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# The Continent



9°56'10.7"N 39°25'06.9"E

A war crime happened here



Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



**Cover:** Standing on the ruins of a recently deceased empire, the Federal Republic of Ethiopia is notoriously unstable. Its constituent parts are constantly fighting to loosen Addis Ababa's grip on them. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed seems to relish wielding violence to keep the centre's hold. But his troops have often done it at great cost: massacres and war crimes under the cover of communications blackouts. An exclusive investigation by *The Continent* this week peels the shroud off one of those massacres to give war crimes investigators something to work with: the exact location where a drone strike killed dozens of civilians returning from a child's baptism ceremony on 19 February 2024 (p13).

# Inside:

- **Chad-Cameroon:** People are dying in floods that would sink Noah's Ark (p7)
- **Zimbabwe:** Bank heists bother law-abiding residents (p9)
- **Ghana:** Akufo-Addo was determined to fight galamsey – until push came to shove (p11)
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## A message to journalists and editors

*The Continent* recently signed a syndication deal with *Courrier International*, a French weekly newspaper that is read by 120,000 people every week. It's a win-win: *Courrier* translates selected articles into French – and we use the revenue to pay for more journalism. If your media house would like to republish stories from *The Continent*, let us know on [read@thecontinent.org](mailto:read@thecontinent.org). Syndication is free for partner publications in Africa.



**Occupied: Activists wave Western Sahara and Algerian flags at a protest in France.** Photo: Thibaud Mortiz/AFP

## WESTERN SAHARA

### Not colonial at all

United Nations police escorted Nouria Hafsi, the president of the National Union of Algerian Women, out of a meeting on Tuesday after she referred to Morocco as “colonial”. They were responding to a complaint by Morocco’s UN representative Majda Moutchou, who said Hafsi’s words amounted to hate speech. Morocco then paraded a group of young people who identified as Sahrawi and said they want Moroccan authorities to govern their disputed homeland. Algeria, which supports Sahrawi fighting for self-government, describes Western Sahara as “occupied territory”. Western Sahara’s residents are supposed to decide their fate for themselves in a referendum which has never been allowed to happen.

## BURKINA FASO

### Voice in the wilderness

Ouagadougou authorities yanked *Voice of America* off the air on Monday over statements that “minimise the efforts” of the Sahel States Alliance “to reconquer national territory” from jihadists. The country’s communication council has suspended the station for three months. This is the broadcaster’s second such punishment this year: in April, along with the *BBC*, it was suspended after reporting on a Human Rights Watch report that accused soldiers with the national army of massacring more than 220 civilians.

## COMOROS

### Two women face jail time for being gay

Two women aged 22 and 25, who police arrested in June, appeared in a Comoros court on Thursday. In the hearing, the prosecutor asked the judge to jail them for a year for “unnatural sex acts”. Comoros, like many formerly colonised countries, has long had laws forbidding homosexuality that were considered obsolete and rarely if ever enforced. In recent months, a moral panic has arisen after two women wed in nearby Mayotte, an island that is geographically part of the Comoro Islands but legally (if not culturally) part of France.

## MIDDLE EAST

## Israeli soldiers shoot cameras after tanks target UN compound

Israeli tanks fired at a United Nations compound in Lebanon on Thursday, injuring peacekeepers. The UN said the army “repeatedly hit” its positions. Soldiers also “deliberately fired at and disabled” security cameras. A hallmark of Israel’s other war, in Gaza, has been the destruction of anything or anyone recording its violence, with 126 journalists killed, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. This week marked a year since Hamas murdered 1,200 people in Israel. Over 40,000 people have been killed by Israel in response.



**Under fire: UN peacekeepers at an observation point on Lebanon’s border with Israel** Photo: Christina Assi/AFP

## RACISM

## Stereotypes cost Africa \$4.2bn a year

A report by Africa No Filter and Africa Practice estimates that African countries are losing up to \$4.2-billion every year due to high interest rates inflated by negative media coverage of the continent’s elections. The report says coverage tends to associate African elections with negative sentiments around violence and election fraud. This does not happen to the same degree elsewhere. Lenders then perceive the continent as volatile and impose higher interest rates on loans to its countries.

## RWANDA

## Marburg is under control – Africa CDC

There is “almost zero risk” that the Marburg outbreak in Rwanda will spread to other countries, the Africa Centre for Disease Control said on Thursday. In recent weeks, Rwanda has confirmed 58 cases of the Ebola-like virus, including 13 deaths. Typically, 88% of people infected by the Marburg virus die, compared to the 22% fatality rate in Rwanda’s current outbreak. Patients in Rwanda are being treated with remdesivir, a trial drug by Gilead Sciences, which donated 5,100 vials.

## EUROPEAN UNION

**Police burn asylum seekers' belongings**

*The Guardian* reported this week that border police in Croatia, a European Union member state, “appear to be burning clothing, mobile phones and passports seized from asylum seekers attempting to cross into the European Union”. The asylum seekers are then pushed back into neighbouring Bosnia, – not an EU member – where they are often stranded in freezing temperatures, a blatant violation of international law. The EU, which preaches loudly about human rights, oversees brutal border controls where violence, human rights abuses and violations of international law are commonplace.

## HORN OF AFRICA

**Axis of resistance to keep Abiy at bay**

A meeting between the presidents of Somalia, Egypt and Eritrea has sparked speculation that an axis of resistance is coalescing against Ethiopia. It came after Egypt sent arms to Somalia via sea and air. Upset by Ethiopia leasing a stretch of coastline from Somaliland, Mogadishu signed a military supply deal with Egypt, itself at odds with Addis Ababa over Ethiopia’s Grand Renaissance Dam, which it says threatens its water security. The Brutus here is Eritrea’s Isaias Afwerki: Ethiopian leader Ahmed Abiy won a Nobel prize for making peace with him, and the two went on to commit war crimes together in Tigray.

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Unresolved issue: *The Continent* delved into the Chagossians' plight last year.

## CHAGOS ISLANDS

**Empire: More things change, the Mauritian things screw you over**

Over the protests of a significant proportion of Chagossians (and some right-wing Brits), the UK this week honoured a ruling of the International Court of Justice and handed its last African colony to Mauritius. This, some Chagossians say, is decolonisation by Britain but recolonisation by Mauritius, a nation 1,000km away from the Chagos archipelago, which accepted \$8-million to remove the islanders in the 1960s.

## DRC

## Journalists arrested for too much truthing

Police used tear gas to break into the Kinshasa home of journalist Patrick Lokala, claiming he was in contempt of court. They questioned him about a defamation complaint filed by private radio honcho Christian Lusakuenu, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Lusakuenu told reporters he was surprised to hear about the arrest as he was no longer interested in the complaint. On Monday, police also arrested radio reporter Érasme Kasongo for defamation after he read a press release accusing traditional leaders of misappropriating mining royalties.

## CAMEROON

## Really old president not dead just resting

Reports of President Paul Biya's death have been greatly exaggerated, at least according to his staff. Biya is 91 and not in the best of health. When he began to miss big shindigs – including the United Nations General Assembly and the La Francophone summit – rumours abounded that he had moved out of his Geneva hotel suite and into the Great Presidential Palace in the Sky. But he is “in excellent health”, says the head of his private office, and is scheduled to return to Cameroon in the next few days.



**S'all work, no playin': Sahle-Work Zewde has resigned as president of Ethiopia, amid talk of a rift with the prime minister.** Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

## ETHIOPIA

## Wait, so Ethiopia has a president?

Ethiopia's President Sahle-Work Zewde resigned three weeks before the end of her term amid reports of tensions between her and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The presidency is a largely ceremonial position in Ethiopia, with real power residing with Abiy. Just before she resigned, President Sahle-Work posted a cryptic tweet including the phrase “the only hope is silence” – a lyric from a Mahmoud Ahmed song. This has been interpreted as a veiled criticism of Abiy's enthusiasm for conflict in the Tigray, Amhara and Oromia regions – though critics say the president's silence facilitated that violence. She was replaced by foreign minister Taye Astike Selassie.

# Chad-Cameroon

## Biblical rains are killing people from N'Djamena to northern Cameroon

**Dorcas Ekupe in Maroua, northern Cameroon**

**O**n the western outskirts of Chad's capital N'Djamena, two rivers meet: the Chari and the Logone. Follow the Logone south, and you will enter the Far North region of Cameroon. In massive rains that have killed more than 570 people in Chad since July, the water level of this river has risen to 8.18 metres (up from 7.16m in 2022 and 6.53m in 2020). This is wreaking deadly havoc from N'Djamena to Cameroon.

This week, the Yagoua area of northern Cameroon is mourning eight people who died trying to navigate a swollen Logone in three separate incidents within a 48-hour window.

The first was the capsizing of a canoe that had left Bonghor in Chad with

six passengers destined for Yagoua in Cameroon. It capsized about 18km from its destination due to the choppy water.

"It's been raining cats and dogs these past days and on this day, the rains were more intense combined with strong winds," Antoine Ngana, the deputy mayor of Yagoua, told *The Continent*. Five of the six bodies have been recovered so far. One was a Chadian woman who was travelling to help her grandmother in Cameroon with this season's harvest, said Ngana.

Then, a 17-year-old boy drowned after trying to swim across one of the swollen river's tributaries, the Danay.

In the third incident, seven boat passengers were interrupted by a hippopotamus frolicking in the swollen river. It overturned their boat, leading to two deaths. Five were rescued.

Back north, where the Logone joins the Chari (before travelling 120km further north to pour into Lake Chad), communities are just as scared by the dramatic rise in the rivers' volumes. Neighbourhoods of N'Djamena near the meeting point have been submerged, *AFP* reported.

Families are now living in makeshift shelters built out of tree branches, rice bags and cloth, on whatever higher or dam-protected ground they can find, with some 1.9-million people affected across Chad and Cameroon. ■

# Mozambique

## Youth towers over legacy in key election

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

Whatever the result of the election that happened on Wednesday, one thing is certain: the president's official residence at the Palácio da Ponta Vermelha in Maputo will have a new occupant come January. With Filipe Nyusi, the current president, stepping down after two terms, there are two frontrunners to replace him. Both represent some kind of change.

Daniel Chapo is Nyusi's designated successor as leader of the ruling party Frelimo, which has governed Mozambique without interruption since independence in 1975. Chapo is just 47, meaning that he was born after independence and the long, bitter struggle to achieve it.

Initial results suggest that Chapo has reason to be worried. Opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane has electrified this contest with slick campaigning and impassioned pleas for change. On Thursday, Mondlane declared himself winner of the election – based on the opposition's parallel counting process – and said that he was making plans for a peaceful transition of power.

Mondlane made a similar claim of victory in 2023 when he ran for mayor of Maputo, but was found to have lost when the official results came out. He said that the mayoral election was rigged. Some analysts have raised fears about the integrity of the vote-counting process in the national election.

There is not much policy divergence between any of four men running for the highest office (parliamentary and provincial assembly elections were held on the same day). During the 43 days of campaigning, all candidates promised to fight corruption, combat militants in Cabo Delgado in the far north, and build more infrastructure.

They are all competing for the votes of young people like 21-year-old Artemisa Matevele, who voted for the first time in her life in this election. From the voting line, she told *The Continent*: “We young people are the factor for change.” ■



**Historical figures: War veterans at a rally for Mozambique's ruling Frelimo party.** Photo: Marco Longari/AFP



# Zimbabwe

## The \$4.4-million heist that shocked the nation

Last week Thursday, thieves stole \$4.4-million from an Ecobank branch in Bulawayo in what is believed to be the biggest-ever bank heist in Zimbabwean history. The brazen crime has captivated the nation, and local media is rife with juicy details.

According to reports, just moments before the crime, one of the alleged criminals stopped to buy chewing gum from a vendor across the road from the bank. “He kept looking all over the place then suddenly ran in the direction of the bank,” the vendor told *The Herald*. “When I looked to see why he was running, I saw him wrestling one of the security guards. Everything happened so fast.”

Wisely, the vendor gathered her things and ran as fast as she could in the other direction. A total of seven men were recorded on security cameras overpowering the guards and running off with three trunks of cash.

This week, police released the names of the seven suspects, and said they were believed to have fled across the border to



**Robbin' hoodlums: Two gang members loot a container full of cash from Ecobank in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.**

South Africa. Police linked the gang to a string of other high-profile robberies, according to *Bulawayo24*, and identified the gang leader as Elijah Vumbunu. They claim that he operates a trucking business and is “living in affluent suburbs in South Africa”, and said they were liaising with Interpol to co-ordinate an arrest.

The police's enthusiastic investigation of this particular crime has raised questions about why other crimes do not warrant a similar response – especially government corruption, which can involve far greater sums. “Zimbabwe is not poor, it simply has poor leadership in charge of the country, ruthlessly looting it and leaving ordinary citizens without basic human rights, such as healthcare and access to clean drinking water,” observed journalist Hopewell Chinono on social media. ■

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# Akufo-Addo has dug himself into a political hole

**Ghana's president has failed to keep a promise to end illegal 'galamsey' gold-mining – and protesters are not letting him forget it.**

**Delali Adogla-Bessa and  
Yaw Obrempong Ampofo in Accra**

**O**n the back of a historic election win, Ghanaian president Nana Akufo-Addo made a bold declaration in 2017: “I am prepared to put my presidency on the line in the fight against galamsey”, he was quoted as saying in the state-owned *Daily Graphic*.

But with just three months remaining of his presidency, that boldness was nowhere to be seen. When protesters took to the streets chanting “Stop galamsey!” at least 40 of them were arrested by Akufo-Addo's government.

Galamsey is the popular Ghanaian term for what used to be small-scale artisanal gold mining. But is now often mechanised, illegal and perceived to be clandestinely bankrolling political bigwigs. Some Ghanaians have been organising to protest against it, arguing that the practice is destroying farmlands and forests, and contaminating rivers and other sources of freshwater.

Ghana's Water Resources Commission estimated in 2017 that 60% of the country's

water bodies were polluted. It said that illegal mining is a leading cause of this pollution – thanks to the dumping of silt and hazardous materials like mercury and cyanide that are used in unregulated gold processing – along with industrial waste and household waste disposal. The problem is especially pronounced in the resource-rich south-west river basin.

“The water is like oil,” says fisherman Phillip Abambe in the fishing village of Sanwoma, along the Ankobra River. “The fish can't survive in it.”

## **Toxic techniques**

An estimated 85% of small-scale mining in Ghana is considered to be illegal and/or informal. This figure has expanded dramatically over the past two decades. Many protesters believe that this expansion has been driven by people with ties to the political elite, who they allege clandestinely employ artisanal miners or buy their processed gold. This, protesters add, explains why the government has been so reluctant to take real action.

Ghanaian law sets a minimum 15-year jail term for engaging in illegal mining,



**Toxic behaviour:** Protesters in Accra demonstrate against illegal artisanal mining known in Ghana as galamsey. Photo: Fadel Senna/AFP

but it is rarely enforced. Rural Ghanaians are drawn to small-scale mining because it tends to fetch more income than farming or other informal work, especially given the recent increase in gold prices. An ounce of gold is now worth \$2,600 on the international market, compared with \$1,200 in 2014. Artisanal miners are often paid as much as 70% of global market prices, which is a lot more than one can say for cash crops like coffee.

But digging for gold comes with the unseen danger of heavy metal pollution. To extract gold from the dirt they dig up, miners add mercury. Gold ore binds to mercury to form an amalgam of both elements. To recover the gold from that amalgam, the miners heat it, expelling toxic mercury vapours into the air.

“The heavy metals go into the water bodies. They go into the air as vaporised mercury and into the soil,” says Enyonam Gbadago, a scientist with the NGO Pure Earth Ghana, which studies polluted rivers and food systems. Exposure to heavy metal pollutants is associated with congenital defects in human beings, among other health dangers.

Ghanaian authorities have sometimes shut down water treatment plants after learning that their water sources are heavily polluted. The recent wave of anti-galamsey protests were partly sparked by a water shortage in the historically significant towns of Cape Coast and Elmina due to polluted rivers.

Even before the protests, galamsey caught the attention of some workers’ unions, which announced protest strikes. “The fact that unions are striking over environmental issues rather than traditional labour concerns underscores the severity of the illegal mining crisis,” Bernard Owusu, chairman of the Trades Union Congress, tells *The Continent*.

Akufo-Addo has yet to speak publicly about the renewed uproar over galamsey, but he met the largest coalition of unions and convinced the workers’ leaders to call off the planned nationwide strikes. A statement from his office said he was committed to ending illegal mining, citing another planned deployment of soldiers to crackdown on illegal miners and a move to reverse a law his government passed to allow mining in forest reserves. ■

# We knew a massacre had taken place. But we did not know where – until now

*In February, somewhere in northwestern Ethiopia, more than 30 civilians were killed in a drone strike. But amid official denials and the fog of an underreported war, it was impossible to pinpoint the location of the massacre. After an exhaustive investigation, The Continent can tell war crimes investigators exactly where to look.*

## Zecharias Zelalem

The camera pans over a gruesome mangled mess of blood, limbs and bodies as wailing voices console each other and discuss how to dislodge dismembered human remains from the wreckage of an obliterated Isuzu truck.

The horrific footage, far too graphic to publish in its entirety, surfaced undated and unverified on the web earlier this year. Anonymous uploaders claimed it depicted the aftermath of a deadly drone strike in Ethiopia's northwestern Amhara region on 19 February. The strike killed at least 30 civilians.

"They wiped us out," said one survivor, who lost seven relatives in the attack and later helped to transport their bodies. "They had been dancing and celebrating just a few hours before. Then we had to collect their bodies piece by piece. I haven't felt alive since that day."

The survivor confirmed that the attack



**Massacre: At least 30 civilians were killed when a drone attacked their truck in Amhara in February.**

came from an unmanned aerial vehicle, more commonly known as a drone. "There were two drones we saw that day. One was a dark coloured one with a low roar. This was the one that attacked. But there was another one, a surveillance drone which had a lighter shade and a red flashing light, as if it was recording us."

Initially, it was difficult to confirm accounts of the massacre.

As the conflict between the state and the rebel Fano militia has intensified, the government has denied journalists access to the region and imposed significant restrictions on mobile communication.

The army denied that any civilians had died, describing the incident as an army operation that led to the killing and capture of rebel militants.

The army's version of events was contradicted just days later when the first media reports emerged, notably in the *Addis Standard* and on *BBC Amharic*.

These reports included harrowing eyewitness testimony. The dead were from only three or four families. An infant

who had just been baptised survived, but seven of his relatives were killed – some still wearing their white ceremonial dress. Other bodies were too mangled to properly identify.

But there was one detail on which the media reports did not agree – the exact location of the massacre. *Addis Standard* said it happened in Sasit, a small town north of Debre Birhan.

The *BBC* located it at “Fela Megenteya”, which loosely translates as “Fela Turn” – an informal name that does not appear on any maps. Some activists said it was in another, slightly larger town, called Sela Dingay.

All of these locations are found in the same district, within 30km of each other.



**Death from above: Ethiopia has reportedly expanded its drone fleet to include the Akinci combat drone, developed by Baykar Defense. Photo: Baykar Defense/AFP**

But no one had exact co-ordinates for where the strike occurred.

This is important for two reasons. Symbolically, it is difficult to honour the dead when we don't even know where they were killed. And practically, it is much harder to collect evidence of war crimes when we don't know where to look.

### Pinpointing the massacre

The drone strike was only the latest in a string of deadly drone strikes since the outbreak of war, in August 2023, between the Ethiopian army and ethnic Amhara rebels known as the Fano. More than 300 civilians have died in at least 31 drone strikes in Amhara in the past year alone, according to reports collated by the Armed Conflict Location and Events Database.

The Ethiopian national army and the Fano militia are former allies who together fought against rebels from Tigray, another region in northern Ethiopia, from 2020 to 2022.

They fell out after Fano militants were ordered to disarm and disband, following the signing of a peace treaty in Pretoria that ended the war on Tigray.

Instead, Fano fighters remobilised and captured a slew of towns across their home region in August 2023. The federal troops deployed to crush them have struggled to contend with Fano's familiarity with the terrain and the wide support they enjoy among the locals.

The federal army has been repeatedly implicated in human rights abuses against civilians in the region.

A previous visual investigation by *The*

*Continent*, a little over a month into the conflict, geolocated footage of Ethiopian army extrajudicial killings of civilians to an area near a police academy in the Amhara town of Debre Markos.

In the initial video footage of the February drone massacre, there was not enough visual evidence to conclusively geolocate the attack.

This changed when additional images – 12 photographs and a 65-second video clip – were delivered to *The Continent* by Misganaw Belete, a lawyer and human rights advocate who was based in the Amhara capital Bahir Dar, and worked with a team to compile evidence of war crimes across the region.

**... there was not enough visual evidence to conclusively geolocate the attack. This changed with additional images – 12 photographs and a video clip – that were delivered to *The Continent***

“Unfortunately, the war in Amhara is underreported,” said Misganaw. “The world’s focus is elsewhere. By compiling evidence today, we may assure that accountability and closure for victims may be obtained tomorrow.”

By authenticating the new evidence and analysing open-source documents and satellite imagery, *The Continent* successfully geolocated the massacre to a specific four-way intersection between villages in the rural Amhara North Shewa Zone, some 220km northeast of Addis Ababa and nine kilometres west of Sasit.



**Friend or foe: Fano militia patrol a ransacked terminal at the airport in Lalibela in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, in December 2021.** Photo: Solan Kolli/AFP

The big clue came in the footage provided by Misganaw, which showed bodies in clearly discernible civilian attire. In the background, two connected transmission towers are visible a few hundred metres apart, parallel to the wreckage of the truck. There is a village in the distance. The attack appeared to have happened at an intersection of two roads.

Publicly sourced documents, including a 2022 village assessment study produced by the International Organisation for Migration, lists a village by the name of Fela, with precise coordinates.

On Google Earth – which erroneously names this location as “Jingodo” – a four-way intersection is clearly visible leading into the village, with the transmission towers in the background.

The visual evidence is consistent with

eyewitness descriptions of “Fela Turn”, making this overwhelmingly likely to have been the site of the drone massacre.

The site’s coordinates are 9°56’10.7”N 39°25’06.9”E. When war crimes investigators are finally able to access Amhara, this is where they can begin to collect evidence.

Ethiopian government spokesperson Billene Seyoum did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

Last week, the Ethiopian army announced plans for a major new offensive against Fano militias in Amhara, claiming that efforts to find a peaceful resolution have failed.

“The only language they understand is force. From now on we will talk to them in that language,” said army spokesperson Colonel Getnet Adane. ■





US Predator drone.  
Photo: US Air Force

## Combat drones are changing how war is waged in Africa

**Nearly 740 drone strikes have been conducted on African soil since the very first one that the US military conducted in Libya 13 years ago. Driven by fighting in Sudan, drone warfare on the continent has escalated dramatically in the past two years.**

**Simon Allison and Lydia Namubiru**

**I**t was the United States of America that laid the template for drone strikes on the African continent – and then spent more than a decade perfecting it, civilian casualties be damned.

The very first drone attack on the African continent was carried out by a US Predator drone in April 2011, operating in

the skies above Misrata, in western Libya. Two months later, the strikes started happening in Somalia.

There, the bombs were supposedly targeting Al Shabaab militants – although, given that the US Air Force acts as judge, jury and executioner, and releases no evidence to support their determination of guilt, we shall never know how many of the more than 60 people reported





## DIASPORA

# Dock Sud, Buenos Aires

*The City of Fury's harbour district is a home away from home for Cabo Verde's diaspora in Argentina, writes Mercedes Sayagues.*

**B**etween the old harbour and the Riachuelo River lies Dock Sud, a neighbourhood of brightly coloured quaint houses built with wood and corrugated metal sheets. Waves of economic migrants from the Cabo Verde islands – 6,000 km away – settled here. They have an estimated 30,000 descendants today.

Cabo Verdeans first arrived in Argentina in the late 19th century to work in the whaling fleets. Later migrations followed in the 1920s and 30s, with

another surge during Cabo Verde's devastating 1946-48 famine. Among them was Aquiles Edgar Pino Santos, who had never seen torrential rain until his ship docked in Buenos Aires during a downpour. He was seven years old.

Firmina Roberto arrived in the 1930s, young and alone. She worked as a washerwoman and was widowed early, raising four children on her own. Like many others, life back home had scarred Roberto with memories of hunger. In Dock Sud, she used to cry at the sight of

maize spilled on the harbour: wasting food brought the years of scarcity flooding back, says her grandson, Carlos Alberto Custodio.

When they arrived in Argentina, Cabo Verdeans settled near the ports, mostly in Buenos Aires, working as sailors, mechanics, cooks and stevedores for the government merchant, oil and fishing fleets. Thus, their homes were built with metal sheets and paint salvaged from ships. “These were stable, well-paid jobs until privatisation dismantled the national fleets in the 1980s,” explains researcher and activist Miriam Gomes, whose grandparents arrived from Santo Antão island in the 1930s.

Women were the backbone of the community. While the men were away at sea for many months, women managed household finances, children’s education and daily problems.

Dock Sud was lively. “Cabo Verdean music, food, Kriolu everywhere, doors always open,” remembers Custodio. Many other immigrants – Polish, Italians, Armenians – also called it home.

The oldest mutual aid associations of the global Cabo Verdean diaspora were founded in Buenos Aires between 1927 and 1932. Because stowaways and migrants without relatives or jobs risked deportation by the Port Prefecture, the members of the associations claimed them as “cousins”.

Ali Delgado’s maternal grandparents met this way: Juan Delgado, a “cousin” of his great grandmother Ana Soares, married Victoria, Ali’s grandmother and Soares’ daughter.



Today, the Unión Caboverdeana (UC) in Dock Sud remains the community’s heart. As port jobs dwindled, people moved away but many still return for the monthly cachupada (named for the traditional Cabo Verdean stew) and cultural events at the UC.

Cabo Verdeans are part of a multi-racial Argentina that has worked hard to flatten its own narrative into a binary black and white.

The 1887 census was the last to list five

racial categories: White, Black, Pardo (tan or light-skinned), Indian and Mestizo (mixed heritage). Afterwards only White and Black were recorded. Diverse population groups were admitted into whiteness and only a small minority were labelled black, marginalising them into statistical invisibility.

That is starting to change again.

The 2000 census included a question allowing people to self-identify as indigenous. The following year, a team of Afro-Argentines returned from the International Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, fired up with a mission to restore their statistical visibility by adding an Afro-descendant self-identification question to the census.

Initially, government statisticians met the Afro-Argentine team “with absolute denial”, says Miriam Gomes, but the

question was added to the 2010 census and it revealed 150,000 self-identified Afro-descendants. By 2022, it had risen to 302,000.

**The 2010 census revealed 150,000 self-identified Afro-descendants. By 2022, that figure had risen to 302,000. Another estimate says that as many as two million could be Afro-descendants.**

Another estimate says that out of Argentina’s 46-million people, around two million could be Afro-descendants.

For many of these people, reclaiming their black heritage is difficult: the estimated 200,000 enslaved Africans trafficked to the River Plate were deliberately severed from their cultural

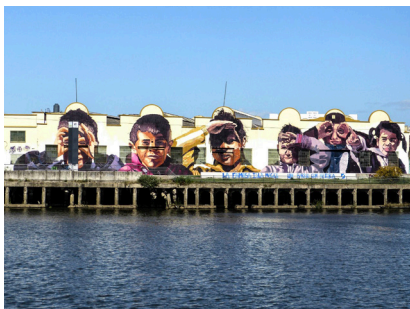


roots. By and large, Cabo Verdeans are Argentina's only Africa-originating community that has maintained its cultural and family ties to the continent.

Amilcar Cabral, the anti-colonial political organiser from Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau, is an especially celebrated figure in the Dock Sud community. On 14 September, with struggle films and lentil and chorizo stew, UC celebrated the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Cabral's calls for political independence and nationhood in the mid-1950s stirred the Dock Sud community enough that it formed a committee to support the liberation struggle back home.

"To me, Cabral means revolution for my people," said Cristian Silva, born in Argentina to Cabo Verdean parents. He speaks fluent Kriolu and has toured the islands as a tango singer. For 50 years his father has hosted a radio programme in Buenos Aires dedicated to Cabo Verdean news and culture – which lives in the streets of Dock Sud. ■



All photos:  
Mercedes Sayaguis

## Pessimists see the class as half-empty

The fifth of October was World Teachers' Day. Unfortunately, Afrobarometer was not in class to hand in its assignment. That got us thinking: How often do children in countries across the continent miss school?

In a survey spanning 39 countries, conducted between late 2021 and mid-2023, we asked respondents how frequently children in their community are not in school. Disturbingly, nearly half (48%) report that children are "somewhat" or "very" frequently not in school.

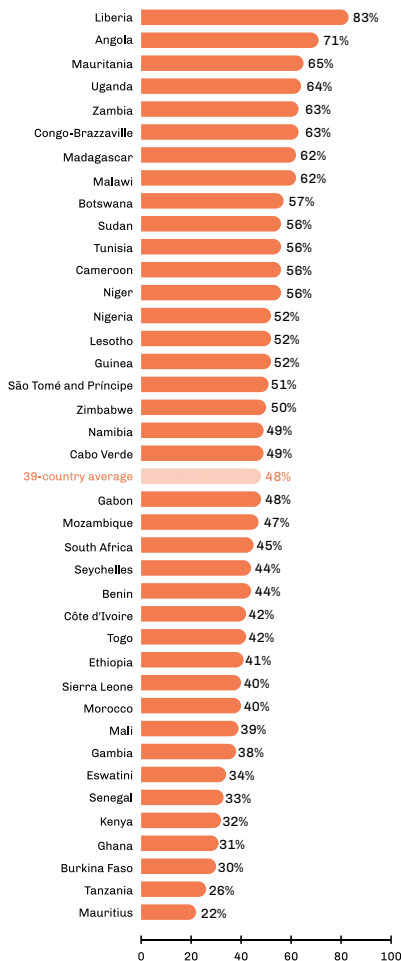
In 18 countries, half or more of adults fret about a lack of school attendance, including 83% of Liberians and 71% of Angolans. Poor respondents are a lot more likely than the well-off to see out-of-school children as a common problem in their community (55% vs 34%).

Children may be absent for any one of a number of different reasons.

Many face logistical hurdles to get to school, while others – girls in particular – struggle with social and economic barriers that prevent them from attending. They could be sick, holding down jobs, caring for younger siblings or just truant.

Whatever the reason, there's a teacher waiting to welcome them back.

### Children frequently not in school | 39 African countries | 2021/2023



**Source:** Afrobarometer is a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.



## Ghetto gets a global blast

**Asake serves up what he knows works while still offering experimental, sonic amuse-bouches.**

**Wilfred Okiche**

**N**igerian popstar Asake, born Ahmed Ololade, fashioned a viable career for himself by introducing a unique spin on afrobeats. This Asake strain is an alchemy of sounds including hip-hop, amapiano, pop and fùjì. With hits like *Organise* and *Sungba*, Asake enjoyed a lightning quick rise to music's upper echelons, demonstrating crossover appeal.

*Lungu Boy* is his third album in three years and the 15-track record says that Asake is done with playing local and

wants to go global. Day-one fans won't worry about this new direction. Asake has been building up to it for some time now. He duetted with American singer H.E.R. on a remix of his hit *Lonely at the Top*, worked with Idris Elba on his upcoming documentary and routinely sells out massive shows around the world.

There is plenty that is familiar on *Lungu Boy*. He still sings mostly in Yoruba with some pidgin and English thrown in. The songs are still catchy, choruses are layered and the lyrics have the appropriate amounts of spunk and vulnerability.

But there is also new stuff that proves Asake is still willing to experiment. On *My Heart*, a welcome surprise, he is simpatico with French-Gabonese singer Anaïs Cardot; on the Travis Scott-assisted *Active*, he samples a classic.

There are limits to that culture hopping, though. When Asake announces that skating is a lifestyle on the dud, *Skating*, it is hard to take him seriously. And *Wave*, a collaboration with British rapper Central Cee serves up nothing new.

The record gets back on track with the steady bounce of *Whine* with Ludmilla and closes out on a high with the florid battering of polyrhythmic drums on the highlight *Fuji Vibe*.

Asake may have grown up geographically disadvantaged but *Lungu Boy* – which refers to a kid born in the ghetto – is his attestation that he's made it out, and is now settling into his new station. Local to global, he's living the dream. ■



# THE QUIZ

**0-3**

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

**4-7**

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

**8-10**

"Not all castles have moats. Some used to have them. But they were demoated."



- 1\_** Osu Castle (pictured), a Unesco World Heritage Site, is found in which country?
- 2\_** Sahle-Work Zewde was the president of which country until this week?
- 3\_** Rigathi Gachagua became which country's impeached vice president ... also this week?
- 4\_** Who won Tunisia's presidential election, you guessed it, this week?
- 5\_** Sam Nujoma was which country's first president?
- 6\_** Name the South African jazz musician famous for songs such as *The Boy's Doin' It*.
- 7\_** True or false: Paul Biya first served as Cameroon's prime minister before becoming president.
- 8\_** How many years has Paul Biya been president?
- 9\_** *Lungu Boy* is the latest album of which Nigerian artist?
- 10\_** Which country was basketball legend Dikembe Mutombo from?

**HOW DID I DO?** WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to [+27 73 805 6068](tel:+27738056068) and we'll send the answers to you!

# The 'Better Question' is ...

*Why the hell do US journalists go to the political circus?*

Patrick Gathara

In an interview on *60 Minutes*, American journalist Bill Whitaker asked Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, whether Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is a "strong ally" of the United States. Given the humiliations Netanyahu has handed the Biden regime in the past year, it's a question that must be asked.

Without wavering, Harris responded: "The better question is: Do we have an important alliance between the American people and the Israeli people? And the answer to that question is yes."

It is a telling exchange that shows how public officials work the media as an arena for performance rather than information. They show up for "media engagements" – not to answer uncomfortable questions, but to regurgitate talking points. US officials are well-practiced at this dance that generates heat rather than light, drama rather than knowledge. Just listen to the convoluted answers offered up by the state department spokespeople when journalists point out the contradictions of US policy in the Middle East.



**Shall we dance? US journalist Bill Whitaker allowed Kamala Harris to reframe interview questions to her advantage.** Photo: courtesy CBS

It makes one wonder why journalists participate in the charade. They are unlikely to come away with a better understanding of any policies.

"People are sick of the bullshit in here," one frustrated journalist exclaimed during a recent press briefing.

Yet they keep attending. Is it the fear of missing out on a game of "Gotcha"? Or perhaps they believe that they are serving



their audiences by providing the regime's point of view, regardless of how obscure and unintelligible it is.

In 2003, the newly-elected Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki caused excitement when he called a press conference to announce his cabinet. We thought he was inaugurating a new era of what we imagined to be US-like presidential transparency. It didn't quite turn out that way. He didn't hold another press conference until his wife hauled him before journalists six years later to deny that he had another not-so-secret family.

But Kibaki did create the office of the government spokesperson, which, under Alfred Mutua, now the labour cabinet secretary, initially held regular briefings featuring little more than "official truth"; or, to use modern-day parlance, public disinformation. To report Mutua's "truth" was to be deeply unserious.

Journalism is meant to be a

counterweight to government propaganda, not a platform for it. When the US news media is so deeply unserious about its work, Trumpian insults gain more traction than interrogations of policy: the country's election now looks less like a competition of ideas than a shouting match, or marketplace for slogans. This can lead to terrible consequences: See Gaza and Lebanon.

There is a famous 1997 interview where broadcast journalist Jeremy Paxman hounds Britain's home secretary for an answer, posing the same question 12 times in 90 seconds. It is difficult to imagine the news media today being so insistent and refusing to take a non-answer.

Not when the politicians can themselves pose and answer "the better question", and get away with it. ■

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*Patrick Gathara is a journalist, cartoonist and author*

# Kenya's divided house

**The impeachment of the vice-president has fractured the country's political landscape.**

**Dan Gatsinzi**

**A**llies of President William Ruto voted on Wednesday to impeach Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua following a deterioration in their relationship.

With 291 MPs backing the motion, it passed, having garnered support from two-thirds of the National Assembly. This reflects widespread concern over Gachagua's role in corruption, both before and during his tenure as deputy president. However, it has also sparked divisions within Kenya's youth-led social movement, which has prided itself on being ethnically neutral.

Gachagua played a pivotal role in Ruto's election victory in 2022, particularly in mobilising the Kikuyu community of Central Province. But as the youth-led anti-government protests unfolded this year, he appeared to distance himself from Ruto. In response, Ruto brokered a deal with opposition leaders, including Raila Odinga, aiming to form a "broad-based" government. While this was framed as a unifying effort after political violence, it also reduced Ruto's dependence on Gachagua for legislative control as he gears up for re-election in 2027.

Ruto's decision to press the "eject" button may resonate with the public,

as it suggests the ousting of a widely recognised figure of corruption. However, the dynamics are complex. Despite Ruto's declining popularity amid mass protests against the Finance Bill, Gachagua's image improved among certain protesters who viewed him as sympathetic to their grievances. This complex interplay was evident last week at a public participation forum at Bomas of Kenya in Nairobi, where tensions flared between Gachagua's supporters and his detractors.

**Ruto's decision to press the 'eject' button may resonate with the public ... However, the dynamics are complex.**

Opponents argue that the impeachment punishes a deep-rooted culture of corruption in Kenyan politics. "We need to send a message that corruption will not be tolerated," asserted an activist at the forum. "Impeachment is a necessary step toward accountability and restoring public trust in our leaders."

These divisions are not just political; they also reflect regional and ethnic lines, as highlighted by a Tifa Research survey showing that while 38% of Kenyans oppose Gachagua's impeachment, this



**Deputed: Kenya's Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua has been impeached at the prompting of former ally President William Ruto. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP**

figure swells to 69% within his Central Province stronghold.

The discourse on social media mirrors these tensions. Youth activists are mobilising on platforms like X and TikTok, using hashtags such as #ImpeachGachagua and #StandWithGachagua to express their divided sentiments.

The youth are also split on the best approach to achieving a more accountable government. Some argue that any figure linked to corruption must be removed, while others contend that Gachagua is merely a scapegoat, suggesting that true change can only come with the impeachment of Ruto himself. The president has, after all, been dogged throughout his political career by allegations of corruption and inciting ethnic violence.

The repercussions of Gachagua's impeachment could be profound for both the government and the unity of the youth-led social movement. His removal might lead to a significant reshaping of the ruling coalition and could jeopardise Ruto's support among Kikuyu voters. Meanwhile, youth activists' reactions could further fracture their movement.

As Dr John Mwangi, a political scientist at the University of Nairobi, observed: "It could signal a shift in the political narrative. But it could also deepen the divisions within the electorate." ■

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# THE BIG PICTURE

Holy waters: Oromo Ethiopians in Addis Ababa this Saturday past splash themselves with water to mark Irreecha, the annual festival held to express gratitude for the blessings of Waaqa, the creator.

Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP



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