POLICY BRIEF

THE 2025 ELECTIONS OF THE FIVE MEMBERS OF THE PSC: CONDUCT AND OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS

AMANI AFRICA

Media and Research Services

THE NEW COMPOSITION OF THE AU PSC AS OF 1 APRIL 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The election of the 5 members of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) was held on 12 February 2025 at the 46th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council in line with its delegated power pursuant to Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.106(VI)[1] of the sixth Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly. The outcome of the elections was endorsed by the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly held on 15 and 16 February 2025. While providing an update on the conduct and outcome of the election, this policy brief also highlights some of the dynamics that transpired during the election and the new composition of the PSC.

THE CANDIDATES

The list of the member states that submitted their candidature was initially circulated to member states on 15 January 2025. This was then followed by a note verbal that the Legal Counsel circulated on 17 January 2025 with an updated list of candidates that saw the removal of South Africa and the inclusion of Djibouti as candidates for the three-year term. The final list included ten (10) member states for the five (5) seats that were available. Out of the ten candidates, four (4) were running for re-election. Three of the candidates from the Southern, West and Central regions were running on a clean slate.

As captured in our previous policy brief on The 2025 Elections of the African Union Peace and Security Council: The Process, Candidates and Dynamics, the West, Southern and Central Africa regions fielded candidates equal in number to the number of seats allocated to the regions. The most anticipated elections were the ones for the East and North regions, which fielded a higher number of candidates than the number of seats available. North Africa had three candidates running for the one seat available to the region, and East Africa fielded four candidates for the one seat that was available. For West Africa, Nigeria ran for re-election as **the standing candidate** of the region for the 3-year term regional seat.

Map 1: Candidates on the ballot for election to the AU PSC for the 3-year term

The list of candidates that the Office of the Legal Counsel circulated to AU member states on 17 January consisted of ten member states. This included four candidates from East Africa and three from North Africa with one candidate each from the other three regions. Djibouti announced the withdrawal of its candidacy in favour of other member states from East Africa when the Executive Council convened for the holding of the elections. As a result, there were only nine candidates on the ballot when the PSC elections were held.

1 (Assembly/AU/Dec. 106(VI)). (2006) https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/assembly-au-dec-106-vi-e.pdf

THE ELECTION PROCESS

The election of the PSC members is regulated by the PSC protocol and the 'Modalities for the Election of Members of the Peace and Security Council'. Accordingly, the Executive Council elects PSC members by secret ballot and candidates shall receive a two-thirds majority vote among member states eligible to vote pursuant to the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Council. When the number of candidates fielded for the three-year term is equal to the number of seats available, the balloting goes on until the candidate meets the required threshold for membership. In the event that the candidate is not able to get the required two-thirds majority by the third ballot, the election will be suspended to allow member states of the concerned region to undertake consultations. In a situation where regions submit more than one candidate, and none of the candidates obtains the majority required, the candidate with the fewer votes shall withdraw after the third round of elections while the rest continue to the next ballot. However, if all the candidates fail to garner the required two-thirds majority by the seventh round, the elections will be suspended for consultation.

CONDUCT AND OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION

The election was conducted following the regional allocation of the seats of the PSC. According to the Modalities for the Election of Members of the PSC, the regional representation of the five members for the three-year term is organised based on the five regions of the AU. Following the technical glitches that affected the last PSC elections for the two-year term in 2024, a decision was made to change the balloting from an electronic system to a manual system. Accordingly, the elections were held manually, with the deans of the five regions serving as election observers during the counting of the ballots.

The number of candidates on the ballot before the election and at the time of the election were not the same. As noted in our policy brief ahead of the election, Djibouti had initially not been included in the preliminary list of candidates circulated by the Legal Counsel on 15 January but later joined the race through an updated note verbale circulated on 17 January. At the start of the election process, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Djibouti, one of the four countries vying for the one seat for East Africa seeking to continue to retain the seat by re-election, informed the Executive Council that Djibouti wished to withdraw its candidacy in favour of the other candidates. The move, which was received by the house, seemed to be a campaign strategy for enhancing the goodwill of member states for the Minister's candidacy for the position of Chairperson of the AU Commission. As a result, the candidates on the ballot at the time of the election were less by one candidate than before the list of candidates prepared for voting.

Another significant development that emerged ahead of the election was the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Southern Africa Region. As we noted in our policy brief ahead of the session, South Africa protested its removal from the list of candidates submitted to the office of the Legal Counsel and, hence, its non-inclusion to the list of candidates for the elections. Despite initial fears that South Africa would raise a challenge on the floor at the commencement of the

election, consensus was reached at the Southern Africa Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting to support Eswatini as the sole candidate for the regional seat in the PSC.

The sequence of the election follows the alphabetical order of the five regions of the AU. Accordingly, it started with the election for membership in the PSC from the Central Africa region. The region fielded only one candidate, Cameroon. During the election, Cameroon, which stood for re-election, received 46 votes. Compared to its 2022 election, Cameroon received five votes more in an election in which the number of eligible voters was less than it was in 2022. With only three votes short of the unanimous vote of the members eligible for voting, the 46 votes it received for its re-election represent a strong show of support for Cameroon as current member of the PSC.

Following Djibouti's withdrawal from the race, the election for the East Africa region proceeded with the remaining three candidates. Ethiopia took the lead during the first round with 24 votes followed by Somalia with 13 votes and 11 votes for Rwanda. Ethiopia maintained its lead during the 2nd round of votes securing 32 votes, which fell short by only one vote from meeting the two-thirds majority required. During the 3rd round of voting, Ethiopia secured 38 votes, Somalia 10 votes and Rwanda received only 1 vote. Ethiopia's performance signifies a restoration of its support on the part of AU member states considering its withdrawal from the 2024 elections and removal during the 3rd round of votes for getting the least number of votes during the 2022 elections. By contrast, Somalia's argument that its election to the PSC will reinforce coordination with the UN Security Council where it is an elected member failed to convince AU member states and the poor performance of Rwanda signals the erosion of its standing and weakening of support from AU member states apparently in the context of the war in Eastern DRC.

The other highly contested election, highlighted in our pre-election analysis, was for the North Africa seat. From the 1st round of voting, Algeria took the lead receiving 26 votes followed by Morocco 21 votes and Libya receiving 2 votes. By the 3rd round, Libya remained with 2 votes, Algeria gained two more votes than during the 1st round and Morocco lost two votes securing 19 votes. After the 3rd round, Libya, having received the fewest votes, was dropped from the race. Despite maintaining its lead during the next four rounds and receiving 32 votes at the 7th and last round of voting, Algeria was unable to secure the required two-thirds majority by falling short only of one vote. Following that, the election for the North Africa region was cancelled as per the AU rules. Prior to the lifting of the suspension of São Tomé and Príncipe from participating in AU activities for non-payment of their dues, the required number for a two-thirds majority was 32. However, the reinstatement just days before the 46th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, following its payment of overdue contributions, raised the two-thirds majority threshold from 32 to 33 votes. This one vote change in the required number of votes for meeting the a two-third majority threshold held Algeria from becoming a member of the PSC.

This marks the first time in the 20-year history of the PSC that an election for a seat in the PSC was suspended due to a lack of the required number of votes from member states for a candidate that

received the most votes. Traditionally, when a country maintains a lead over multiple rounds of voting, member states have adjusted their votes to allow such a candidate secure the required threshold. However, the failure to do so in this instance highlights divisions within Member States. It is widely believed that it is a result of the major fault line in North Africa that pits Algeria against Morocco.

The consequence of this is that until the convening of the election for the 3-year term seat for the Northern region, the PSC will operate with only 14 members as of 1 April 2025. The North Africa's allocated seat will remain vacant until the elections. Both for the election of two AU Commission Commissioners and the election for PSC membership from the North Africa region, it was decided that the AU convenes an extraordinary session of the Executive Council in mid-April rather than waiting until the next ordinary session of the Executive Council. The AU Office of the Legal Counsel has already circulated a letter inviting the Northern region to submit candidates for election to the PSC for the regional 3-year seat.

For the Southern Region, the key question ahead of the election was whether Eswatini would remain the sole candidate. The initial note verbale from the region listed two candidates: Eswatini and South Africa. However, the final note verbale circulated by the Legal Counsel of the AU only included Eswatini. While it confirmed that the region would have a single candidate— acknowledging that it was Eswatini's turn under the regional rotation arrangement—South Africa formally protested its exclusion from the final list in a letter shared with the Legal Counsel. As noted above, following the meeting of the Southern Africa's Foreign Ministers just before the start of the election, consensus was reached on proceeding with Eswatini as the only candidate for the Southern Africa region. Eswatini ran as the only candidate of the Southern region and secured the regional seat with 45 votes and 4 abstentions.

In West Africa, Nigeria was the only candidate, and it received 46 votes with 3 abstentions in the first round and got re-elected to the PSC. This is higher by two votes than the number of votes that Nigeria received during the last election for the three-year seat in 2022. This is a testament to the wide support that Nigeria enjoys and the expectation for it to exercise greater leadership and responsibility.

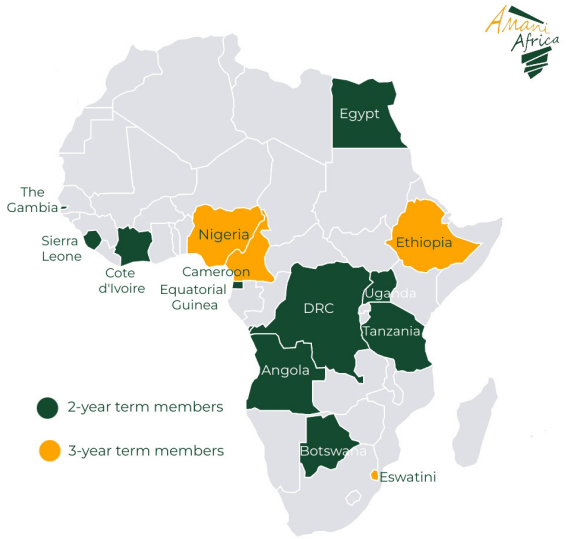
Map 2: Elected Members of the AU PSC for 3-year term

Region	Country	Votes Received	Years of absence from the PSC
Central Africa	Cameroon	46	Re-elected
East Africa	Ethiopia	38	3
Southern Africa	Eswatini	45	15
West Africa	Nigeria	46	Re-elected

MORE CONTINUITY WITH NOT-SO-INSIGNIFICANT CHANGE WITH THE NEW COMPOSITION OF THE PSC

Considering that two of the five seats were taken by current members, the outcome of the election represents more continuity than change. Generally, this means the working dynamics in the PSC will largely be the same as in the past few years. However, the arrival of the few members elected into the PSC after some years of absence will not be without its consequences. While Eswatini may be strong on some files such as humanitarian issues as the current chair of the PRC on a related portfolio, it is not expected to play the kind of role Namibia played.

The new PSC must confront critical challenges in its working methods and institutional effectiveness. While the new members meet several of the PSC protocol's Article 5(2) requirements, particularly those concerning diplomatic and defence attaché presence in Addis Ababa, questions remain about whether the PSC will fare better in confronting the growing number and complexity of conflicts on the continent and the challenges posed by the major geopolitical shifts on the continent and globally.



Map 3: The New Composition of the AU PSC as of 1 April 2025

Ethiopia's return to the Council for the first time since 2022 introduces an interesting dynamic, and most specifically it is expected to affect PSC's dynamics around specific files such as those in the Horn of Africa and Libya. Meanwhile, the North African impasse also reflects a broader trend where regional and national rivalries stand to override collective continental considerations, undermining the AU's ability to function as a unified body.

The major strength of the AU as a multilateral body is the universal membership of countries of the continent rather than being an organisation of like-minded countries. While it's not without its downside, the diversity of its membership is the source of this strength. Despite the division that this diversity occasions, thereby impeding effective collective action, the norms and policies of the AU provide the common basis for building consensus and mobilising collective action. The challenge to the

PSC moving forward is how to secure this common ground and pursue building consensus on the basis of the norms and policies articulated in AU's founding instruments notably the Constitutive Act and the PSC Protocol. This is critical for restoring confidence in the PSC and ensuring that the Council operates as a collective security mechanism rather than an arena for regional power struggles and advancing the pursuit principally of national interest by member states. If these issues remain unaddressed, the credibility and effectiveness of the PSC will continue to erode, weakening its ability to fulfil its core mandate: the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts across the continent.

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