

# Inside Kenya's silent push as Jubaland all set for elections

- [Biketi Kikechi](#) © 18th Aug 2019 00:00:00 GMT +0300



**Jubaland President Ahmed Islam Mohammed Madobe. [File, Standard]**

The region of Jubaland in neighbouring Somalia will tomorrow elect a new president as the Kenya government covertly intensifies its support for incumbent Ahmed Islam Mohammed Madobe, who has ruled the region over the last eight years.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has engaged in a behind the scenes diplomatic push for the incumbent to retain his position because of security concerns and emerging regional interests.

So much is at stake because apart from Kenya, the election is also of great concern to the US, the European Union, the divided Gulf states, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia itself.

Whereas Kenya is for a strong regional government especially in Jubaland, the Somalia government with the support of Ethiopia and Eritrea, the so called Cushitic axis, wants a central government, a position that has created animosity between Mogadishu and Nairobi.

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Coupled with the maritime dispute between the two countries that will shortly be decided by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the stakes in the outcome of the elections become exceedingly high. "There is nothing ideological that ties Kenya to Madobe, except the fact that he is the best person to guarantee security which is in our interest. It is about the stability of the region, prosperity and security," says Peter Kagwanja of the University of Nairobi.

The situation is so dicey that the electoral commission has had to postpone the elections twice in as many weeks from the earlier scheduled 24th August, to 21st and now tomorrow 19th of August.

There are fears in the commission, echoed by the Madobe administration, that the Somali government and Ethiopia, which has, according to diplomatic sources secretly deployed some soldiers in Kismayu, could interfere with the elections.

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Scholars and politicians have divergent views on why the election matters to Kenya and why the outcome should work in it's favour.

### **High stakes**

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"It is a matter of real-politick and that is why Kenya should use its instruments of power to advance its own interests whatever outcome there is," says Hassan Khannenje of The Horn Institute.

Kenya and Ethiopia have high stakes in Jubaland because they both have troops in the United Nations backed African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom), the former based in Kismayu sector and the later in Gedo.

But whereas Kenya supports Madobe's re-election, Ethiopia wants him out because he was a one-time ally who was born in the Ogaden region of that country, but later abandoned them when he moved south to Jubaland.

He worked closely with Ethiopia when was a member of the now disbanded Islamic Courts Union (ICU) but changed when he started working with Kenya in the fight against terrorism after he was first elected in 2013.

Somalia has itself declared that it will not recognise the elections results until the traditional elders, who are selecting members of the new parliament are registered with the interior ministry. Apart from Madode, the other candidates are Mohamed Omar Gedi, Abdirahman Ahmed Rabi, Abdi Hiis Udan, Mohamed Abdille Magan and Anab Mohamed Dahir.

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Another worry is that candidates who were ruled out of the contest by the electoral agency have formed the Union of Presidential Candidates for Change in Jubaland and vowed to hold parallel elections.

They, like the Federal government in Mogadishu, want the Council of Elders that will pick the MPs reconstituted afresh because it is allegedly biased in favour of Madobe.

According to the Somalia Constitution, the incumbent president appoints the electoral commission which in turn appoints the elders' council from representatives of major clans in Jubaland. The commission also sets electoral rules.

Speaking at a meeting convened by the Ukumbi Forum in Nairobi, Prof Kagwanja said the election is not about who rules Jubaland but about if the region is going to be stable after the elections. That is what concerns Kenya most.

"Ahmed Madode was not the choice of Kenya but the fact that he was the only one who was able to guarantee peace and security, the powers that be then and now accepted him," Kagwanja said.

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As a member of the Islamic Courts Union, he was closer to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti but although his relationship with Kenya is much younger, it is more strategic and about the shared destiny.

Dr Khannenje argued that the election of President Mohammed Abdullahi alias Farmajo and his team in 2017, brought about a a new leadership in Mogadishu that is supported by the US in the belief that leadership should be from the centre.

He said this is also the position taken by their Qatar and Turkey allies and, to some extent, the European Union.

The manoeuvres Mogadishu is involved in to ensure Madobe is not elected started during Siad Barre's era when the Marehan clan ethnocracy dominated and marginalised other tribes, among them Madobe's Ogaden clan.

The entry of Middle East politics in Somalia has also monetised politics to an extend that an MP in the country now earns much more than US counterparts and Kenyan legislators.

But former Lagdera MP Maalim Farah cautioned Kenya against interfering in Jubaland elections because it will create more problems between Kenya and Somalia.

"If we align ourselves with clans, then we will have a problem with other sub-clans. The most important foreign relations policy is reciprocity. It is easier to defeat a country with 45 different languages than one big homogenous group like Somalia," Farah said.

He urged Kenya to deal with Somalia as a nation and not with regional states because despite the fact that that they fought as clans, they are quickly getting over it.

### **Joined at the hip**

He is also very critical of the administration in Jubaland which he says has not built even one classroom, or a health centre since taking in Kismayu.

“They went there, cut deals with Al-Shabaab to share resources at the Port and in charcoal business which led to the massive destruction of the Boni forest, also known as Bushbush on the Somalia side,” Farah said.

The former MP had nothing good to say about the Madobe’s leadership. “I don’t blame him because he has no capacity. He never went to school and even the title Sheikh is just a title,” he said.

He described the bespectacled and bearded leader as a man who began as a small businessman at a time when smuggling goods across the Somalia-Kenya border around Doble was rife.

“Our relations with Somalia are permanent because they will always be our neighbours and we are joined to them at the hip. We are not joined to a small region in Somalia,” said the former Deputy Speaker.

Patrick Maluki of the University of Nairobi urged Kenya to balance what is good and moral and what is in its national interests.

“If we sit back and do nothing, then we will have a challenge. Our stakes are high but neither should we be seen as an occupier and an enemy because Somalia is a sovereign country,” urges Dr Maluki.

Dr Maluki argued that Kenya may take measures that other people may not like because that is the only way it can reclaim the position of influence it is fast losing to Ethiopia in the region.

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