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The Continent

Recipes to crush resistance





Cover: A new wave of protest movements is sweeping across Africa. These are driven by sky-rocketing costs of living and a dearth of economic opportunities. Some commentators have been swept up in the excitement, declaring this an 'African Spring'. Our reporting this week – from Angola, Cameroon, Nigeria and Kenya – suggests a different, more ominous direction. Our under-pressure governments know exactly what to do in order to keep themselves in power – and they are doing it, casualties be damned.

Inside:

- **Kenya:** How Ruto turned technology against the people using it to mobilise (p10)
- **Nigeria:** If you can't beat them, pay them (p13)
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Welcome news: President Patrice Talon is likely to sign the new citizenship law into effect soon.

Photo: Yanick Folly/AFP

BENIN

Porto-Novo opens path to descendants of enslaved Africans

President Patrice Talon is poised to approve a law giving descendants of enslaved people a right to Beninese citizenship. First proposed by the Council of Ministers in early May, the law was approved by Parliament in late July. Anyone with an African ancestor who was taken abroad in the slave trade will be eligible for a passport, although it is not clear how exactly this will be determined.

SUDAN

Warmongers ghost their own peace talks

Neither of Sudan's warring groups showed up on Wednesday, the first day of peace talks aimed at ending the brutal conflict. Representatives from the African Union and the United Nations were present, as were diplomats from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. The war between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Force, a paramilitary group, began in April 2023. It has brought untold horror to the country, killing thousands and displacing around 10-million people.

ALGERIA

Champion boxer files suit against X

Olympic gold medallist Imane Khelif has filed a legal complaint in France against the social media platform X, for harassment. The Algerian boxing champion and another gold medallist, Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting, have been at the centre of a social-media gender-identity dispute that has been mired in misinformation and falsehood. Among the high-profile individuals named in the lawsuit and accused of enflaming the furore over Khelif's eligibility are X owner Elon Musk, *Harry Potter* author JK Rowling, and former United States president Donald Trump.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE**Zelenskyy turns the tables on Putin**

Days into a surprise incursion into western Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that his country

now has control of the town of Sudzha in the Kursk region. Since 6 August Ukraine has reportedly advanced nearly 1,000km into the undisputed territory of its neighbour who did the same to it in February 2020. Russia is evacuating people from border areas and at least one region has declared a state of emergency.

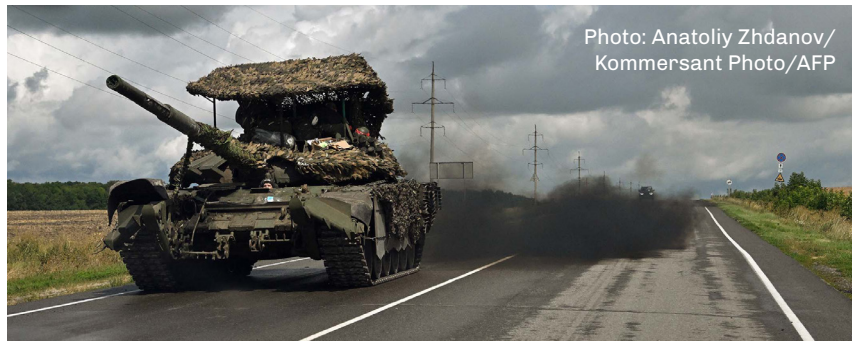


Photo: Anatolij Zhdanov/
Kommersant Photo/AFP

CHAD**Deadly floods in the Sahara desert**

Torrential rains that started last Friday and went on until Wednesday caused flooding in Chad's north-east that killed at least 54 people, most of whom are informal gold miners, *AFP* reports. The floods also swept away thousands of cars and shops, said Mahamat Tochi Chidi, the governor of the affected Tibetsi province. Chad's Sahara regions usually get less than 200mm of rain a year, but suffers torrential rains every five to 10 years, according to the country's leading meteorologist.

EGYPT**Tomb digger-uppers dig up Cleo-era bling**

Archaeologists excavating 63 tombs in the Nile Delta have discovered a trove of ancient artefacts – including gold pieces, jewellery, statues, pottery and bronze coins. According to Egypt's antiquities ministry, the tombs in present-day Damietta City date back to the Ptolemaic dynasty, which ruled Egypt from 305 BCE, ending with the reign of Cleopatra. As yet, no curse-based deaths have been reported, nor have archaeologists admitted to gaining mysterious supernatural powers.

MALI

Bamako boots Swede for ministerial tweet

Angered by a tweet by Swedish minister Johan Forssell, Mali's military leaders gave Sweden's ambassador, Kristina Kuhnel, 72 hours to leave Bamako. The minister's tweet linked Swedish aid cuts in Mali (imposed in December) to the West African country's relationship with Russia, and came just after Bamako cut diplomatic ties with Ukraine. The breakdown in relations with Ukraine was in reaction to claims that Kyiv supported Tuareg rebels in a battle that led to mass casualties for Malian troops and their allied Russian mercenaries.

INDONESIA

The not-quite launch of a new capital city

Indonesia's current capital city, Jakarta, is densely-populated, polluted and prone to some of the world's worst traffic jams. That's why President Joko Widodo, in 2019, decided to build a brand new capital in the Kalimantan rainforest. Called Nusantara, the city was supposed to cost \$35-billion and be completed by this weekend. It has not gone according to plan. Although the president has now moved his office there, the area is a mess of construction sites, and is only expected to be fully complete in two decades' time.

WESTERN SAHARA

International sands are shifting around Morocco's occupation

On Wednesday, Chad opened a consulate in Western Sahara, joining 28 other countries that have consulates there. This is seen as an endorsement of Morocco's occupation of the territory, which has been bitterly contested for decades by the indigenous Saharawi people. Other supporters of Morocco's position include France, which declared support in July, and the United States. About 173,000 displaced Saharawi live in refugee camps in Algeria, which backs their independence movement.



Displaced: Saharawi delegates arrive at an independence congress at a camp in Dakhla, Algeria. Photo: Ryad Kramdi/AFP



On guard: A policeman at the farm where 95 Libyan 'students' allegedly trained. Photo: Phill Magokoe/AFP

SOUTH AFRICA

Charges against 'secret boot camp' Libyans dropped

The case against 95 Libyans arrested at a suspected secret military training camp in rural South Africa has been withdrawn. The group was arrested in July, in a joint operation led by police and immigration officials, after the discovery of the camp on a farm in White River in Mpumalanga. Prosecutors had initially charged the group of contravening South Africa's Immigration Act. It is unclear why the charges were dropped, as drugs and other contraband were allegedly discovered at the farm. The Libyans have told police they entered South Africa on student visas to train as security guards.

HORN OF AFRICA

Ethiopia and Somalia won't bury hatchet

A second round of Türkiye-brokered talks to thaw Somalia-Ethiopia relations ended on Tuesday without an agreement. Relations between the two countries broke down last year, when Addis announced a deal with Somaliland – a breakaway region that claims independence from Somalia – to lease a 20km stretch of coastline. Landlocked Ethiopia wants coastal access for both naval and commercial purposes, and has reportedly promised to recognise Somaliland's independence bid as part of the deal. Mogadishu has sought new security partnership with both Türkiye and Egypt.

CENTRAL AFRICA

DRC beer ban makes border a powder keg

Zambian authorities closed the country's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo for three days this week, fearing a spillover of insecurity. This follows protests by angry truck drivers against a Congolese government decision to ban the import of beer, soft drinks and tiles from Zambia. The two countries have since agreed on a 30-day grace period to allow importers to adjust to the ban, which is designed to protect local Congolese manufacturers.

South Africa

Xenophobic vigilantes target foreign-owned shops

Kiri Rupiah

After a shooting on Saturday, members of the anti-migrant group Operation Dudula and the Patriotic Alliance party descended on Soweto to shut down foreign-owned shops. The group's leader, Zandile Dabula, said they have closed at least 15 shops in Soweto's White City area since Monday.

According to *The Sowetan* newspaper, a group of about 50 people raided migrant-owned shops after 22-year-old Luyanda Ngxongo was shot – allegedly by a foreign shop owner. Phumzile Mnisi says her son was shot after accusations that he was loitering outside the shop. Ngxongo is reportedly in an intensive care unit at a local hospital.

Operation Dudula – dudula means “to push out” in isiZulu – wants all undocumented foreign nationals to be deported. The vigilante group first emerged in June 2021, in response to the riots ignited by the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma. Since then, it claims to have expanded across the country.

In South Africa, xenophobia is a potent tool for garnering support from



Back off: An Operation Dudula member warns away community members while shutting a shop in Soweto, South Africa.

Photo: Emmanuel Croset/AFP

disgruntled locals who blame foreign nationals for a lack of jobs and rampant criminality. Official statistics released on Tuesday show unemployment in the country rose to 33.5% in the second quarter of the year, highlighting growing poverty and widening inequality in Africa's biggest economy.

On the other hand, multiple studies have concluded that migrants are a net economic benefit to the country. The latest, by the Scalabrini Institute, suggests that immigration into South Africa raises per capita GDP by as much as 5%. ■

News

World wises up to Africa's Mpox crisis

The disease has become a global health emergency.

Josephine Chinele

The World Health Organisation has declared Mpox a public health emergency of international concern. This follows a spike in cases of a new sexually transmittable strain of the virus.

East African countries are particularly affected. More than 100 cases of sexually transmittable Mpox (clade 1b) were confirmed in Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda last month.

The WHO declaration came a day after the Africa Centre for Disease Control declared the disease a continental public health emergency, signalling that African expertise and monitoring is being taken more seriously in global decision-making.

"This isn't just an African issue. Mpox is a global threat, a menace that knows no boundaries, no race, no creed," WHO director general Tedros Ghebreyesus said on Tuesday. "It's a virus that exploits our vulnerabilities, preying on our weakest points."



Severe risk: Mpox can be fatal for immunocompromised people. Photo: M Mara/Washington Post via Getty Images

The Africa CDC said there would be no travel or trade restrictions related to these developments. Its leader, Dr Jean Kaseya, urged countries to learn from the Covid pandemic and fight Mpox in solidarity.

There have been over 15,600 Mpox cases and 537 deaths this year alone. It spreads through close contact and occasionally from surfaces touched by an infected person. It can be caught from contact with infected animals like monkeys and tree squirrels, and newborns can catch it from infected mothers.

Mpox is treatable but people who are immunocompromised, including from pregnancy and untreated and severe HIV, are at risk of severe and fatal illness. ■

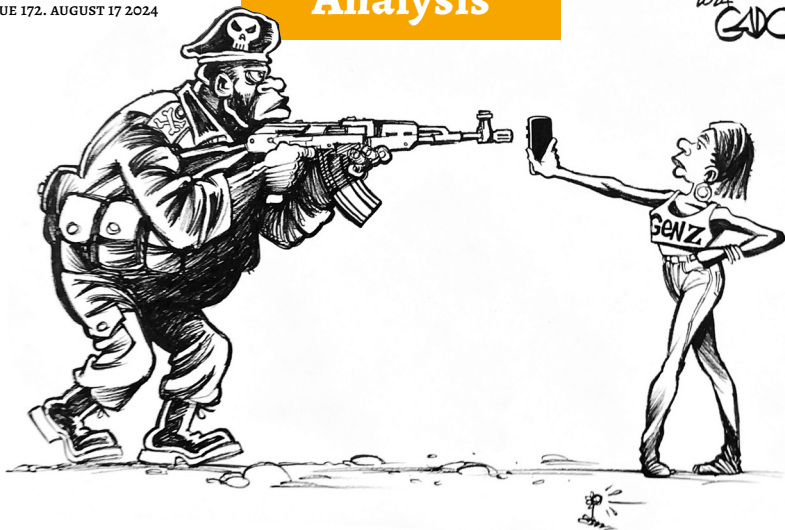
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Kenya's government has a blueprint for digital tyranny. It is working – for now.

With remarkable creativity, young Kenyans used technology to organise nationwide protests. The state's digital response has been equally remarkable, but for all the wrong reasons.

Odanga Madung in Nairobi

When plans to hike taxes drove Kenya's young people to revolt against the political establishment in June, they turned to technology to organise themselves. They built custom GPTs – artificial intelligence programs – to educate each other about the proposals, gathered in X Spaces to plan protests,

and even had TikTok influencers doing political education. During the protests themselves, they used walkie-talkie apps to coordinate their movements and mobile money to crowdfund the medical bills of the injured.

This is what Gen Z activism looks like: civic engagement reimaged for the digital age.

But technology can be a double-edged



On the move:
Activists and relatives of protesters killed by police in the protests march to Parliament.

Photo: Patrick Meinhardt/AFP

sword. The same digital infrastructure that empowers protesters can be used to repress them. The Kenyan government appears to have deployed more than a few tools from the tyrant's digital toolbox to respond to the June uprising.

Its first move was to shut down the internet on 25 June. This is the first time such a disruption has happened in Kenya (which likes to bill itself as the "Silicon Savannah"). Internet watchdog Netblocks said the outage occurred just as protesters attempted to storm Parliament in Nairobi.

As the protests raged on, journalists, activists and dissenters began to disappear. CNN reported that this included at least a dozen prominent social media users, who were abducted by Kenyan security forces on the night before the storming of Parliament.

According to Amnesty International Kenya's Ramadhan Rajab, the abductees who resurfaced spoke of their phone functioning strangely before they were picked up; cars waiting at their residences

and favourite hangouts; and their abductors confiscating their phones as soon as they took them. These stories draw attention to the massive surveillance infrastructure that Kenya has invested in over the years.

Nairobi streets have about 2,000 police surveillance cameras, according to a 2023 investigation by *Coda Story*. The Communications Authority of Kenya has a Device Monitoring System (DMS) capable of intercepting text messages and phone calls.

The agency fought a long legal battle against campaigners, who argue the DMS unduly breaches privacy, but eventually secured the right to use it. In addition, according to a 2017 investigation by Privacy International, Kenya's spooks can directly intercept telecom networks, even without the operator's knowledge.

The abductees' stories raise suspicion that some combination of such capabilities were used to target them.

When initial attempts at repression

failed to quiet the protests, President William Ruto tried a less combative approach: a widely publicised X Space to meet the protesters online, where it all began.

He followed this with a full cabinet reshuffle to signal he was listening. But the olive branch was ultimately ineffective at reconciliation, and the unrest continued.

A more insidious but familiar tactic entered the fray: disinformation that blames foreign entities for domestic troubles. Speaking at an event in Nakuru on 15 July, President Ruto suggested that money from the Ford Foundation had been used to fund the “anarchy”.

The accusation, which he provided no evidence for, and which the Ford Foundation has strongly denied, initially landed flat offline – but that didn’t discourage its promotion by a small army of dubious social media accounts.

A more insidious but familiar tactic entered the fray: disinformation that blames foreign entities for domestic troubles.

The first post linking the Ford Foundation with the protests appeared on 23 June, and was published by Sam Terriz, a state official.

A surge of over 500 posts, from accounts aligned with Ruto’s administration, built on it, often using cherry-picked funding disclosures from the foundation’s own website and manipulated images.

Subsequent disinformation campaigns have since blamed LGBTQIA+ groups,

human rights defenders and journalists.

Whether or not these messages are believed is almost immaterial. They distracted, muddled public discourse and made the truth debateable. They also harassed key players to exhaustion as they tried to counter the deliberate spread of falsehoods.

Kenya’s protests appear to have lost momentum for now, and President Ruto is back to touring the country.

But his government’s actions over the past two months leave a digital blueprint for politicians to use against the surge of protests across the continent, and cast a troubling shadow over Kenya’s Silicon Savannah brand.

The state’s tactics are forcing activists to take counter-measures. “People have reduced their digital footprint, changed their numbers or phones, are restricting their communications to less popular apps like Signal, or even abandoning cellphones entirely,” said Amnesty’s Rajab.

The move towards encrypted apps shows that as states invest in more sophisticated surveillance, people learn to be more vigilant about privacy when using technology. According to Top 10 VPN, demand for virtual private networks in Kenya rose by 534% in the period right before 25 June 2024.

This response brings to mind Chinua Achebe’s proverbial bird, which learnt to “fly without perching” once “men learnt to shoot without missing”. ■

Odanga Madung researches how technology influences society and is an independent journalist.

Nigeria

How Tinubu brings hungry people to heel

Distract, threaten and, if all else fails, dangle cash.

Pelumi Salako in Lagos

Dressed in a Super Eagles shirt and baseball cap, 49-year-old Samuel Oluwaseyi joined those who took to the streets this month to protest against the economic crisis – 40% food inflation and 34% general inflation. It's the worst he remembers living through. "I don't care," he said. "I am ready to sacrifice my life."

His commitment was, however, matched by that of the Nigerian state – which appeared determined to repress popular expressions of anger.

A week ahead of the protests, the secretary to the government, George Akume, on behalf of President Bola Tinubu, asked traditional and religious leaders to rein in their people. Days later, adherents of the Oro traditional worship practice announced a two-week festival to overlap with the planned protests. Oro faithful reportedly went around Lagos threatening would-be protesters, accusing Igbo people of trying to destroy the city.

On the eve of the protests, pre-emptive marches to discourage participation in the protests popped up in Lagos, Ogun State and the national capital Abuja.

Some of the marchers told journalists they were paid to participate, and needed the money to buy food. Osa Emmanuel, a plumber, told *The Africa Report* in Abuja that: "We are saying no to protests because of the 5,000 naira (\$3) we were promised."

When thousands showed up for the protests on 1 August, Nigerian security responded with force, killing at least 21 and arresting more than 1,000 people, according to Amnesty International. The protests soon fizzled to small gatherings.

None of this means that the Nigerian government has had the last word, however.

Nigerian security responded with force, killing at least 21 and arresting over 1,000 people, according to Amnesty International.

"The Nigerian government appears to be underestimating the wider frustration in the country," said Ikemesit Effiong of the Lagos-based risk analysis firm SBM Intelligence. "The next protest will not be announced. We will not know where it will happen. It may turn out to be more violent and more reactionary." ■

Angola

Vandalism law seen as backdoor attack on dissent

Damaging public property at a protest can fetch the same jail sentence as murder.

Borrvalho Ndomba in Luanda

Angolan civil society groups are asking the Constitutional Court to repeal a law passed by Parliament in mid-July that seeks to penalise “crimes of vandalism of public goods and services” with up to 25 years in prison – the same as murder.

The law also imposes a 10-year prison sentence on people convicted of filming or photographing public services. That means a patient who films mistreatment at a government hospital, or a person who films police brutality, would risk jail.

Critics say the new law is meant to discourage citizens from participating in protests and government scrutiny.

The law “covers up what is President João Lourenço’s primary intention, which is to punish all those who try to protest against his rule in Angola,” said Adilson Manuel, the leader of the Bloco Democrático, a political organisation for young Angolans. They are among the seven groups petitioning the court.

The Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy warned that the new law

gives the ruling party and President João Lourenço’s government the legal means to persecute NGOs and political parties that exercise the freedom of assembly. The group said this would deal “a coup de grace to participatory democracy”.

The government says it is simply reacting to an upsurge in vandalism across the country.

Much of the reported vandalism has targeted monuments depicting national figures like first president Augustinho Neto, and the country’s postal services and the rail and electricity network.

The head of the National Electricity Transmission Network, Rui Gourgel, told journalists in early July that vandals had cost the public company more than \$6-million in the last three years.

Those who remain sceptical of the official rhetoric on the law are now preparing to test it on the streets. “We are going to hold several demonstrations across the country in order to put an end to this attempt by the Angolan government to violate the Constitution of the republic,” said Manuel. ■

Cameroon

Older leader, thinner skin

Criticism of Paul Biya is getting more intense. So is the repression.

**Amindeh Blaise Atabong
in Yaoundé**

Amid frantic concerns over his age and mental health, 81-year-old President Joe Biden pulled out of this year's presidential election in the United States. Similar concerns swirl around President Paul Biya in Cameroon. At 91, he is already the oldest president in the world. But he has given no indication that he will step aside any time soon.

Perhaps because of the president's perceived frailties, the criticism is louder than ever before. It comes from disaffected youth, as well as established opposition and civil society groups.

There are also rumbles of discontent from within the ruling elite – all jostling for position in an increasingly bitter succession battle. They know Biya's hold on power can survive anything except his own death, and that can't be too far away.

Biya's administration is responding with a familiar tactic: brutally cracking down on dissenting voices.

Digital disorder

The highest-profile recent example is that of 23-year-old Junior Ngombe. He is a barber by day and a digital activist by night, campaigning for democratic change and urging his 35,000 followers on TikTok to register to vote. Ngombe was outraged last month when another outspoken activist, Steve Akam – known as Ramon Cotta on TikTok – was arrested in neighbouring Gabon.

Akam had been in exile in Gabon for a decade, but he was suddenly picked up by local authorities, who delivered him to their Cameroonian counterparts at the border. This was a clear violation of extradition procedures, say rights groups.

Akam promptly disappeared, and has



WTF: Detained activist Junior Ngombe consults his lawyer after his release

not been seen since.

Ngombe took to social media to denounce Akam's arrest. "To hunt those who denounce or criticise your system of governance, and those who have opposing views, you put all your ingenuity at work to lay hands on them. Why not use this energy positively?" Ngombe asked in a TikTok video.

Shortly afterwards, Ngombe was detained by three plain-clothes intelligence officers. He was transferred to the capital Yaounde in a military vehicle, and held in the notorious Secrétariat d'Etat à la défense – a facility previously noted by Human Rights Watch for the "widespread use of torture". A week later, he was granted bail by a military tribunal, and may still have to appear before a court – even though he has not been formally charged with anything.

"His arrest was not in conformity with the law," said Ngombe's lawyer, Akere Muna.

Zero tolerance

Dozens of opposition leaders, journalists, political activists, human rights defenders, and other government critics have been jailed or forced into exile in recent months, according to Ngo Mbe Maximilienne, the executive director of the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network. "The political and human rights situation is very preoccupying," Maximilienne told *The Continent*.

Human Rights Watch offered a similar assessment. "The Cameroonian government has for years cracked down on opposition and free speech, jailing



Jacked boots: President Paul Biya and his entourage observe a parade by the Rapid Intervention Battalion. Photo: AFP

political activists, journalists, and dissidents. Ahead of elections in 2025, it has increasingly restricted freedoms of expression and association," it said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Cameroonian government has itself warned that criticism of Biya and institutions of state will not be tolerated. "It is unacceptable for compatriots, be they political party leaders or opinion leaders, to use irreverent, insulting or even offensive language with regards to the person who is legitimately and happily presiding over the destiny of Cameroon," said government spokesperson Rene Emmanuel Sadi last month.

To this end, the regional administration that governs Yaoundé decreed that entry to the capital will be denied to those deemed likely to offend the head of state, organise uprisings or cause serious disturbance to public order.

"It's ideal to prevent disorder than to restore law and order," said Emmanuel Mariel Djikdent, the senior divisional officer for Mfoundi – a Biya appointee. ■

Who is left to police the police?

The viral case of a security guard, who says he was tortured by cops, shines a spotlight on Malawi's dysfunctional police oversight agency.

Josephine Chinele in Blantyre

In April, 45-year-old security guard Felix Kachingwe sent a friend a WhatsApp voice note describing his assault and torture by police officers in Blantyre. “They beat me with a machete while my hands and legs were tied,” he says in the voice note, “This assault has changed my life.” The voice note has since gone viral, prompting the Independent Complaints Commission, which investigates the police, to take up his case.

That’s the kind of reaction Kachingwe was hoping for when he sent the note.

“This is a corrupt world,” he said. “I know I can’t just get help so I want human rights organisations to know about this.”

However, if prior complaints to the commission are any kind of predictor, viral empathy may be all the justice Kachingwe ever receives.

A strange turn of events

In the small hours of 17 February, robbers broke into the premises of Papat Wholesalers where Kachingwe worked security. Nothing was stolen but when he informed his boss, the businessman

showed up with police officers from the criminal investigations department.

The police detained the guards, including Kachingwe, for interrogation. “This is when they tortured us,” he says. “They didn’t stop even when I screamed. They made fun of my private parts.”

“They didn’t stop even when I screamed. They made fun of my private parts.”

Kachingwe says his injuries were ignored for two days until other officers not involved in the assault took him to Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital. From the hospital he was taken back to the same cell. He was eventually charged with theft, along with one of his colleagues.

Kachingwe says his health passport (a booklet issued by the ministry of health and kept by patients as a portable medical record) went missing while he was at Blantyre Police Station. It held information about the assault, medication prescribed and follow-up appointments.

He has since had some of the information from the hospital’s electronic recording system noted in an older



Brutalised: Felix Kachingwe lies on a hospital gurney. The police watchdog is investigating 37 cases of assault and nine wrongful deaths in police custody

health passport, which *The Continent* was shown. It indicates that on 4 July, months after his detention, Kachingwe underwent surgery for serious injuries to his genitalia.

Aubrey Kawale, officer-in-charge at Blantyre Police Station, denies Kachingwe was assaulted in police custody, saying he only learnt of the allegations after the voice note went viral. “If the issues were reported to us rather than social media, we would have investigated and dealt with officers involved,” he says.

Reports of police misconduct rise

As the civil courts examine the charges against Kachingwe, the police oversight body will be investigating his own claims against officers. It has a dismal record.

Established by law in 2020, the commission receives and investigates complaints by the public against the police. It has received 285 complaints over the years but 186 of them remain under investigation. Only 50 investigations have been resolved, 10 were withdrawn and 39 complaints are categorised as “pending”.

The body’s complaints log is a troubling look into the misconduct of Malawian police. It includes 37 complaints of physical assault and nine reports of wrongful death in police custody. One complaint documents the case of a 13-year-old boy whose hands were amputated allegedly due to police negligence. Another case has parallels with Kachingwe’s: a security guard died allegedly due to police action.

Many of the cases remain unresolved in part because of collusion within the police force, says the oversight body’s commissioner, Christopher Tukula. “There is still a tendency to protect each other or conceal information among officers,” he told a parliamentary committee earlier this month. “There is a failure to report issues to oversight institutions in fear of reprisals.”

The commission is also struggling with limited resources and inadequate training for investigators.

All this leaves Kachingwe in painful limbo. “I’m heartbroken and frustrated,” he says to *The Continent*. ■

From Paris, with notes

African athletes performed brilliantly at the Olympics. Let's make sure more of them get the opportunity next time.

Michelle Katami in Paris

The Olympic Games have come to a spectacular end. As the flag passes to Los Angeles, the host of the 2028 edition, it's worth taking stock of Africa's performance in Paris.

Represented by 51 countries, Africa had 951 athletes at the games. Of these, 39 athletes (from 12 countries) won medals: 13 gold, 12 silver and 14 bronze. These were spread across an impressive array of disciplines, including athletics, gymnastics, boxing, rugby, modern pentathlon, and taekwondo.

But there appears to be plenty of room for improvement. Although it's a slight improvement on the 37 medals from the Tokyo games in 2020, the hope was that the continent would for the first time get at least 50 medals from Paris.

Kenya maintained its African supremacy with four golds, two silvers and five bronzes – a credit to the nation's athletic prowess. The country was ranked 17th overall, and second in athletics – where only the United States is ahead of it.

It was rather embarrassing to see powerful and immensely talented Nigeria walk away empty-handed, despite 88 athletes participating in 12 disciplines.

Then again, its sports managers somehow managed to forget to enter a qualified athlete in the 100m race and had no bike for the cyclist they *did* remember to enter in the correct race.

South Africa and Egypt had the biggest contingents, both bringing nearly 150 athletes, but only managed six and three medals respectively.

Given the clear talent of the African athletes, the blame for the continent's poor performance must lie elsewhere: in mismanagement, weak institutions, the absence of proper infrastructure and investment, and failures to incorporate cutting-edge sports science.

Given the clear talent of the athletes, the blame for Africa's poor performance must lie elsewhere: in mismanagement, weak institutions, the absence of proper infrastructure

For Africa to harvest more medals in Los Angeles, preparations must start now. The impetus for this resides with the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa, and must flow from there down to individual countries.

From the reporter's notebook

The Summer Olympic Games will forever be unforgettable for me. I was accredited under the Olympic Committee's gender equality quota – a privilege that gave me access to all competition venues. Memorably, I watched my favourite tennis player Novak Djokovic play at the historic Roland Garros against Stefanos Tsitsipas, to an unbelievable crowd.

Logistically, meals were a big challenge – mainly exorbitantly priced fast food at the stadium; and movement between venues was not for the unfit or stuffed. Cursed be those flights of staircases at Stade de France, my main home once track and field got under way.

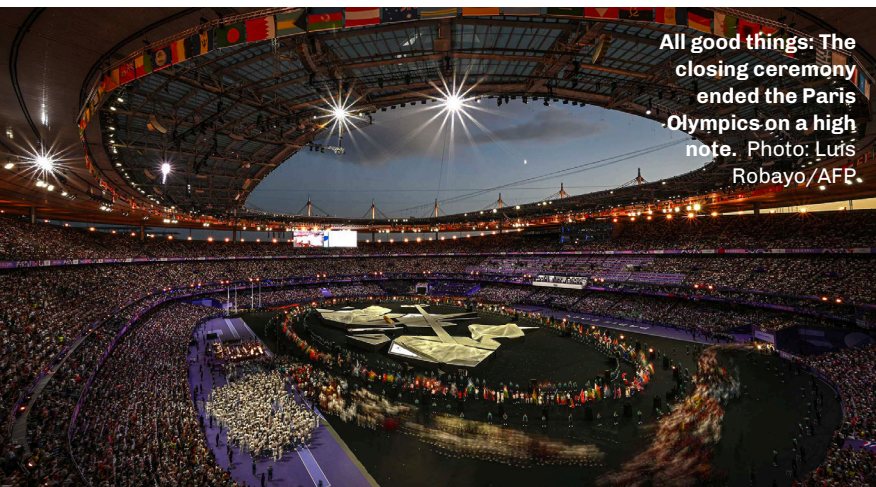
The athletes are of course the MVPs but spectators don't rank too far behind. The stands were constantly

full, the cheers were deafening and the chants are still ringing in my ears. An incredible, unforgettable atmosphere! The Parisians did not disappoint and other nationalities turned up too, so it wasn't only about the French athletes getting that amazing fans' energy.

I particularly enjoyed the evening sessions under floodlights and the clear Parisian sky.

Although I loved the Kenyan performances, my most memorable moments were watching Botswana's Letsile Tebogo win the men's 200m sprint; and the joy of Saint Lucia's Julien Alfred winning the women's 100m gold. That's what the Olympics is all about: the emergence of new greats.

Covering the 2024 Olympic Games was exhausting yet monumental. And Les Champs-Élysées will probably be booming in my ears for some time. ■



South Sudan is revelling in its Olympic joy

After a long, hard road to Paris, we aimed for the sky and reached the stars.

Adhieu Majok

I can still hear the chants of “SSD! [South Sudan] SSD!” reverberating. It has been a whirlwind few years, and an even faster-paced summer for the Bright Stars – South Sudan’s men’s basketball team.

Africa’s first-ranked basketball team propelled itself to the world stage by becoming the continent’s only men’s basketball team to qualify for the 2024 Summer Olympics.

The journey to Paris 2024 was not easy. Just 13 years ago, South Sudan did not exist as a country, and the team’s players were scattered worldwide, displaced by the decades-long civil war.

Against that history, they arrived in France – united under the leadership of Luol Deng, the president of the South Sudan Basketball Federation, and head coach Royal Ivey.

I attended two of the team’s pre-Olympic friendlies in London and its final group-stage game against Serbia in Lille, France.

In the pre-Olympic games, basketball



Network: South Sudan’s JT Thor on the hoop post-dunk in their match against the US. Photo: Sameer Al-Doumy/AFP

fans were stunned when the Bright Stars lost to the world’s number one, the United States, by just one point.

Praise rained down from some of the sport’s greatest including LeBron James and Team USA head coach Steve Kerr. A media storm ensued. One thing had been made clear: Team South Sudan was not to be underestimated.

Hundreds of South Sudanese fans from all over the world, including South Sudan, Australia, Europe and North America, brought an energy that was simply unmatched.

Clad in SSD basketball t-shirts and beaded necklaces and bracelets with the country’s colours, they waved flags and chanted “SSD! SSD!”, singing and dancing



Starring brightly: South Sudan celebrate after their victory against Puerto Rico.

Photo: Christina Pahnke/sampics/Getty Images

to traditional music.

Even after the US game, fans gathered outside the O2 Arena chanting “SSD! SSD!” as supporters of our opponents watched our celebratory spirit after the loss with amazement.

We entered the Olympics on a high, defeating Puerto Rico 90-79 during our first game. In the second game against the US, the Americans came back with a vengeance, defeating us.

Ultimately, South Sudan failed to reach the quarterfinals. Despite this, the team received a hero’s welcome in Juba, just a few days ago, including from President Salva Kiir who has promised to continue supporting sports development.

Despite bowing out of the Olympics earlier than we hoped for, the Bright Stars remain winners to many of us.

They brought a welcome respite from the negative media coverage that

South Sudan is typically in the headlines for: ongoing armed conflicts and a deteriorating economy. They showed the world the hope that determination, investment and great leadership can bring to the country’s story.

Seeing our country’s name associated with something so positive, and on the world stage and in the media, fills us with immense sense of pride and affirms the South Sudanese often challenging self-determination journey.

The team may not have left with a medal but they cemented their place in the hearts of old fans, won new fans and reaffirmed a people. ■

Adhieu Majok is an analyst and writer pursuing a public health master's degree at the UK's University of Manchester. Her writing focuses on South Sudanese feminism, politics and peace-building.

Oh, but how quickly the glory fades

Again and again, African athletes are celebrated today and forgotten tomorrow.

Kalungi Kabuye

Botswana's Olympic athletes returned from Paris on Tuesday to a hero's welcome. Their plane received a water salute on the runway, and Gaborone's international airport was packed with jubilant crowds – President Mokgweetsi Masisi among them.

The athletes were then whisked off to the national stadium, where tens of thousands of fans had gathered to celebrate their success.

The star of the show was undoubtedly Letsile Tebogo.

The young sprinter shocked the world to win the men's 200m, and anchored a phenomenal silver medal-winning performance in the 4x400m relay.

The president urged the crowd to shower the athletes with gifts, and announced the reward of two houses for Tebogo, and a house each for the rest of the relay team.

Two decades ago, Uganda's Dorcus Inzikuru was also awarded a house,



Fleeting glory: Dorcus Inzikuru won gold for Uganda in 2005. Now authorities want to bulldoze the house she was given. Photo: M Dadswell/Getty Images

but that was about it. She was the first Ugandan woman to win a gold medal in a major international contest: the 3,000m steeplechase at the World Athletics Championships in Helsinki in 2005.

When she got back to Kampala, Parliament held a special session in her honour, and she was invited to dine with President Yoweri Museveni. He promised her a car, a house and a stadium in her honour in her hometown of Arua,



according to reports from the *New Vision* newspaper.

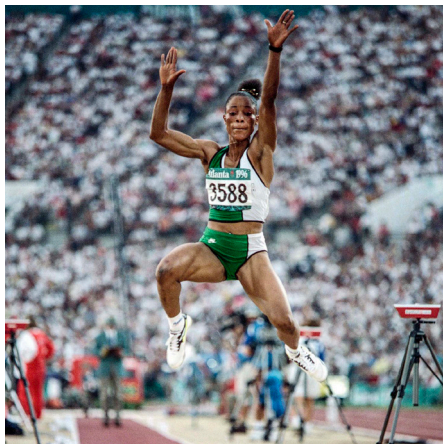
The car never materialised. The small local stadium bearing her name is so dilapidated that goats graze on its field. And local authorities want to demolish her house to make way for a new road. Usually, homeowners would receive compensation for this – but Inzikuru was never given the property's title deed.

How quickly we forget our heroes.

Just ask Chioma Ajunwa. In Atlanta in 1996, in the long jump, she became the first – and, to this day, only Nigerian to win an individual gold medal at the Olympics.

On her return, Nigeria declared a three-day public holiday, and decorated her as a Member of the Order of Niger. She appeared on TV and toured the country in a motorcade, according to *Bella Naija*.

By 2003, the glitter of her gold was a



(Top) Josia Thugwane was the first black South African athlete to win gold at the Olympics. Photo: Georges Gobet/AFP

(Above) Chioma Ajunwa is the only Nigerian to ever win an individual gold medal at the Olympics. Photo: Patrick Hertzog/Pool/AFP

distant memory. Ajunwa was no longer fêted by the country's sporting fraternity, but complained about being overlooked and ignored – perhaps because she was (and remains) critical about the quality of sports administration in the country.

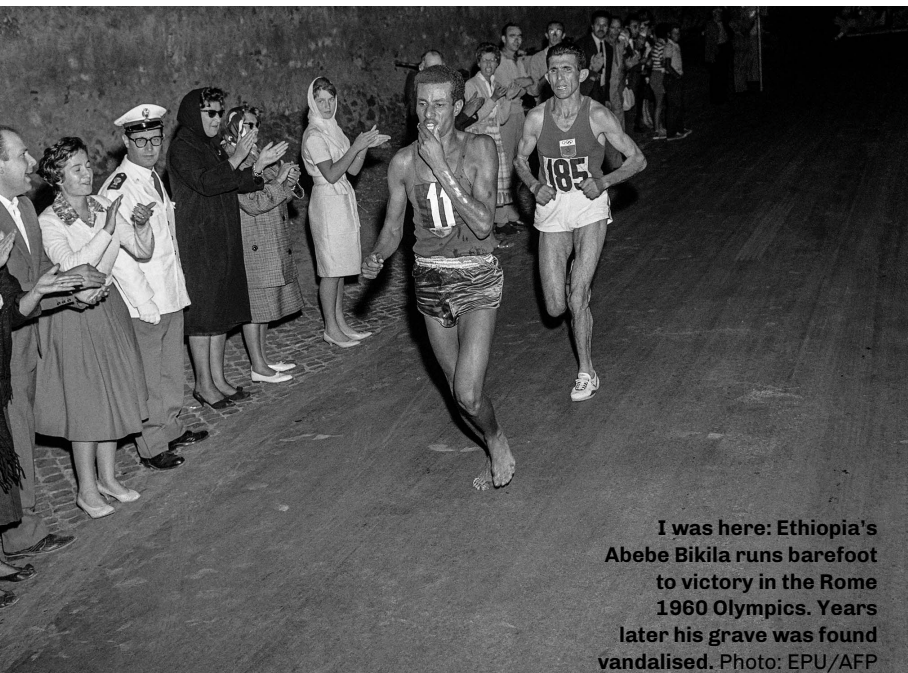
“I toiled so much for this country but then I was dumped,” Ajunwa told *Vanguard* newspaper. “That I could be the only individual gold medal winner for Nigeria in over half a century of participation in the Olympics and still be treated like a scourge, I couldn't believe it.”

Her story is echoed by Josia Thugwane, the first black person to win an Olympic gold medal for South Africa. He ran, and won, the men's marathon in Atlanta 1996 – just two years after the end of apartheid.

And he did it with no formal training, while working as a janitor at a coal mine.

“I toiled so much for this country but then I was dumped. That I could be the only individual gold medal winner for Nigeria in over half a century of participation in the Olympics and still be treated like a scourge, I couldn't believe it.”

At the time, Thugwane's against-all-odds victory seemed to symbolise the promise of the new South Africa, and he was treated accordingly: there were endorsement deals, parades, and a



I was here: Ethiopia's Abebe Bikila runs barefoot to victory in the Rome 1960 Olympics. Years later his grave was found vandalised. Photo: EPU/AFP

Golden glory: Olympic champ Letsile Tebogo got a hero's welcome home in Gaborone on Tuesday.

Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan/
AFP



meeting with president Nelson Mandela.

But when ESPN checked in on him a couple of decades later, the crew found Thugwane at a farmhouse in rural Gauteng.

All that spoke to his glory days were two pictures on the wall: one with Mandela, and another in which he is surrounded by excited school children. The tracksuit he wore so proudly in Atlanta was tucked away in a closet.

He spent his days watching television, and his evenings tending to cattle. He wasn't living out his dreams.

"My dream was to help the young and talented athletes in South Africa. I failed in this goal because I don't have the money from the government or sponsors to help them," he said.

Wherever you look, there are similar stories: Charles Asati, part of the Kenyan team that won gold in the 4x400m relay

in Munich in 1972, lives alone in western Kenya in a house without electricity, according to *The Nation*; Eridadi Mukwanga and Leo Rwabogo, the boxers who won Uganda's first Olympic medals at the 1986 Games in Mexico City, both died destitute.

And, speaking of faded glory: in Ethiopia, which treats its athletes better than most, the tombstones of Abebe Bikila and Mamo Wolde were vandalised in 2006.

The two marathon runners, who between them won the 1960, 1964 and 1968 Olympic marathon gold medals, laid the foundation for Ethiopia's distance-running dynasty.

But no one bothered to repair the damage done to their gravestones, until a Japanese photographer happened upon them many years later and raised funds for their restoration. ■

South African democracy: A falling star?

South Africa's new government inherits more than an incumbent president. It also takes over a country in democratic crisis.

One of Africa's most admired democracies since its transition from apartheid to racial equality, the country has struggled with poverty, unemployment, inequality, and corruption, leaving many citizens questioning their political system.

Since 2011, Afrobarometer surveys have documented a drop of 29 percentage points in South Africans' support for democracy, from 72% to 43% – the largest

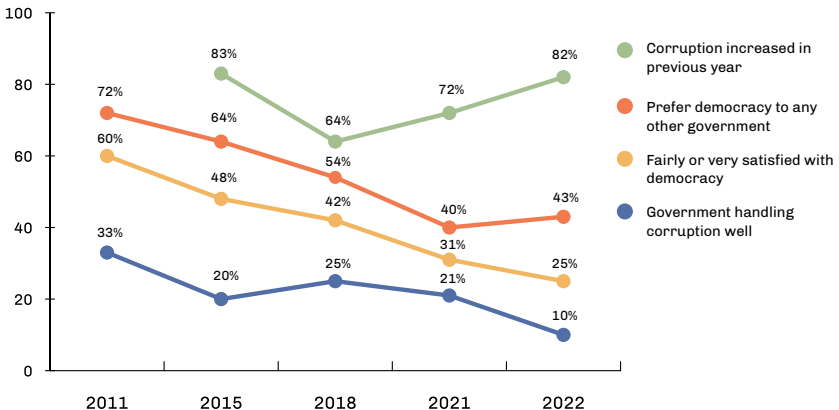
slide on the continent.

Satisfaction with democracy has plunged 35 points, to just 25%.

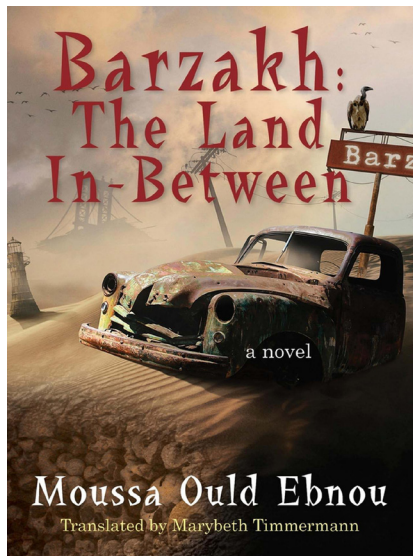
The majority who see corruption as increasing has climbed back up to 82%, after dipping to 64% during a brief period of hope at the start of President Cyril Ramaphosa's first term in 2018. And the minority who say the government is doing a good job of fighting corruption shrank further, from 33% to 10%.

With a new administration, the question is whether votes for change in the recent elections produce results that restore popular faith in democracy. ■

Trends in democratic attitudes and perceived corruption | South Africa | 2011-2022



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.



Cruelty stings like sand in a desert breeze

A rare translation brings reflections on humanity back from the future.

Jacqueline Nyathi

Barzakh: *The Land In-Between* opens with a prelude from the far future: archaeologists are excavating the memories and consciousness of Gara, a long-dead man from the Mauritanian Sahara, by processing crystals extracted

from his skull. Then we shift to Gara's perspective – his memories of living as an enslaved boy, then jumping forward in time to our near-future, where his descendants rule over an authoritarian desert nation on a dying Earth. Gara is a disillusioned time-traveller searching in vain for a better version of humanity, who he had once assumed would one day evolve away from brutality and cruelty.

Barzakh explores Mauritanian life and culture through an evocative depiction of the life of desert dwellers and nomads, and the desert economy, with a piercing examination of slavery and racism.

Its science fiction profits from the construction and operation of vividly imagined facilities in the “useless” desert that store and reprocess radioactive waste from the depleted and polluted planet. Of course, at the cost of the workers who are forced to work in them, and of any remaining desert-dwelling communities and surrounding wildlife. Naturally, there's a guerilla movement called “Save the Sahara”, a group of former nomads, fighting to save the land.

Moussa Ould Ebnou's novel sets itself apart by being a rare English translation from that part of the continent.

His visions of desert life are dreamy and his style and pacing are meditative and slow, adding to the feeling of traversing the desert of time; this is part of what makes this narrative feel trippy. Even those who enjoy unusual and interesting perspectives in speculative fiction won't have read many books like it. ■

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

"Sally says she's sure she saw Wavel selling sea shells on the sea shore."



Photo: Giovanni Mereghetti/UCG via Getty Images

- 1_ In which country is the Nile Delta found?
- 2_ Sierra Leone launched a re-denominated currency in 2022. What is the currency's name?
- 3_ Wavel Ramkalawan is the president of which country?
- 4_ The lilangeni is the name of which country's currency?
- 5_ Ben Amera (pictured) is Africa's largest monolith. In which country is it found?
- 6_ Who was the president of Côte d'Ivoire from 2000 to 2011?
- 7_ In which year was the African Union launched?
- 8_ Who was the first chairperson of the African Union?
- 9_ 'Guinea-Conakry' is used to refer to a) Guinea-Bissau b) Guinea or c) Equatorial Guinea?
- 10_ Which country is the top producer of honey in Africa?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

RSF coerces adults, sends child soldiers to fight its war

The paramilitary group has often grown its troop numbers by recruiting children and brutally press-gangng civilians.

Mohamed Suliman

The war which erupted in April 2023 between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia and the Sudanese National Army has displaced millions and killed tens of thousands. Knowing how the militia recruits individuals is critical to understanding its strength and sustainability. The sad reality is that these practices are often brutal, usually violate international laws, and highlight what a threat the militia poses to human rights and political stability.

The RSF emerged primarily from a restructuring of the notorious Janjaweed militia in 2013, to support the central government's counterinsurgency operations in Darfur and South Kordofan. In 2017, Sudan's Parliament passed a law legitimising its activities. Since then, it has grown rapidly. One of the first

independent military analyses by the Small Arms Survey in 2017 estimated that it had around 6,000 soldiers, but analysts said this had increased to 100,000 before the start of the ongoing war.

The RSF has achieved this through a range of tactics including co-opting foreign fighters while also recruiting children, leading to an uptick in the number of child soldiers since the start of the war. At the same time, there are widespread reports of adults being recruited through extremely brutal strategies including the use of torture and the threat that those who do not comply will be executed or denied food and medical aid. This violates numerous international laws and treaties.

Given that the end goal of RSF is to take control of the country, its coercive recruitment drives are unlikely to be curtailed any time soon. It is therefore critical for the international community – including the United Arab Emirates, which has been funding the militia – and human rights groups to exert as much pressure as possible to ensure that international laws and conventions are upheld. Unless this happens, the rise of the RSF will continue to mean an increase in misery for the people of Sudan. ■



Mohamed Suliman is a Sudanese writer based in Boston, United States. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Onboarding process: A boy races into the water in the fishing town of Robertsport, Liberia, where surfing has taken off thanks to community projects aimed at throwing a lifeline to vulnerable kids.

Photo: John Wessels/AFP



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