

# Special EDITION

## The African Union Commission Chair Elections; Examining Kenya's Previous Bid and the Prospects for Victory

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### Executive Summary

Kenya's renewed bid for the African Union Commission (AUC) chairmanship through the candidacy of opposition leader Raila Odinga, has set the Kenyan government on the limelight once again, owing to intensive lobbying across the continent. The AUC chair is a crucial position tasked with overseeing the African Union Commission's operations and shaping its policies. This paper delves into Kenya's past strategies while unveiling the new approaches being employed in its renewed pursuit of the position. Odinga's manifesto is briefly analyzed alongside that of his formidable competitor, Djibouti's Mohamoud Youssouf. The paper emphasizes the importance of strategic diplomacy and leveraging the SADC bloc among other strategies. Challenges to Odinga's candidacy, including his age and the dynamics within regional alliances, are discussed, along with recommendations for strengthening Kenya's position.

### Introduction

The African Union Commission (AUC) chair, a position that Kenya's former Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary Amina Mohammed once vied for in 2017, is once again attracting regional attention and sparking lively discussions in the country in the wake of President William Ruto's endorsement of Kenya's opposition leader, Raila Odinga, for the position (Huaxia, 2024). The AUC chair is the head of the commission, which is the secretariat of the African Union (AU), an organ tasked with running the union's day to day operations. Duties of the chair range from administration of the commission, representation, to promotion of the union's interests within and outside the continent. Generally, the chairperson plays a pivotal role in shaping the policies and direction of the AU alongside representing the interests of the member states on the global stage (Tieku, 2021).

The AUC chair is elected by the AU Assembly (comprises of heads of state and government) for a four-year term, which is renewable once. Election of the chair is done

alongside that of the deputy and is achieved through a two-thirds majority consensus of member states (Ngeno, 2024). Since the reconstitution of the AU in 2002, representatives from the Western, Southern and Central Africa regions have respectively served in the position of chair. Owing to the AU's principle of regional rotation, the next chair is scheduled to come from the Eastern Africa region (Union, n.d.)

### Kenya's Previous Bid for the Position

In 2017, Amina's candidacy was perceived as a strong one considering her credentials, which included serving in various departments in the Ministry of foreign affairs as director, Permanent Representative to the UN (2000-2006), chair of the World Trade Organization's General Council (2005) and ultimately Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs (2013-2018). In light of her aforementioned credentials, Kenya embarked on a continental mission of promoting her as the ideal candidate for the position (African, Kenya nominates Amina Mohamed for AU chair

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