

III

JUDGEMENT 3 OF 7

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

Africa won the argument for Council seats and lost the process

IN BRIEF

- Every senior UN official agreed that Africa should have permanent seats on the Security Council, yet the reform talks still have no timetable.
- The one real contest this year, the choice of the next Secretary-General, found African governments divided.

Africa's claim to permanent seats on the Security Council, the UN body that decides on war and peace, won the argument in every speech. The talks that could deliver those seats have run since 2009 without a negotiating text, and they still have no end date. In the one vote that mattered this year, African governments did not act together.

The reasoning

The Secretary-General called Africa's lack of a permanent seat unjust and indefensible. Leaders or ministers from Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia and Namibia made the same case from the podium. Burundi did so for the African Union. Kenya's President William Ruto said that Africa's 54 nations are "permanently discussed, yet permanently excluded". In July, however, UN members agreed only to continue the reform talks, with no end date and no single text. The African Union has also not said which African countries would hold the seats. Without names or a text, other governments have nothing to vote on.

Burundi, which chairs the African Union this year, nominated Senegal's former President Macky Sall for Secretary-General in March. At least 20 African governments then objected to an African Union

endorsement or asked for more time. Senegal's government backed him in July, and President Bassirou Diomaye Faye endorsed him from the podium on 25 September. In the third straw poll, an informal vote in the Council, nine members discouraged Sall. Uganda had nominated a second African candidate, Olara Otunnu, in July, which split African support further. The leading candidates now come from Costa Rica and Guyana. Africa's own division made its candidate easier to set aside.

Three of Africa's four largest economies did not send their head of state to speak. Nigeria sent its Vice-President, South Africa its foreign minister and Egypt its Prime Minister. This year, Africa's 54 votes were worth most in the choice of Secretary-General. They have not yet been used as one bloc. Inside the Council, the three African members, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Somalia, each have a vote on the choice, and the Council is still choosing.

The evidence

- UN News: the Secretary-General called Africa's exclusion unjust and indefensible [Source](#)
- UN: the July decision continues the reform talks with no end date and no single text [Source](#)
- Institute for Security Studies: 14 African states objected to an African Union endorsement of Sall and six asked for more time [Source](#)
- PassBlue: results of the third straw poll on 18 September [Source](#)
- UN News: Kenya's President on Africa's exclusion from the Council [Source](#)
- UN: candidates for Secretary-General and the states that nominated them [Source](#)
- UN Security Council: current members and their terms [Source](#)

The strongest argument against

Council reform has stalled for three decades because no region accepts a deadline that would lock in its rivals. By declining to name which countries would hold the seats, the African Union keeps the continent united. A list published now would divide Africa before there is any vote to win.

Sector briefings behind this judgement

Sector · Observed

Politics and governance

Africa stays united on Security Council reform because its position never forces a choice between countries, while coups and unpunished killings at home weaken its case.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Observed

The UN and diplomacy

The UN is shrinking because its largest members do not pay, and Africa entered the one big decision of the year, the choice of the next Secretary-General, divided and with its own candidates trailing.

[Open the briefing](#)

Recommended moves

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African list of demands for the next UN Secretary-General

Leads: The AU Commission and the Committee of Ten, with the African Group; the DRC, Liberia and Somalia as the first negotiators

100 DAYS · BY FEBRUARY 2027 AU SUMMIT

CONTINENTAL

Keep asking for permanent seats, and win smaller Security Council gains now

Leads: The Committee of Ten and the AU Commission, carried by the African Group; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe as first users

Words used on this page

Veto and permanent members

China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States hold permanent seats on the Security Council. Each can block any decision on its own. Africa has no permanent seat. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

UN Security Council

The 15-member UN body that decides on war and peace. It can impose sanctions and send peacekeepers, and its decisions bind all UN members. Five permanent members can each block any decision. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

Security Council reform talks

Talks among UN members on changing who sits on the Security Council. They have run since 2009 without a negotiating text or a deadline. Any change needs a two-thirds vote and approval by the five permanent members. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

UN Secretary-General

The head of the UN's staff and its main public voice. The Security Council recommends a candidate and the General Assembly appoints them, usually for five years. António Guterres's term ends on 31 December 2026. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

African Union (AU)

The organisation of 55 African states, based in Addis Ababa. Its heads of state meet each February. It can suspend members after a coup. [Glossary](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

Straw poll

An informal, secret vote in which Security Council members mark each Secretary-General candidate "encourage", "discourage" or "no opinion". Several rounds are held before the Council makes its formal choice. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

The African members of the Security Council

Africa holds three of the ten elected seats on the Security Council, each for two years. The three usually coordinate their positions. They are the only African voices inside the Council. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Africa's second-largest country by area, in central Africa. Its east has seen armed conflict for three decades, and it holds much of the world's cobalt. [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)