower-ranking or higher-ranking elected officials stems from political and institutional considerations, and the decision may depend on a judgement as to the advantages and disadvantages of the mechanism: in general, the higher the rank of the elected official, the greater the impact of a recall could be, in terms of political polarization and disruption of government and public affairs. This consideration has played an important role in preventing the more widespread use of the recall, especially in the case of the highest-ranking positions.

151. The different types of recall require different administrative procedures during the several phases of the recall. The main phases are: (a) initiating a recall; (b) processing and validating the initiative; (c) campaigning against/for the recall; (d) submitting the recall petition to a vote; and (e) replacing the recalled official. In the case of full recalls at the national level, the requirements that define who can demand a recall vary from country to country and according to the officers subject to the recall.

Table 5.3. Countries with provisions for full recall: officials subject to and initiatives to promote the recall

Country or state	Elected official subject to recall	Initiative
Belarus	Deputies	Not less than 20% of the citizens eligible to vote and resident in the corresponding area
Ecuador	President, governors of autonomous regions, mayors, <i>prefectos</i> and deputies	At least 15% of the registered electors for the president and governors of autonomous regions and at least 10% of the registered electors in the electoral district for others
Kiribati	Member of the Maneaba ni Maungatabu	A majority of those who were registered as electors at the time of the last election of that member
Micronesia, Federated States of (Chuuk)	Governor or lieutenant-governor	Registered electors equal in number to at least 15% of those who voted in the last general election
	Senator or representative	Registered electors from the official's district or region equal in number to at least 20% of those who voted in the last general election in the district or region
Micronesia, Federated States of (Kosrae)	Governor, lieutenant-governor, a justice of the State Court, senator	At least 25% of the persons qualified to vote for the office occupied by the official, except that recall of a justice of the State Court requires the same number of signatures as state-wide elective office in Kosrae
Micronesia, Federated States of (Pohnpei)	Governor and lieutenant-governor	35% of the registered electors of Pohnpei
	Member of legislature	35% of the registered electors of the electoral district
Micronesia, Federated States of (Yap)	Governor, lieutenant-governor and members of the legislature	At least 25% of the persons qualified to vote for the office occupied by the official
Nigeria	Member of the Senate or of the House of Representatives	More than one-half of the persons registered to vote in that member's electoral district

Country or state	Elected official subject to recall	Initiative
Palau	Member of the Olbiil Era Kelalau	Not less than 25% of the number of persons who voted in the most recent election
Venezuela	All elected officials, including the president	At least 20% of the electors registered in the relevant electoral district

152. Some countries have more difficult requirements in terms of the number of voters required to sign the initiative (see table 5.3). A very demanding case is that of Nigeria, where the initiative has to be signed by more than 50 per cent of the registered electors in the electoral district concerned. An important distinction is whether the petition is signed by any registered elector within the electoral district of the official, or only by voters who participated in the last election at which the official was selected. This requirement increases the difficulties of promoting a recall.

153. In the case of mixed recalls, the authorities that can initiate the process are shown in table 5.4. In the cases of mixed recalls for presidents and vice-presidents, the decision adopted by the authorized bodies according to the established procedures has to be approved or rejected by the electorate through the vote in a recall referendum. In order to avoid promoting irresponsible and groundless recall processes, the decision has to be taken by strong majorities in the legislative bodies and has to be approved by the electorate. In the cases of Austria, Iceland and Serbia, if the recall is rejected by the voters at the recall referendum, the chamber of the legislature that promoted the recall shall be dissolved. The stringent high thresholds of the vote required in the legislative chambers, combined with the submission of the decision to recall the president or vice-president to a referendum and the possibility of dissolution of a legislative chamber, are intended to prevent irresponsible use of the recall by the authorities.

Table 5.4. Countries with provisions for mixed recall: officials subject to recall and initiatives to promote the recall

Country or state	Official subject to recall	Initiative
Austria	Federal president	The House of Representatives vote requires the presence of at least one-half of the members and a majority of two-thirds of the votes cast.
Iceland	President	Three quarters of the members of the Althing
Palau	President or vice-president	Resolution adopted by not less than two-thirds of the members of the state legislatures in not less than three-quarters of the states

Country or state	Official subject to recall	Initiative
Romania	President	Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, in joint session, by a majority vote of deputies and senators, and after consultation with the Constitutional Court
Serbia	President	Two-thirds of the total number of representatives
Taiwan	President or vice-president	Initiated a quarter of all members of the Legislative Yuan, and also passed by two-thirds of all members
Turkmenistan	President	The People's Council may express its lack of confidence in the president.

154. The requirements of the recall referendum and for approval of a recall vote also vary. In terms of the timing of a call for a recall referendum, there are also variations and a number of possibilities for extending the period that elapses from the moment the drive to initiate a recall begins until the point at which it is effectively carried out. The period of signature collection and validation can vary and extend the process significantly, as in the case of the attempt to recall the president of Venezuela in 2004 (see the case study following chapter 1).

155. Table 5.5 shows that there are different criteria to define when a recall is approved or rejected. These involve defining who can vote in the referendum; the percentage or absolute number of electors who are required to participate; and the percentage or absolute number of votes required in favour or against the recall. In some cases the only requirement is that the absolute number of voters in favour of the recall exceeds the number of those who oppose it. Other cases require a turnout quorum that ranges from a simple majority (Belarus) to 25 per cent (Venezuela) of registered electors if the referendum is to be valid. Additionally, there can be requirements for approval, for example, a simple majority of voters, or a predetermined absolute number of voters, as is the case in Venezuela, where the recall is approved if the number of voters in favour is equal to or greater than the number of those who elected the official. An example of a very demanding case is that of the state of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, where 60 per cent of the registered electors have to approve the recall, which means that at least 60 per cent of the registered electors have to participate in the recall in order to validate it.

Table 5.5. Countries with provisions for full recall: timing and rules for the approval of a recall referendum

Country or state	Timing of recall referendum	Rules for approval
Belarus		The referendum shall be held if more than one-half of the citizens who are entitled to vote support the referendum petition. The decision shall be considered as adopted by the referendum if it is supported by more than one-half of the total number of votes cast.
Ecuador	15 days after verification that the requirements have been fulfilled, the recall is called for, and it takes place 60 days afterwards.	
Kiribati		A majority of those entitled to vote in the referendum (i.e. registered as an elector at the time of the last election of the member named in the recall petition, in the electoral district from which that person was last elected)
Micronesia, Federated States of (Chuuk)	The sufficiency of the signatures on a recall petition shall be validated by the Election Commission within 30 days after receipt of the petition. Upon validation of the petition a recall election shall be held within 60 days after receipt of the petition.	A simple majority of the votes cast on a question
Micronesia, Federated States of (Kosrae)	Not later than 60 calendar days after the filing of the recall petition	A simple majority of the persons voting in the election
Micronesia, Federated States of (Pohnpei)	To recall the governor or lieutenant-governor, within 30 days of the determination of the validity of the petition To recall a member of the legislature, within 30 days of the determination of the validity of the petition	The affirmative vote of 60% of registered electors The affirmative vote of 51% of the registered electors of the electoral district
Micronesia, Federated States of (Yap)	Not later than 60 calendar days after the filling of the recall petition	A simple majority of those voting
Nigeria	Within 90 days of the date of receipt of the petition	A simple majority of the votes of the persons registered to vote in that member's electoral district
Palau	No later than 60 calendar days after the filling of the recall petition	A simple majority of the voters

Country or state	Timing of recall referendum	Rules for approval
Venezuela	Within 97 days of approval of the report stating the validity of the petition	A number of voters equal to or greater than the number of those who elected the official vote in favour of the revocation, provided that a number of voters equal to or greater than 25% of the total number of registered electors have voted in the recall election, and the number of votes for the revocation is higher than the number of votes against it

Conclusions

156. The relatively limited international diffusion and use of the recall suggests that this procedure is quite problematic both in itself and in its interaction with the important principles and institutions of representative democracy. In order to ensure that the recall can contribute to improving the means of participation and citizen oversight of elected officials in a democratic setting, the rights of both the citizens and the elected officials have to be guaranteed. To achieve this balance, the rights of all citizens – those in favour of and those against removing the official concerned – as well the rights of the official involved in the process have to be protected. The recall, like other direct democracy procedures, has to balance the principles of participation and effective governance. Achieving that balance is difficult, and failure to achieve it may lead to extreme consequences. On the one hand, if recall is very easy to initiate, this may lead to the trivialization of the recall. On the other hand, tough requirements may make it ineffective as citizens may feel discouraged from using it because of the difficulty of meeting the legal requirements needed to remove a public official through a vote. Finally, in addition to the liberality or the difficulty of the requirements, the assessment of the strength or weakness of the institutional setting may have a strong impact on the willingness and the citizens' ability to use the recall to increase oversight of elected officials.

157. The recall interacts with other institutions and rules of representative and of direct democracy. The decision to introduce it in a particular institutional setting must consider its possible impact in that setting. Conversely, the rules and institutional setting can affect the recall instrument itself. For example, if the presidential term is long – as in the case of Venezuela, where it is six years – the recall would seem to be more necessary than it is in political systems where the presidential term is shorter. Additionally, because of its potential to create polarization and disruption in the regular business of government, it may be preferable to introduce this procedure at the local level, where its impact may generate less negative consequences, rather than at the national level. This may explain why so few countries have adopted the recall to remove elected officials in the national-level executive and legislature.