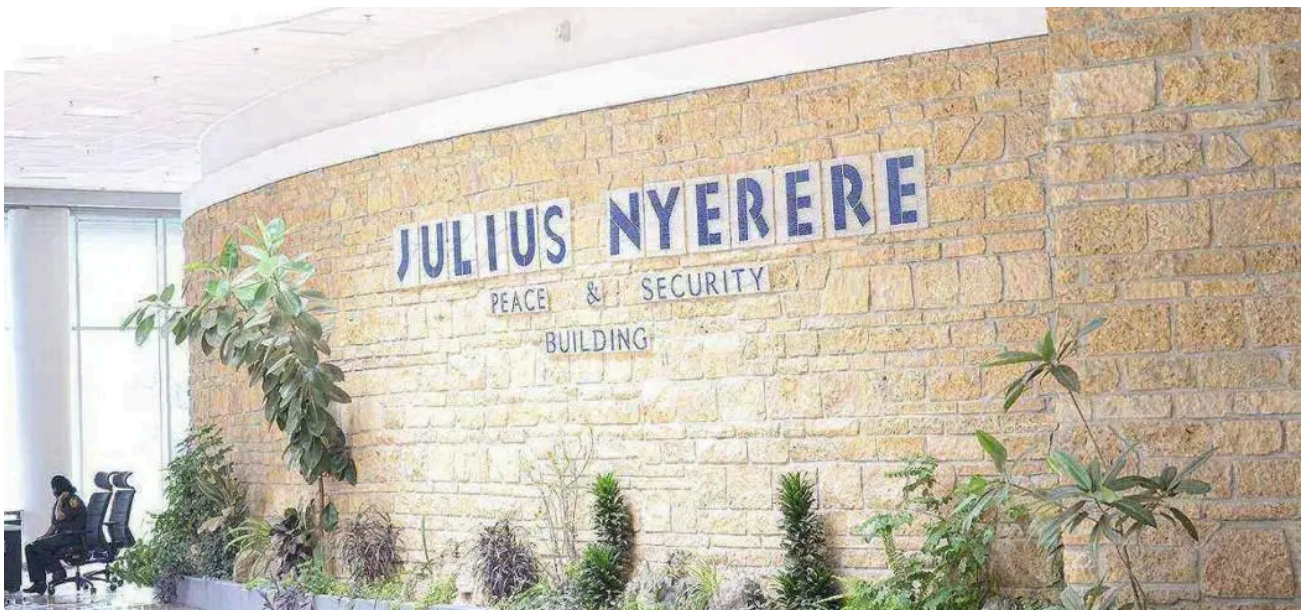


Politics and governance

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.

IN BRIEF

- At the UN in September, every African leader who spoke asked for permanent seats on the Security Council, and none said which countries should hold them.
- At home, soldiers have seized power eleven times since 2020, and elected governments that kill protesters are rarely brought to court.
- Africa also has two candidates and no shared plan in the race for the next UN Secretary-General, so it must first agree rules it will keep and gains it can win now.



The Julius Nyerere Peace and Security Building at the African Union Conference Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2017.

Photo: USAFRICOM, [CC BY 2.0](#), via [source page](#).

11

Successful military takeovers in Africa since 2020

[Source: aa.com.tr](https://www.aljazeera.com)

6

African Union members suspended, most of them after a coup

[Source: issafrica.org](https://www.issafrica.org)

18 of 24

Binding Security Council decisions under Chapter VII in 2025 that concerned Africa

[Source: aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com)

53%

Africans in 39 countries who would accept a military takeover if elected leaders abuse power

[Source: afrobarometer.org](https://www.afrobarometer.org)

3 of 62

Deaths in Kenya's 2024 protests that have reached court

[Source: aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com)

20+

AU members that blocked an AU endorsement of Macky Sall for UN Secretary-General in March 2026

[Source: amaniafrica-et.org](https://www.amaniafrica-et.org)

01

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

What happened at the UN

Kenya's President told the General Assembly that Africa is permanently discussed and permanently excluded. Ethiopia, Namibia, Nigeria and Ghana also asked for permanent seats on the Security Council, the 15-member body that decides on war and peace. Nigeria and Ghana also asked for the veto, the power to block any Council decision alone. Ghana's President John Mahama said reform was needed for "the survival of the United Nations". Yet there is still no text to negotiate, no timetable and no list of the African states that would take the seats.

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. Africa asked for a bigger voice at the UN while some of its largest countries sent deputies to make the case.

On 29 September the Security Council held its fourth straw poll on candidates for the next UN Secretary-General. Two of the seven candidates are African. Olara Otunnu was put forward by Uganda, and Macky Sall, the former President of Senegal, by Burundi. In March at least 20 African Union members blocked an AU endorsement of Sall. They said his bid had bypassed the AU's rules on

candidates, and that this turn belongs to Latin America and the Caribbean. Senegal's government first refused to back him, then changed its mind in July. Africa enters the last stage of the race divided.

Sources for this section (5)

- [Al Jazeera: African leaders on Security Council reform at the Assembly](#)
- [Wikipedia: list of speakers in the 2026 General Debate](#)
- [Security Council Report: the fourth straw poll and the seven candidates](#)
- [Amani Africa: how AU members blocked an endorsement of Macky Sall](#)
- [Africanews: Senegal backs Macky Sall in July](#)

02

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

What is really going on

Military takeovers have returned. Coups in Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau in 2025, and a failed attempt in Benin, bring the number of successful coups in Africa since 2020 to eleven. Madagascar showed how quickly it can happen. Protests over water and power cuts began on 25 September 2025, and at least 22 people were killed in the first days. On 14 October an army unit led by Colonel Michael Randrianirina took power, and the African Union suspended the country the next day. Anger in the street became military rule in three weeks.

The military governments of the Sahel have closed the ways back. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger formed the Alliance of Sahel States in July 2024 and left ECOWAS, the West African bloc, in January 2025. In September 2025 they said they would leave the International Criminal Court. It is the court of last resort for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Mali dissolved all political parties in May 2025. In July it gave General Assimi Goïta a five-year term, renewable "as many times as necessary" without an election. People in these three countries now have few ways left to check their rulers.

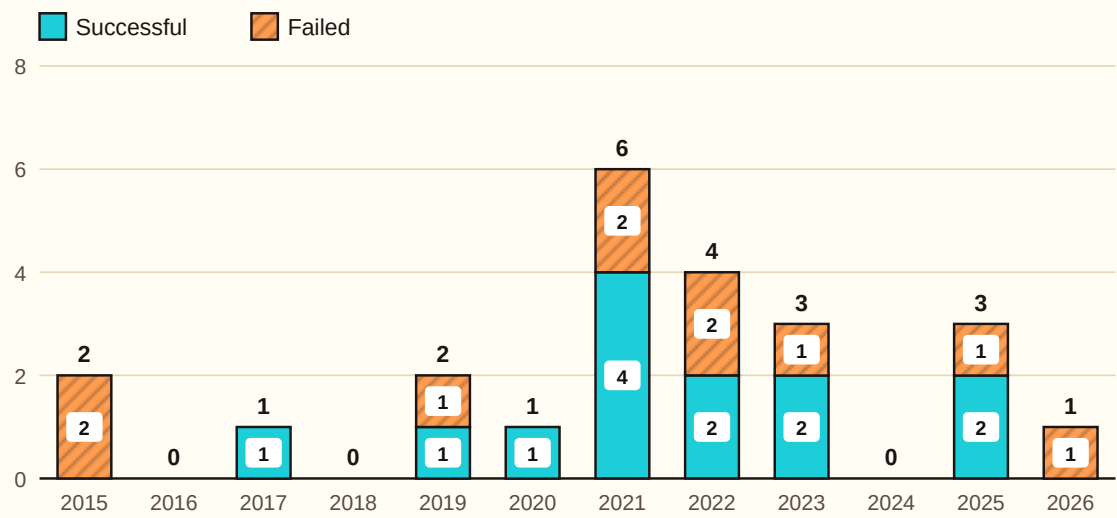
Elected governments also kill protesters, and they rarely answer for it. In Kenya only 3 of the 62 deaths in the 2024 protests have reached court. A group of Kenyan rights organisations, the Missing Voices Coalition, recorded 125 killings by police in 2025. Kenya's national human rights commission counted 38 deaths in the Saba Saba protests of 7 July 2025 alone. The UN reported hundreds killed around Tanzania's election of 29 October 2025. After Mozambique's election in October 2024, more than 300 people were killed, and by April 2025 no one had been arrested. Each unpunished killing tells citizens that elections do not protect them.

Many Africans are losing faith in how democracy works. Afrobarometer, a network that runs surveys across Africa, asked people in 39 countries. Two in three prefer democracy, yet only 37% are satisfied with how it works. More than half, 53%, would accept a military takeover if elected leaders abuse power, and among young people the figure is 56%. Soldiers who seize power can count on some public support where elected leaders fail.

In New York, the talks on who sits on the Security Council have run since 2009 without a text. In July the General Assembly carried them into its new session with no deadline, and asked states for more proposals. The United States supports two permanent African seats without the veto, and France also opposes giving the veto to new members. Africa's demand for the veto is the point where the talks stop.

Coups returned to Africa after 2020: eleven succeeded in under six years

number of coup attempts

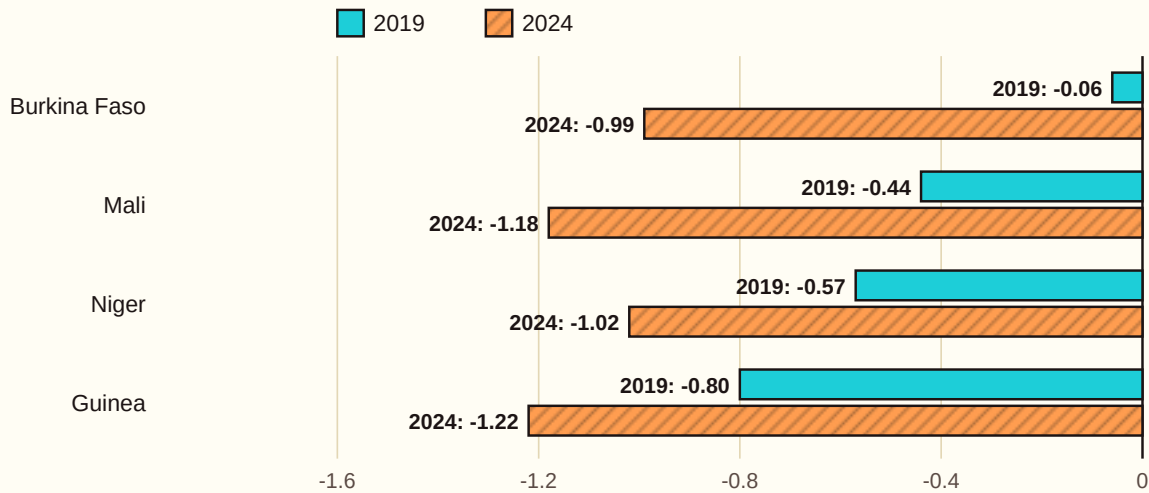


Africa = 54 AU states (COW codes 402-626 plus Egypt). Successful 2020-25: Mali (2020, 2021), Chad, Guinea, Sudan (2021), Burkina Faso (twice, 2022), Niger, Gabon (2023), Madagascar, Guinea-Bissau (2025). The 29 August 2026 Niger attempt is tentatively coded as failed and the authors say coding and larger revisions will follow.

Source: [Powell & Thyne, Global Instances of Coups 1950-present \(version 29 August 2026\)](#)

Voice and accountability fell sharply in the Sahel coup states

World Bank WGI estimate (about -2.5 weak to +2.5 strong)



Perception-based composite with margins of error; small year-to-year changes are not meaningful but these falls are large. 2019 predates the coups in all four countries.

Source: [World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators \(API source 3, indicator GOV_WGI_VA. EST\)](#)

Sources for this section (12)

- [Anadolu: coups and a failed attempt in Africa in 2025](#)
- [UN human rights office: deaths in the Madagascar protests](#)
- [ISS PSC Report: AU suspensions lifted and imposed in 2026](#)
- [Human Rights Watch: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger leave the International Criminal Court](#)
- [Africanews: Mali's law giving General Goïta a renewable five-year term](#)
- [Al Jazeera: Kenya's protest deaths in court and police killings in 2025](#)
- [Kenya National Commission on Human Rights: deaths in the Saba Saba protests](#)
- [UN human rights office: killings around Tanzania's election](#)
- [Human Rights Watch: no arrests for killings after Mozambique's election](#)
- [Afrobarometer: support for democracy and tolerance of military rule](#)
- [President of the UN General Assembly: the July 2026 decision on the reform talks](#)
- [CSIS: US and French positions on African seats and the veto](#)

Country by country

Kenya votes on 10 August 2027 with most of its protest killings unpunished. Nigeria holds presidential and National Assembly elections on 16 January 2027 under a new electoral law. Both governments speak loudest in New York for Security Council reform, and both face their own voters within a year.

South Sudan is due to vote in December 2026. On 10 September a UN rights commission warned that "the political failures of South Sudan's leaders continue to reproduce the conditions for damaging violence". In Madagascar, the military leader has told France that the transition will last no more than two years, with elections possible from July 2027.

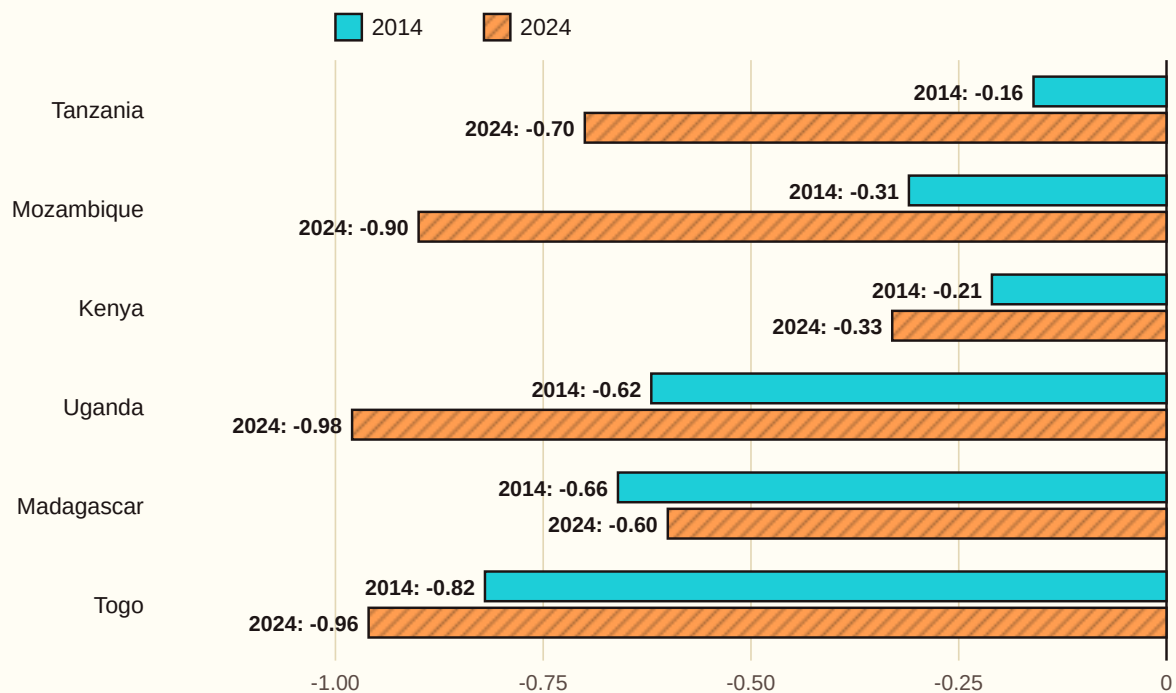
In Guinea-Bissau, soldiers seized power on 26 November 2025. Three days earlier, both President Umaro Sissoco Embaló and his rival Fernando Dias had claimed victory in the presidential election before any results. In Benin, forces loyal to President Patrice Talon put down a mutiny on 7 December. In Togo, at least seven people were found dead in the waterways of Lomé in June 2025. They died after protests against a new constitution that kept Faure Gnassingbé in charge under a new title.

Guinea and Gabon show another path. The African Union let them back in February 2026, once the transitions that followed their coups were complete. It also suspended Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau. In the same month Somalia joined the AU Peace and Security Council for the first time.

Africa's seats on the Security Council change in January 2027, when Zimbabwe replaces Somalia and joins the DRC and Liberia. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will therefore sit on the Council while its own war is on the agenda. That gives it a voice in its own case and a reason for others to doubt that voice.

Voice and accountability has weakened in several East and Southern African states that saw deadly protests

World Bank WGI estimate (about -2.5 weak to +2.5 strong)



Perception-based composite with margins of error. The 2024 values predate the 2025 killings in Tanzania, Kenya, Madagascar and Togo. Madagascar's small rise is within the margin of error.

Source: [World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators \(API source 3, indicator GOV_WGI_VA.EST\)](#)

Sources for this section (8)

- [Rio Times: Africa's election calendar for 2026 and 2027](#)
- [Nigeria's electoral commission timetable for 16 January 2027](#)
- [UN human rights office: the commission on South Sudan warns of violence](#)
- [NewsMada: Madagascar's transition and France](#)
- [Anadolu: Guinea-Bissau and Benin in 2025](#)
- [Amnesty International: deaths after the Togo protests](#)
- [ISS PSC Report: Guinea, Gabon and new Peace and Security Council members](#)
- [PassBlue: the new Security Council members for 2027 and 2028](#)

Why this matters

Africa's shared position on reform, the Ezulwini Consensus, asks for the veto and names no countries for the seats. That spares Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa from competing openly for them. After 17 years of talks, the result is no text. Meanwhile 18 of the 24 binding Council decisions under Chapter VII in 2025 concerned Africa. Who drafts those decisions, and who pays for the missions they create, matters now.

A two-track position would keep the demand for permanent seats and bargain now for gains that need no change to the UN Charter. The first would let African members lead the drafting of Council decisions on African crises. The second would bring steady UN funding for African Union missions, and the third a real say in choosing the Secretary-General.

The African Union already has some of the tools. At its February 2026 summit it agreed that three groups should work more closely. They are its Peace and Security Council, its Committee of Ten leaders on reform and Africa's three Council members. Such plans count only when the three African members draft and vote together. The Sall affair shows the cost of weak rules at home. His bid bypassed the AU's own committee on candidates and split Africa in public, in the one UN appointment where its 54 votes could decide.

The risk least discussed in New York is youth protest turning into military rule. Madagascar showed the sequence in 2025, surveys show that many people would accept it, and Kenya votes in August 2027. Governments that punish police killings make that path less likely.

Sources for this section (4)

- [African Union: the Ezulwini Consensus restated in May 2026](#)
- [Al Jazeera: 18 of 24 Chapter VII resolutions in 2025 concerned Africa](#)
- [ISS PSC Report: coordination agreed at the February 2026 AU summit](#)
- [Amani Africa: the Sall bid and the AU rules on candidates](#)

The case against this view

Refusing to name seat holders protects African unity, and a list published now would divide the continent before any vote exists. Council reform has stalled for three decades because no region accepts a deal that fixes its rivals in place. The return of Guinea and Gabon also suggests that AU suspension, applied patiently, can still bring soldiers back to elections.

Some protests did turn violent. In Madagascar the UN recorded looting and damage to property as unrest spread to eight more cities. Governments use such cases to argue that police were acting

against crime. Almost none of the killings have been tested in court, so that argument remains unproven.

Sources for this section (1)

- [UN human rights office: looting and damage in Madagascar](#)

BY AUDIENCE

What you can do

AU and regional bodies

DO THIS

Adopt a two-track position on Security Council reform at the February 2027 AU summit, keeping the demand for permanent seats and listing gains to win now.

WHY

The July decision set no deadline, so only an African text can create one.

AU and regional bodies

DO THIS

Enforce the AU rules on African candidates for UN posts, with a published calendar checked by the ministers' committee.

WHY

The Sall affair split Africa in public when its 54 votes mattered most.

Governments

DO THIS

Bring protest killings to court before the next election, starting with cases that oversight bodies have already investigated.

WHY

Only 3 of 62 deaths from Kenya's 2024 protests have reached court, and impunity feeds support for coups.

Governments

DO THIS

Brief Africa's three Council members before every African crisis is discussed, and agree who leads the drafting.

WHY

Most binding Council decisions in 2025 concerned Africa.

NGOs and civil society

DO THIS

Count casualties independently and track court cases for every major protest in election years.

WHY

Official figures in Tanzania and Mozambique came late or not at all.

Researchers and media

DO THIS

Publish a yearly scorecard of how African members vote and draft on African crises in the Council.

WHY

Claims of African unity are rarely checked against votes.

Philanthropy

DO THIS

Fund legal help for families of protest victims, and local election observers in Kenya, Nigeria and South Sudan.

WHY

All three vote before the end of 2027, and families cannot afford to seek justice alone.

Young people and citizens

DO THIS

Register to vote before registration closes, and record abuses safely during protests.

WHY

More than half of Africans would accept a coup against abusive leaders, and the vote keeps civilians in charge.

OCTOBER 2026 TO DECEMBER 2027

Dates to watch

5 DECEMBER 2026

Presidential election in The Gambia

A test of a peaceful handover of power in a region with several military governments.

[Source](#)

DECEMBER 2026

South Sudan's general elections

The UN commission warns they could bring renewed violence. [Source](#)

1 JANUARY 2027

The new UN Secretary-General takes office

Shows whether Africa's two candidates, or its votes, shaped the choice. [Source](#)

16 JANUARY 2027

Nigeria's presidential and National Assembly elections

Africa's largest democracy votes under a new electoral law. [Source](#)

FEBRUARY 2027

African Union summit of heads of state

The moment to adopt a two-track reform position and review suspensions. [Source](#)

10 AUGUST 2027

Kenya's general election

The first national vote since the protest killings of 2024 and 2025. [Source](#)

Recommendations

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

Dig deeper

[African Insights 2024: Democracy at risk](#)

Afrobarometer

Flagship report on support for democracy, satisfaction and tolerance of military rule across 39 countries.

[Draft decision on the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform](#)

President of the UN General Assembly

July 2026 text rolling the reform talks into the 81st session.

Fourth Security Council straw poll on UN Secretary-General candidates

Security Council Report

The seven candidates, their nominating states and the timetable to 1 January 2027.

AU's rejection of Macky Sall's UN Secretary-General candidacy

Amani Africa

How 21 member states blocked an AU endorsement and what it says about AU rules on candidatures.

AU Summit 2026: security realities amid reform and justice pursuits

ISS PSC Report

Suspensions lifted and imposed, the Peace Fund proposal and new PSC members.

Sahel countries: ICC withdrawal endangers civilians

Human Rights Watch

The September 2025 withdrawal announcement by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and what it removes.

Tanzania: election-related killings and other violations must be investigated

OHCHR

UN human rights chief on the killings after the October 2025 election.

AUC Chairperson reaffirmed Africa's united and principled position on UN Security Council reform

African Union

11 May 2026 statement restating the Ezulwini Consensus demand for two permanent seats with veto and five non-permanent seats.

Global Instances of Coups, 1950 - Present

Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne

The standard dataset of successful and failed coups worldwide, updated regularly with downloadable CSV.

Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)

Mo Ibrahim Foundation

The main African-produced index of governance performance across all 54 countries.

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](#)

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](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

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](#)

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](#)

Alliance of Sahel States

Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, each ruled by a military government after a coup. They formed their own alliance and left ECOWAS in January 2025. The African Union has suspended them. [Glossary](#)

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger left it in January 2025. [Glossary](#)

International Criminal Court (ICC)

A court in The Hague that tries people for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity when national courts do not. A country that leaves it stays bound for one year after giving notice. [Glossary](#) · [Source: hrw.org](#)

AU Peace and Security Council

The African Union's 15-member body for conflicts. It can authorise African peace missions and suspend governments that take power by force. [Security and conflict 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](#)

The Ezulwini Consensus

Africa's shared position on Security Council reform, agreed in Eswatini in 2005. It asks for two permanent seats with the veto and five elected seats for Africa. It does not say which countries would take them. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Chapter VII

The part of the UN Charter that lets the Security Council order action, including sanctions or force, to deal with threats to peace. Chapter VII decisions bind all UN members. [Glossary](#)

Penholder

The Security Council member that leads the drafting and negotiation of decisions on a given crisis. France, the United Kingdom and the United States hold most of these roles. Our recommendation on this · Glossary · Source: securitycouncilreport.org

The Committee of Ten

Ten African heads of state chosen by the African Union to speak for Africa on Security Council reform. 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