



Peace & Security Council Report

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Focus on 32nd AU summit: elections could see big powers return to the PSC

In February 2019 the 15-member Peace and Security Council (PSC) will elect five new members for a three-year term. This comes amid discussions around strengthening the continental body in charge of peace and security.

Of the five PSC seats up for grabs in 2019, only four are expected to change occupants. These are in Southern Africa, currently occupied by Zambia; Central Africa, currently the Republic of Congo; East Africa, currently Kenya; and North Africa, occupied by Egypt. Nigeria is a de facto permanent member of the PSC, as the Economic Community of West African States agreed to reserve that seat for the West African giant for the foreseeable future.

Next year could see the return of South Africa, Ethiopia and Algeria to the PSC. These countries could help to bring more clarity on what 'strengthening the PSC' could look like. This was one of the issues placed on the agenda of African Union (AU) reforms.

If South Africa rejoins the PSC, this will run concurrently with its non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council

The election will take place during the 34th ordinary session of the Executive Council of the AU on 7–9 February 2019. This will be followed by the 32nd summit of the AU Assembly on 10–11 February.

Algeria likely to make a comeback

Algeria, after having been on the PSC since 2004 (with the exception of 2013–2016), earlier this year ceded its seat to Morocco, which had just joined the AU. At the time Algeria explained that it was following the principle of rotational membership for the North Africa region. This was also seen as an attempt by Algeria to ease tensions with Morocco on the Western Sahara question while at the same time eyeing the three-year term seat in 2019.

It has to be noted that the country will hold presidential elections next year, which are likely to be the government's primary preoccupation.

It is also possible that Egypt might want to retain the seat when Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi presides over the AU from February 2019. Leading the AU while having a presence on the PSC would give Egypt a stronger voice on the continent.

Current PSC Chairperson

Osama Mahmoud Abdelkhalek, ambassador of Egypt to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the African Union.

PSC members

Angola, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Crucial role for South Africa on both the UNSC and the PSC

South Africa also left the PSC at the beginning of the year. In general, Southern Africa respects a rotational principle among both big and smaller countries. Angola and Zimbabwe now represent the region until their two-year terms expire in 2020.

If South Africa rejoins the PSC, this will run concurrently with its non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) from 2019, for two years. A seat on both the PSC and the UNSC would give the country an ideal platform to weigh in on peace and security matters on the continent, reaffirming its continental stature and global presence.

South Africa could also play an important role in improving coordination between the UNSC and the PSC. South Africa will, for example, be chairing the ad hoc working group on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, which in the past focused almost exclusively on UN–AU relations.

Being on both councils would also help with the flow of information and decision-making between New York and Addis Ababa. By using its presence on the PSC, South Africa should be better informed about political developments in Addis Ababa, influencing the way in which diplomats develop their positions at the UNSC.

A PSC seat would be good for Abiy

Meanwhile, Ethiopia has been front and centre since Abiy Ahmed ascended to power in April 2018. The new prime minister has put his country on a path to transformation that is felt both nation- and continent-wide. Beyond internal reforms, he ended a 20-year conflict with Eritrea, helping to lifting international sanctions against Ethiopia's neighbour.

Abiy's leadership could contribute further to peace and security in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia might seek and perhaps just be handed a seat in the PSC.

In these three cases and in Central Africa, the practice has been that regional blocs agree on who is to take the open seats on the PSC. Apart from considerations of regional rotation and a given country's diplomatic capacity, regional political dynamics and countries' internal politics also play an important role.

An important role for the PSC

As the organ tasked with handling peace and security matters on the continent, the PSC has the power to address thematic issues and country situations. It can take strong measures against a member of the AU, including suspension of membership and sanctions.

However, the very nature of the body – composed of sovereign states that favour consensus decision-making – affects its effectivity and efficiency.

Often, for a country or situation to feature on the PSC agenda the regional bloc to which it belongs has to raise the issue at the PSC. The problem, however, comes when countries' undemocratic behaviour converges within the bloc.

Often, for a crisis to feature on the PSC agenda the regional bloc to which it belongs has to raise the issue

The case of Cameroon is one such example. The Central African country has experienced a lot of turmoil, including during recent presidential polls, which should have, at the least, been the subject of discussion at the PSC.

The PSC's silence on certain countries, notably members of the Central African bloc (which are prone to instability and questionable governance practices), shows that serious thought needs to be given to how a country/situation can make it on to the council's agenda.

Another recent case is that of Gabon, which the AU Commission rebuked for a suspect constitutional amendment. The AU, in principle, strongly condemns tampering with constitutions, and the PSC should be the body pronouncing on the sentence. However, Gabon has been a member of the PSC since March this year and the region has been mute on issues emanating from its bloc.

Ideally, a discussion on strengthening the PSC should look at these issues. This would allow the council to prevent crisis situations from developing into full-blown conflicts, which are much more difficult to deal with once violence has escalated.

The slow pace of ‘changing mindsets’ on AU reform

AU heads of state met in Addis Ababa on 17 and 18 November for an extraordinary summit on the AU reforms. While some progress was made, the success of the reforms will be in their implementation.

There was more than a hint of frustration in the air when AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat spoke to the media at the end of the 11th extraordinary summit on 18 November 2018. ‘Time is running out. We realise that the world is changing and individually we no longer mean *anything*,’ Mahamat said after a gruelling day of discussions in which the closing ceremony was delayed by more than three hours. ‘The pace at which we’re doing things is not sufficient,’ he added.

Mahamat said that the commission and Rwandan President Paul Kagame’s reform team had worked extremely hard to finalise the details of the various reforms launched in July 2016. In 2018 more than ten meetings were held in Kigali to discuss the reforms, including the financing of the AU, and yet, by mid-November, close to the end of the AU’s financial year, only 50% of member states had paid their dues. ‘How do you want the commission to function?’ asked Mahamat. Making the AU financially self-sufficient has been one of the key aims of the reforms, yet so far only around half of AU members are implementing the 0.2% levy on imports to finance the organisation.

By mid-November only 50% of member states had paid their dues

Kagame, who chaired the summit, was slightly more resigned and spoke at the press conference about ‘changing mindsets in Africa’ and accepting that ‘not everyone will move at the same pace’. The decision to call heads of state to Addis Ababa for a fourth AU summit in one year had always been something of a gamble.

In the end, little new momentum was achieved on the main outstanding issues, such as the appointment vs. election of the leadership of the AU Commission. The initial reforms envisaged a merit-based system where commissioners would be appointed by the chairperson according to their competencies. It was

finally decided that the chairperson, deputy chairperson and six commissioners would in future still be elected by member states, albeit through a more rigorous process than in the past.

Reducing the size of the AU Commission

The heads of state did sign off on reducing the number of AU commissions from eight to six. At this stage, the proposed commissions are: Political Affairs, Peace and Security; Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and the Environment; Economic Development, Trade and Industry and Mineral Resources; Education, Science, Technology and Innovation; Infrastructure and Energy; and Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development.

A key change is the merging of the departments of peace and security and political affairs. Some member states believe this will reduce overlap and allow the AU to better tackle structural drivers of conflict rather than narrowly focusing on security and peacekeeping. This also harks back to the structure of the Organization for African Unity.

Mahamat has been tasked to present the details of the new structure at the mid-2019 summit, but it will only be in place when the new AU Commission takes over in 2021. The vetting process and regional nominations of candidates for these positions should start in early 2020.

Much was also made at the summit about a decision to strengthen sanctions against countries that do not pay their membership fees. This included reducing the number of defaults – from five to two years – that would lead to a total suspension from the organisation’s activities. While, as Mahamat pointed out, such sanctions already exist, they have seldom been imposed. As with many other aspects of the AU reforms, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Will there be only one summit in 2019?

As a result, 2019 will be an indicative year for the reforms. For example, the decision adopted in January 2017 to

hold only one regular AU summit instead of two will again be tested when Niger organises the mid-2019 summit. The mid-year summit is supposed to be a very small summit between the AU chairperson, the commission and the heads of the regional economic communities (RECs) recognised by the AU.

It was understood that this reform would kick in as soon as 2018, but the recent summit in Mauritania in June/July was no different from the past, with all African heads of state invited. It remains to be seen, then, whether Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou will be happy to host a small summit or whether he will succumb to the temptation and invite all his fellow heads of state as well. Since the host foots a large part of the bill, it will be difficult for the AU to impose the new formula if there is resistance to this change.

It remains to be seen whether Niger's President Issoufou will be happy to host a small summit or whether he will invite all his fellow heads of state

At the next summit, in February 2019, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is taking over the rotating chairpersonship from Kagame. It remains to be seen to what extent Egypt, generally one of the less proactive AU member states, will make sure these reforms are in fact carried out.

One definite sign of progress is the step taken with the AU Peace Fund, which has been in existence for a long time but only now gained momentum thanks to the efforts of former African Development Bank president Donald Kaberuka. It was announced at the summit that the Peace Fund now had US\$60 million in the kitty for important AU peace and security efforts such as mediation. It still has a long way to go before the planned US\$400 million that Kaberuka spoke of initially, but this is a much better situation than having no funds at all.

Pushback on ACP–EU negotiations

The one major shift that Kagame and Mahamat fought for since the beginning of the reforms was an agreement that the AU should speak with one voice and represent the continent on the world stage. This has so far not been achieved.

At the extraordinary summit it was decided to maintain the original African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) team, led by Togo, to negotiate with the European Union (EU) about the post-Cotonou agreement, which should kick in by 2021. This decision brought to an end a long and tough debate within the AU between those, led by Mahamat and Kagame, who wanted to see Africa negotiate this new agreement as a united body and those in favour of the ACP structure (which excludes, notably, all of North Africa). In fact, the pushback on earlier decisions regarding the common African position on negotiations with the EU could be one of the main reasons for Mahamat's frustration at the closing ceremony.

\$60 million

IN THE AU PEACE FUND

In a report tabled at the Nouakchott summit in July, Mahamat argued strongly for an AU–EU framework to determine the new ‘continent-to-continent’ relationship and set out a roadmap for the implementation of the common position in this regard. He said Africa’s solidarity with countries in the Pacific and Caribbean should not depend on their joint relationship with Europe and that ‘the successor to the Cotonou Agreement cannot be based on a linear extension of the current arrangements, thematically or geographically’.

Mahamat also argued that the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area gave added impetus to the need for Africa to negotiate with one voice.

In contrast, those in favour of the ACP negotiations believed time was running out, and that the current structures were already in place. This group was supported by the EU. They also said that the current negotiating team had vast experience in negotiating on these issues. In fact, a mandate for negotiations had already been adopted by the ACP council of ministers at the end of May 2018. This position has now prevailed.

The pushback on earlier decisions regarding negotiations with the EU could be the reason for Mahamat’s frustration

Insiders who worked closely with Mahamat on the issue said that all was not lost and that a two-track process would be followed where the AU would remain informed and involved in the negotiations with the EU, within the framework of the AU–EU agreement adopted in Abidjan in November last year. Symbolically, however, it does demonstrate the difficulties of getting 55 member states of an inter-governmental organisation, with no real supra-national powers, to agree to work together.

Apart from the implementation of the decisions on sanctions for non-payment of dues, the holding of one summit and the more rigorous election process for top leadership positions, the reforms of the key organs of the AU are also still a work in progress.

An earlier decision to change the NEPAD Secretariat into the African Development Agency was reconfirmed at the summit and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) saw its budget integrated into that of the AU Commission.

The tricky relationship between the AU and the RECs, as well as the status of other organs such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, is still outstanding and will have to be tackled some time in the coming months. The effectiveness of these organs is crucial for the AU to be seen as an organisation committed to serving the continent’s citizens and upholding shared values such as democracy and human rights, enshrined in its Constitutive Act.

2020

THE COTONOU
AGREEMENT EXPIRES

The AU should remain steadfast on Gabon

On 14 November 2018 Marie-Madeleine Mborantsuo, the president of Gabon's Constitutional Court, announced that the court had introduced a constitutional amendment addressing instances where the president was 'temporarily unavailable'. This move, over which the AU has expressed its concern, is viewed as unconstitutional by civil society and the opposition.

President Ali Bongo, who reportedly suffered a stroke on 24 October in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, has undergone surgery and has since been hospitalised in Rabat, Morocco.

Reports diverge on the true state of his health, although many suggest that he is incapacitated.

With the country at a standstill, the prime minister approached the Constitutional Court in early October, asking it to invoke articles 13 and 16 of the constitution. He asked the court to authorise the vice-president to hold a cabinet meeting – a role reserved in the constitution for the president.

Neither article 13 nor article 16 gives the Constitutional Court this prerogative. Article 13 provides for situations where there is a power vacuum for any reason whatsoever or when the president is permanently incapacitated. In such a situation the president of the Senate should assume the position until new elections can be organised.

The opposition has denounced the blatant violation of article 16 by Mborantsuo

Article 16 states that only the president can call and preside over cabinet meetings, unless he expressly delegates those responsibilities to the vice-president.

The opposition has denounced the blatant violation of article 16 by Mborantsuo, who is also Bongo's mother-in-law and is seen as an instrument of the regime. Mborantsuo, who has presided over the court since 1991, denies allegations of acting unlawfully. She claims it is a 'temporary' amendment to find an 'interim solution to a question which is not addressed by our constitution'.

Civil society leaders insist the constitution only allows the court to interpret the constitution, not change it. They believe the court should have limited itself to interpreting article 13.

The constitution can only be modified or amended by referendum or a vote by both chambers of Parliament (National Assembly and Senate), said Jean-Gaspard Ntoutoume Ayi of the opposition party Union Nationale.

By seeking the court ruling, the government effectively recognised the president's incapacity to continue holding office, while also refusing to follow the constitution's guidance and apply article 13, argued Ntoutoume Ayi. This would have seen the president of the Senate assume the position and organise presidential polls within 30 to 60 days.

Critics believe these delaying tactics are intended to allow the ruling party to retain power. The regime wants to avoid an interim presidency's leading to elections that it fears it will lose, especially after the disastrous 2016 presidential polls. The low voter turnout at last month's legislative elections is an indication of the unpopularity of the regime.

The court's unilateral decision has plunged the oil-rich nation into institutional uncertainty, threatening the viability of democratic institutions and the country's stability.

Gabon's institutional decay

This new constitutional amendment is the latest in a litany of decisions by the Constitutional Court in favour of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), in power since 1967.

Following the death of former president Omar Bongo, who had ruled for 42 years, his son Ali Bongo took over as president in highly contested 2009 polls marred by irregularities. Post-electoral violence ensued and the court ruled in favour of Bongo.

In the August 2016 presidential election, the court again declared Bongo the winner, in spite of widespread fraud documented by, among others, a European Union observer mission.

It can be argued that Gabon's current institutional instability stems from the disputed outcome of the August 2016 presidential polls, which resulted in the postponement, on several occasions, of legislative elections initially scheduled to take place in October 2016.

The Constitutional Court finally dissolved the National Assembly in May 2018, handing (some) power over to the Senate until legislative elections finally took place in October.

The new National Assembly has yet to be sworn in, as Bongo fell ill right before the second round of legislative elections. According to the constitution, when the National Assembly is inaugurated the government resigns and a new government is appointed by the president.

This is not possible when the president is absent, nor can other important decisions and texts be approved, such as the 2019 budget (which the president has to validate by December this year). This leaves Gabon in an unprecedented institutional dilemma.

Successive Constitutional Court decisions – validating the controversial 2016 presidential election, the prorogation and then dissolution of the National Assembly, the dubious interpretation of and amendment to the Gabonese constitution – have essentially undermined the very fabric of the society by grossly violating the constitution.

Can the AU salvage the situation?

On 17 November, during his welcoming speech at the AU extraordinary summit, Rwandan President Paul Kagame – the current chairperson of the continental body – wished Bongo well. 'We wish our brother, President Ali Bongo, a quick recovery and continued stability for his country, Gabon.'

This was followed by a communiqué from AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat expressing concern over the situation in Gabon and reaffirming the 'African Union's strong commitment to the full respect of constitutional order in the country'.

Faki's communiqué amounts to a subtle condemnation, in diplomatic terms, of the constitutional amendment in Gabon. This is in line with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, signed by Gabon. Faki further announced the imminent deployment of a fact-finding mission to Gabon.

The Gabonese government, through its Minister of Foreign Affairs Régis Immongault, insisted that Gabon's institutions were robust and functioning as they should. Immongault thanked both Faki and Kagame and stated that his government would only welcome the AU mission on agreed terms and at a later stage.

Faki's communiqué amounts to a subtle condemnation, in diplomatic terms, of the constitutional amendment in Gabon

Clearly, had the AU taken strong measures on the partiality of the Constitutional Court in Gabon in 2016 (or even in 2009), this would have averted the erosion of democratic institutions in the country and could have prevented today's crisis. Inaction will only lead to more instability.

The AU is now faced with the dilemma of a member state being in flagrant violation of the institution's shared values while invoking its sovereignty.

The continental body must, nonetheless, use the tools at its disposal to curtail unconstitutional changes of government and prevent the erosion of democratic rules and principles in its member states, including Gabon.

This will require other member states to take strong action, including possible sanctions, to re-establish constitutional order in Gabon. The AU can and has suspended other member states in cases of unconstitutional changes of government.

Gabon's other partners must look beyond their short-term interests and ensure that the country's institutions are strengthened and that there is a return to respect for the constitution. Flouting the constitution undermines constitutional order and contributes to Gabon's institutional corrosion, which has caused a lot of harm to the Gabonese people and is contributing to the upheaval in an already unstable central African region.

On the Agenda: A busy election year ahead in 2019

2019 will be a busy electoral year on the continent, with at least 11 presidential seats up for grabs. Some of those elections will be combined with legislative and/or local polls. Ideally, Africa should be moving towards less contentious and violent pre- and post-electoral situations. Yet electoral periods remain volatile and pose serious challenges to peace and stability on the continent.

In July 2018 the Zimbabwean elections were marred by police crackdowns and at least six reported deaths. Cameroon's October polls were equally tense, especially in its already unstable regions in the extreme north, and anglophone north-west and south-west. The run-up to elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, scheduled for 23 December, also created uncertainty in a country battling Ebola outbreaks and violence in its eastern parts.

What to look out for in 2019, and what can Africa do to address electoral violence and avert crises?

Nigeria and Senegal first to vote

Nigeria will open the continent's electoral year with presidential elections on 16 February. Africa's most populous nation will also hold elections for its House of Representatives and Senate in the same month, followed in March by state assembly and governors polls.

After a long history of coups d'état and dictatorships, elections have become the only way to secure Nigeria's top job

Since the election of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, after a long history of coups d'état and dictatorships, elections, however contested, have become the only way to secure Nigeria's top job. In 2019, 78 candidates will compete for the presidency. The main contenders are the incumbent, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress, and Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party.

Security and the economy are the major issues surrounding the elections. Young people are also demanding a seat at the governing table with the passing of the 'not too young to run' bill, which has lowered age limits to run for political office.

On 24 February Senegal will hold presidential (as well as regional and local) elections. The campaign to collect

signatures to be eligible to run for the presidency began in August. This is in line with a controversial constitutional amendment passed in April. The amendment requires those who want to be on the ballot to collect 53 000 signatures from voters in at least seven regions, and a minimum of 2 000 'sponsors' per region.

The opposition has slammed incumbent Macky Sall for measures that it says have shrunk the political space and removed all obstacles to his landslide victory. Two of his key opponents, Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade, were convicted of corruption and have been barred from contesting the elections. Khalifa Sall, the now former mayor of Dakar, is held in detention. He insists that he will run and has launched a campaign from his cell.

South African elections in May

South Africa, by all measures a stable democracy on the continent, will hold general elections in May 2019. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) is expected to remain in power. However, it could see its majority in Parliament dwindle even further than in 2014 as a result of repeated corruption scandals and growing discontent with the ANC among sections of the population.

The judiciary is increasingly being used to hold government accountable and as a tit-for-tat between individuals and political parties. While this is a sign of the vibrancy of South Africa's democracy, it could also overburden the courts with issues that Parliament and the executive should address.

If the opposition Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters gain more seats in the legislature, it could open up an era of coalition governments and/or seriously hamper governance processes.

Important polls in North Africa

The ruling Algerian Liberation National Front announced in late October that Abdelaziz Bouteflika (81), in power

since 1999, would seek re-election in April 2019. Bouteflika amended the constitution in 2008 to remove presidential term limits. He had suffered a stroke in 2013 that left him with serious permanent after-effects. The country is reportedly being ruled by a clique close to Bouteflika and the army. Algeria has, over the past several years, also suffered an economic and social crisis.

Meanwhile, following the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, Tunisians continue to take to the streets to demand better living conditions. The 2019 elections, in October (legislative) and November (presidential), could come with more social unrest.

Over the past few months, Mauritania's Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz has denied rumours of a possible third term. Abdelaziz says he will not amend the constitution to run again in April 2019. The arrangements for his succession (or lack thereof) could, however, be contentious.

Tension in two lusophone polls

Guinea-Bissau has been prey to a political crisis for the better part of Jose Mario Vaz's presidency, starting in 2014. The crisis has deepened over the last three years, leading to the signing of the Conakry Agreement in October 2016. This year's legislative elections have already been postponed twice. The 2019 presidential polls, if they take place, will be marked by tensions.

In late 2019 Mozambique will also go to elections that are expected to be tense. The polls are likely to occur in a situation of 'no peace nor war' between the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) and the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo). The country also faces what appears to be an Islamist insurgency in the northernmost province of Cabo Delgado.

Combined elections, including for the presidency, in Malawi (May), Botswana (October) and Namibia should come with minimal trouble.

Legislative elections to watch

In 2019 Cameroon, Guinea (Conakry), Benin and Chad will hold legislative elections.

At the request of the government, Cameroon's Parliament, dominated by the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), extended its own term in office until late 2019. The upcoming elections will follow contentious presidential polls in 2018, and uncertainty looms with the so-called anglophone question and

the threat by Boko Haram in the extreme north of the country. A CPDM win will simply entrench the status quo and Biya's stay in power.

Although stable, Benin will hold legislative elections crucial for incumbent Patrice Talon. He has been criticised for having made it more difficult to run for presidential and legislative elections by amending the electoral law.

In Conakry the February 2018 municipal elections were marked by a low turnout and post-electoral violence that left at least nine dead. Legislative polls are expected to be held by February 2019, undoubtedly under high tension. There is uncertainty over President Alpha Conde's intention to run for a third term in office, which is prohibited by the constitution. A parliamentary majority could help him to amend the law and run in 2020.

Legislative elections in Chad were due to take place in 2015. Postponed several times and scheduled for November 2018, the polls are now announced for May 2019. Chad has also been undergoing a socio-economic crisis and is experiencing what appears to be an insurgency in its extreme north region of Tibesti.

How to sanitise the electoral climate?

The major issue with elections on the continent is the absence of a level playing field for all contestants. Incumbents use subterfuge to tip the scales in their favour. This takes various forms: taking control of the state apparatus, amending the constitution, changing the electoral law, controlling the media, making arbitrary arrests and detaining opponents, as well as electoral fraud and repression.

Often, election observer missions come too late in the process to ensure that elections are credible and that everyone adheres to the rules of the game. Even long-term AU election observer missions are often deployed after constitutions or electoral laws have been changed, opposition activities have been curbed and the credibility of the elections are already in jeopardy. The result of this is highly contested elections that create or exacerbate violence and instability.

Ultimately, ensuring peaceful polls is intrinsically linked to governance that creates the conditions for credible and appeased electoral periods. Until that is established, 2019 is expected to come with its fair share of contested elections.

Elections in Africa in 2019

Country	Elections	Date
Guinea (Conakry)	National Assembly	January 2019
Nigeria	President, House of Representatives and Senate	16 February 2019
	State assemblies and governors	2 March 2019
Senegal	President, regional and local	24 February 2019
Benin	National Assembly	March 2019
Mauritania	President and Senate	March/April 2019
Somaliland (autonomous region)	House of Representatives and Senate	28 April 2019
Algeria	President	April 2019
South Africa	National Assembly and provincial legislatures	May 2019
	President by National Assembly	May–June 2019
Chad	National Assembly and local	May 2019 (postponed from 30 November 2018)
Malawi	President, National Assembly and local	21 May 2019
Egypt	Local	by July 2019
Mozambique	President, National Assembly and provincial	15 October 2019
Botswana	National Assembly and local	October 2019
	President by National Assembly	October 2019
DRC	Local	Postponed to 2019 (?) from November 2016
Ethiopia	Regional state councils and local	2019 (postponed from 2018)
	House of the Federation (indirect, by regional state councils)	2019
Ghana	District, local and unit	2019
Guinea-Bissau	National People's Assembly and Senate	Postponed to 2019 from 18 Nov 2018
	President	2019
Namibia	President and National Assembly	2019
Niger	Local	Postponed from 8 January 2017 to 2019
Tunisia	President, House of Representatives, House of Councillors	2019

Human suffering underlines the urgency to do more in 2019

In 2019 the PSC is likely to see crises in places such as South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Sahel remain on its agenda. Other burning issues such as Cameroon could spiral out of control if not handled by the continental body.

The withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia after 14 years in the country, the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, progress in reforming the AU and the warming of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea after two decades of tension were some of the major positive developments in Africa in 2018.

In a speech to the 2018 African Dialogue Series, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described Africa as 'driving its own agenda' and 'a continent on the move and on the rise'.

Yet despite these positive developments Africa is still the continent most affected by conflict. Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project of the University of Sussex shows that the continent experienced at least 1 495 incidents of conflict-related violence between January and October 2018, with 21 772 associated deaths reported.

This represents a drop in the number of incidents and associated deaths over the same period in 2017, but the enormous human suffering in Africa continues. Crises in north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, South Sudan and Cameroon have underlined the urgent need for the AU to do more to try to solve conflicts in 2019.

The Horn will hinge on Ethiopia

In the year ahead, developments in Ethiopia will have the most impact on peace and security in the East and Horn of Africa. Despite the encouraging developments since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in April 2018, the impact of the loosening of the current regime's hold on the country's political and security system will be tested in 2019.

Emerging contestation for political inclusion from hitherto marginalised groups, the weakness of the ethnic federal system, worsening insecurity in parts of the country, unmanaged expectations and the wide-reaching effects

of the fight against corruption are potential threats to the reform process in Ethiopia in the coming year.

The increasing need to address challenges at home is also likely to reduce Abiy's active role in regional matters. This could see the tripartite arrangement initiated by the leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia strengthened. Meanwhile, the successes of the reforms in Ethiopia will place enormous pressure on Eritrea to reform as well.

Despite positive developments Africa is still the continent most affected by conflict

Without Ethiopia taking a clear lead, Sudan and Uganda could step up to the plate and cooperate on various peace and security issues. Yet they will also compete when it comes to safeguarding their interests, especially regarding the implementation of the revitalised South Sudan peace agreement.

No guarantee of peace in South Sudan or Somalia

The security situation in South Sudan will remain precarious in 2019. Tensions on a local level over unresolved underlying issues will continue to cause conflict in many parts of the country.

Opposition groups are likely to splinter, leading to possible political re-alignments in the run-up to or during the transitional period. Mistrust between President Salva Kiir, opposition leader Riek Machar and Vice-President General Taban Deng will be the biggest threat to the implementation of the revitalised peace agreement, signed in September 2018. While the situation in the country is likely to improve, the conflict will not end in 2019.

In Somalia, the progress made these last few years will be tested in 2019. Two main questions will have to

be answered: will the country be able to implement milestones in preparation for the 2020/21 elections, and will gains be sustained in the fight against al-Shabaab?

In the midst of these key challenges, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) will remain relevant in 2019, as the Somali army will not be ready to take over from the African force.

Developments in the Gulf will also have to be watched, as that could further impact political developments in Somalia, particularly in terms of the already frosty relationship between the federal government and member states.

Cameroon will be a thorn in the side of Central Africa

The eastern DRC and the CAR will remain major crises in Central Africa. The crisis in Cameroon is, however, likely to be the region's new big problem. Despite the worsening of the crisis in 2018, there were few regional and continental diplomatic efforts to address it. The PSC did not place Cameroon on its agenda the entire year.

This could change in 2019, as silence from the AU becomes untenable. As such, a robust continental strategy is essential to prevent the crisis from further deteriorating.

Spread of terror groups in West Africa

According to an October 2018 report by the African Center for Strategic Studies, the activities of terror groups in the Sahel tripled between September 2017 and September 2018.

Institute for Security Studies experts recently warned that violent extremism could be spreading to West Africa's coastal regions. Countries in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly Ghana, Togo, Benin and members of the Mano River Union, will be at greater risk. This comes despite various counter-terrorism initiatives in the Sahel, which will see the groups continue losing territory to government forces. Yet these groups will keep on adapting in 2019 by spreading into new areas and targeting civilians.

Popular protests on the rise

Across the continent, beyond the traditional peace and security threats, popular protests are on the rise.

These are driven by the push for greater political and economic inclusion. The rising cost of living and growing unemployment fuel protests in otherwise stable countries such as Uganda and South Africa, and in North African countries such as Tunisia.

In Uganda, for instance, popular musician turned politician Bobi Wine is likely to continue shaking up the country's politics, despite efforts to silence him in 2018. Yoweri Museveni's regime is increasingly being contested by a youthful population hungry for change.

These protests are expected to continue if governments do not find adequate responses to people's grievances.

Options for the PSC in 2019

Given the AU's efforts to position itself as relevant to African citizens, the need to take charge of challenges in 2019 is an opportunity that should not be missed.

The PSC could, firstly, up its engagements on existing crises in the various regions. This can be achieved through the deployment of regular field missions to hotspots, facilitating regular briefings by the AU Commission and independent experts, and regularly featuring specific crisis areas on the PSC agenda. This will enable the PSC to follow the evolution of conflicts and thereby position it to respond appropriately and in a timely manner. Increasing the number of field visits to crisis areas will also raise the AU's visibility in those areas, in line with its commitment to be relevant to citizens.

Secondly, the PSC could make regular use of the good offices of the AU Commission chairperson and the commissioner for peace and security to deploy into specific countries at crucial times, monitoring progress and encouraging behavioural change. This is particularly useful in countries where conflict parties have agreed to specific roadmaps.

Thirdly, the PSC should pay more attention to specific simmering tensions. Despite the need to respect the sovereignty of member states, there are certain situations that require the PSC to respond early. Current examples are the tensions in Cameroon and Gabon.

Finally, the PSC should be ready to apply pressure in cases of clear impunity by spoilers. This can be through either naming and shaming or the use of appropriate sanctions.

PSC Interview: The African free trade area could be a reality by March next year

The agreement on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has the potential of boosting intra-African trade and supporting Africa's economic development. Yet some are still sceptical about its implementation. The *PSC Report* spoke to Carlos Lopes, Professor at the University of Cape Town, a member of Rwandan President Paul Kagame's AU reform advisory team and former executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

What progress has been made with the ratification of the AfCFTA? Will it enter into force by the end of the year as planned?

To date, 12 countries have ratified the AfCFTA. We need another 10 for it to enter into force. Note that since the signing ceremony in Kigali on 21 March 2018, 49 AU member states have signed up. Following the signing, countries now have to follow the legislative processes in their countries and then every member state has to deposit the instruments of ratification with the AU Commission. A roadmap towards the implementation of the AfCFTA will then be drawn up.

Most countries are still at the level of deliberations within the executive or legislative arms of government. We expect that enough countries will ratify in order for the agreement to enter into force no later than March 2019.

The AfCFTA is often presented as a panacea for Africa's economic woes. But how, concretely, will it achieve that? Is it not only for big multinationals trading across borders?

Commerce is as old as humanity itself. From ancient times to the present day, long before the drawing up of borders by the Berlin conference of 1884, trade, both intra-African and overseas, was one of the most lucrative activities that the kingdoms and empires of old were involved in.

The benefits of the AfCFTA are not only for the big economic actors, the importers and exporters. It extends to ordinary citizens in many ways. In this regard it is important to look at the various steps that will be taken to progressively make the AfCFTA a reality and to understand their impact on the various categories of economic actors.

The aim of the AfCFTA is to eliminate tariffs between African countries, to complete the efforts already being made to reduce non-tariff barriers between them, to promote free movement of people and to promote a single air transport market. Concretely, African businesses, traders and consumers will no longer pay customs on a variety of goods that they trade

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countries

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among themselves. Thanks to a progressive liberalisation of services, service providers will also see the extension of their access to African markets.

At the moment the majority of businesses on the continent pay an average of 6.9% tax on cross-border transactions. This is on top of the non-tariff barriers such as excessive bureaucracy and regulatory discrepancies between countries. The cost of the transactions, added to the cost of production, has a huge impact, not only on the competitiveness of the businesses but also on the quality of life of consumers.

The entry into force of the AfCFTA has got enormous potential to strengthen the African market. Beyond that, it will also allow companies to cut costs and promote development through regional value chains. This could have an impact on investments and/or the cost of products and services. Entrepreneurs could reinvest their gains by creating new jobs, thereby also increasing revenue for states. Companies can increase their competitiveness by selling their goods at a cheaper price. This will benefit all consumers.

AU leaders have decided to largely maintain the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) framework for negotiations with the European Union (EU) on the post-Cotonou agreement, parallel to the ongoing AU–EU relationship. Is it coherent to envisage the implementation of the AfCFTA without being able to negotiate with one voice?

It is important not to lose sight of the main objective of the AfCFTA, which is to increase intra-African trade while at the same time position the continent to trade with the rest of the world on a new footing. The entry into force of the AfCFTA will mean, at some point, the harmonisation of the various trade agreements that states have entered into.

Already, some countries, notably those of the Economic Community of West African States and the East African Community, have suspended the implementation of their recent economic partnerships, partly due to the important impact of the AfCFTA. Others continue to conclude new agreements until the entry into force of the AfCFTA. These are facts that show that states are moving towards greater coherence that will be crucial to the success of the AfCFTA.

What will then happen to the ACP–EU negotiations within the context of the signing of the AfCFTA?

Contrary to the Cotonou ACP–EU agreements, which do not include all African countries, the AfCFTA is a continental and inclusive initiative led by the AU. It is important to note that this changed paradigm set out in the AU–EU Abidjan agreement [of November 2017] places particular emphasis on trade and investment, as well as regional unity and integration.

The negotiations about a future ACP–EU agreement come more or less at the same time as the finalisation of the AfCFTA. Thus the AfCFTA, under the leadership of the AU, is the elephant in the room. It is the new reality that no one can ignore.

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ratifications

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About the PSC Report

The Peace and Security Council Report analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC's work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. Our goal is to enhance human security as a means to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible analysis, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

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