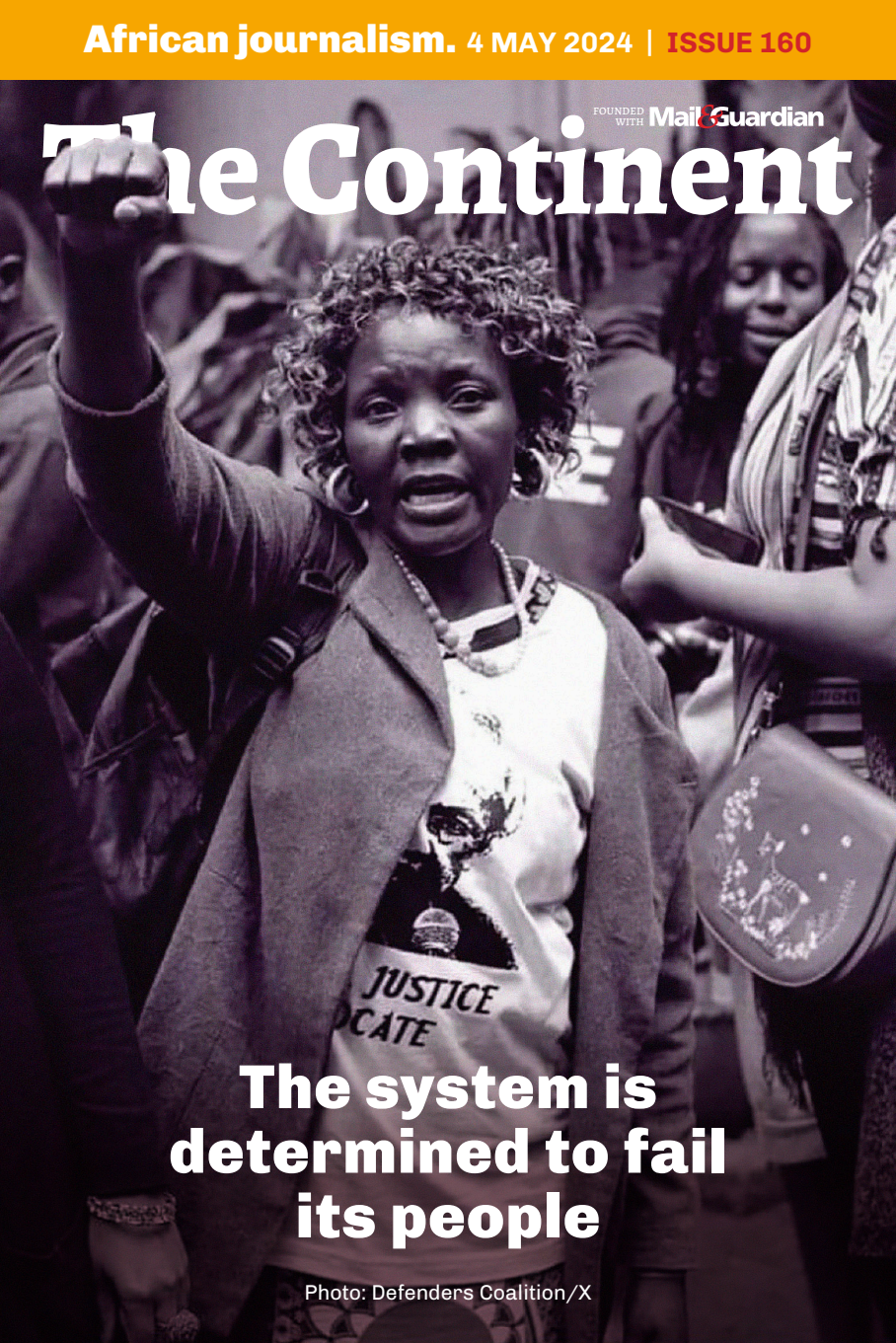


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# The Continent



**The system is  
determined to fail  
its people**

Photo: Defenders Coalition/X



**COVER:** Kenya has lost a lot in the devastating floods of recent weeks: property, infrastructure and lives, among them that of Benna Buluma. Her life had been changed by an earlier tragedy: the loss of two sons in the post-election violence that shook Kenya in 2017. She didn't curl up then. She fought. To counter the tacit acceptance that for people like her, life will be short and death brutal. To end the government neglect that makes it that way. She won on many fronts. But in the end, the system still failed her (p10). Like Buluma's family and comrades, other Kenyans are reeling with shock and searching for answers as to why the country is suffering its worst flooding in decades — and why it was so unprepared (p12).

# Inside:

- **Zambia:** Women pay for men's sins, again (p7)
- **United Kingdom:** If you can't win, rewrite reality (p8)
- **Facebook:** Flying blind into the arms of Somali authorities (p15)
- **Photos:** Piecing together a final voyage (p17)
- **Data:** Is politics even worth women's effort? (p22)
- **Review:** The world's most exciting science fiction writer (p23)
- **Elections:** Is Mauritius really that stable? (p27)



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**Unseated: Former president François Bozizé at his (then) Presidential Palace.** Photo: Sia Kambou/AFP

## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

### Bozizé faces another trial in absentia

A United Nations-backed court in Bangui issued an international arrest warrant for former president François Bozizé on Tuesday. The allegations against Bozizé include murder, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, and other human rights abuses committed during his military rule between 2009 and 2013. The 77-year-old has lived in Guinea for over a year. In his absence he was sentenced to forced labour for life last September, for conspiracy and rebellion. He heads the Coalition of Patriots for Change, a rebel alliance against current President Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### Revolutionary Climate Change Bill set to become law

All nine of South Africa's provinces have adopted the Climate Change Bill and it now needs only President Cyril Ramaphosa's signature to become law. It is the first piece of legislation in South Africa specifically addressing the effects of climate change and the country's response to the extreme weather events associated with it. It's come just in time. A powerful storm recently hit Cape Town, killing at least one person and stranding more than 500 baby turtles of the endangered loggerhead species.

## ETHIOPIA

### Fortress EU deploys stricter visa regime

Ethiopians can no longer obtain multiple-entry visas and diplomats will have to pay to get visas to the European Union. Their standard EU visa processing time has also been extended from 15 to 45 days. The EU says these new conditions are "temporary" while it assesses the situation. The situation is: Ethiopian authorities refuse to play ball in the Fortress Europe game. On Monday the EU said that Addis' cooperation in taking back asylum seekers rejected by European countries has been "insufficient".

## DRC

## Mukwege trains Iraq medics in rape care

Officials from Iraq's ministries of health, social affairs, justice and women's rights visited Nobel laureate Denis Mukwege at his clinic in South Kivu this week. They witnessed Mukwege's model of care, which includes medical, psychological and legal service for survivors, and sought to develop exchange visits between Iraq and Mukwege's Panzi Hospital. Mukwege unsuccessfully ran for the DRC presidency last December.

## ZIMBABWE

## When the banks ZiG, Zimbabweans zag

Banks began issuing Zimbabwe's latest currency to customers this week, officially valued at 14 ZiG to the dollar. But there was already a black market selling it at 20 ZiG to the dollar, leading authorities to arrest dozens of forex traders, *CiteZw* reported. Unlike the Zimbabwe dollar, the ZiG is intended to be fully convertible to other currencies to protect it from collapse, according to the finance minister.



Photo: Fadel Senna/AFP

## NORTH AFRICA

## Algeria and Morocco cancel football match

A football match between USM Alger and RS Berkane was cancelled this week after Algerian customs officials seized RS

Berkane's jerseys. Why? The map on the Moroccan team's kit shows the disputed Western Sahara region as part of Morocco. Algiers supports Sahrawi independence. The Algeria football association wants the Court of Arbitration for Sports to now declare the jersey/map a political statement and therefore against the rules.

**NIGER****Arrested publisher sent to main prison**

Soumana Idrissa Maïga, publisher of *L'Enquêteur* daily newspaper in Niger, was on Monday transferred to Niamey's main prison, according to Reporters Without Borders. Maïga was arrested last week over a story, first reported by French newspaper *Le Figaro*, which said Russian agents had bugged government offices. *L'Enquêteur* raised questions about the consequence of that development, triggering the publisher's arrest. Niger's junta has cracked down hard on journalists since its 2023 coup.

**INTERNATIONAL****Bags of Gaddafi cash haunt Sarkozy clan**

French investigators questioned former first lady Carla Bruni this week, in a case that centres around allegations that her husband, former president Nicolas Sarkozy, illegally received \$5-million in campaign finance from the late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Bruni is suspected of either witnessing or taking part in a scheme to silence Ziad Takieddine, a witness who initially claimed to have delivered three suitcases holding the money to Sarkozy's campaign between 2006 and 2007. Takieddine later recanted.



**Cryptkeeper: Changpeng Zhao, the former CEO of Binance, is off to the big house.** Photo: Jason Redmond/AFP

**CAPITALISM****A non-fungible, but token jail sentence**

The founder of Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, has been sentenced to four months in prison in the United States. US prosecutors, who sought a three-year jail term for Changpeng Zhao, say he allowed users to launder money through the platform. Zhao pleaded guilty last year and Binance agreed to pay fines of more than \$4-billion in the settlement. In Nigeria, authorities are also currently investigating the company. Binance executive Tigran Gambaryan is in jail there while his boss, Nadeem Anjarwalla, fled Nigeria in March.

## UGANDA

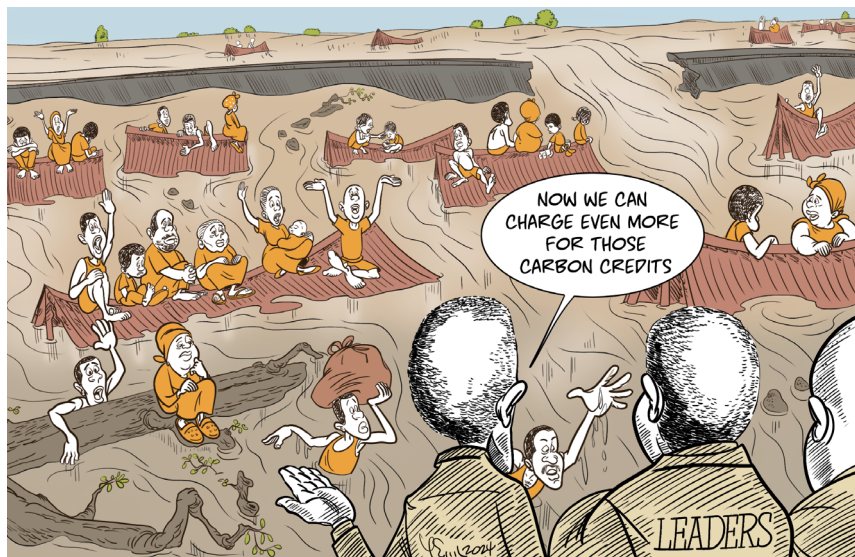
## UK thwaps speaker and cronies for graft

The United Kingdom has imposed sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, on three Ugandan politicians, including Anita Among, the speaker of Parliament. Britain says that they were involved in the theft of “thousands of iron sheets” from a project meant to aid people in Karamoja, where over 60% live in poverty. The other two officials are former ministers Agnes Nandutu and Mary Goretti Kitutu. Without denying the theft, the speaker’s publicists dismissed the allegation, saying she was being punished for passing Uganda’s anti-homosexuality law.

## BURKINA FASO

## Junta’s blacklist grows even longer

The military government has suspended even more foreign media outlets over their coverage of a Human Rights Watch report accusing its army of killing 223 people in February, after accusing them of “complicity” with armed insurgents. The junta, which seized power two years ago, denied the accusations and initially suspended the BBC and Voice of America for reporting on them. It has since added TV5 Monde, Deutsche Welle, *Le Monde* and *Ouest-France*, *The Guardian* newspaper and African outlets APAnews and Ecofin Agency, to the blacklist.



# Zambia

## Men offside, but women in penalty box

**One of the best women's football teams in Africa might miss the Olympics thanks to men's nonsense.**

**Z**ambia's women's football team could be barred from participating in the 2024 Olympics because of a corruption crisis – even though the crisis in question has nothing to do with them.

The president of the Football Association of Zambia (FAZ), Andrew Kamanga, its general secretary Reuben Kamanga and two others were arrested and charged with graft. Zambian authorities allege that they took more than \$16,500 from the government to fund the travel of two unassociated individuals to Afcon 2024 in Côte d'Ivoire earlier this year. They deny wrongdoing.

Following the arrests, football's governing body Fifa instructed FAZ to call its annual general meeting and address the issue there, but the Zambian high court issued an injunction against the meeting. On Tuesday, Fifa said that failing to hold

the meeting showed the “undue influence by third parties” which is prohibited and could get FAZ suspended.

FAZ argues that its suspension would rule the Copper Queens out of the Olympics and the Women's Afcon, for which they have already qualified, as national teams can't participate in international tournaments when their home associations are suspended.

The saga is the latest in a pattern of costly misconduct and dodgy dealings by sports managers that undermine the hard work of athletes.

But sportspeople are fighting back. In Kenya, athletes staged a protest against athletics bosses in March. And in Cameroon the legendary Samuel Eto'o – now the federation president – is being investigated for alleged match-fixing. ■



**Innocent bystanders: Zambia's women's side cheer after a friendly match.** Photo: S. Widmann/Getty Images

# United Kingdom

## ‘Rwanda deal’ made possible by legislating lies into reality

To take control of a debate it could not win in court, the ruling party has turned its argument into law.

**W**hen its new law came into force this week, Britain’s Home Office released a video of officers aggressively rounding up asylum-seekers and locking them up. According to local media reports, border force officials are now summarily detaining asylum seekers when they come in for routine case appointments. To make all this possible, the UK’s ruling Conservative Party had to go full Orwell.

In his novel *1984*, George Orwell modelled a dystopian society on the Soviet Union – a country where the state decided what counted as truth, regardless of the facts. He probably didn’t imagine that his own government, in 2024, would also get into the business of legislating reality.

Last week, Britain’s Parliament passed the Safety of Rwanda Act. This proclaimed – against all evidence and arguments to the

contrary – that “the Republic of Rwanda is a safe country” for the purposes of migration. It also ordered immigration officers and courts to “conclusively treat the Republic of Rwanda as a safe country” – regardless of the facts.

This extraordinary move to write its preferred reality into law, came after the Supreme Court ruled last year that Rwanda is *not* a safe country for asylum seekers and refugees, finding “serious and systemic defects” in how it handles asylum seekers. The UN Refugee Agency says that under a similar deal with Israel, Rwanda clandestinely sent some of the asylum seekers back to Uganda, their country of origin, where they risked persecution.

Frustrated in the courts, but intent on deporting asylum seekers to evade its responsibilities under international refugee law, the British government whipped its ruling party MPs into legislating a new reality into place. ■



**Friends to the end: It's now illegal for Rwanda not to be safe for migrants, we guess?** Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP



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# Benna Buluma 1966-2024

**Mama Victor, as she was known by all, fought against a system that was determined to fail her.**

**Njeri Kimani**

**T**he first sign that something was wrong came at last week's launch of the Missing Voices Annual Report. There was one conspicuous absence. Where was Benna Buluma? Then news broke that her house in Mathare had been swept away.

Flash floods in Kenya have devastated parts of Nairobi, Nakuru, Kajiado and River Tana counties. In the worst incident, in Maai Mahiu town in Nakuru, more than 70 people died when a dam burst and flooded a village. Across the country, heavy rains have burst rivers, dams and bridges, claiming at least 180 lives and displacing more than 190,000.

Buluma's body was found amid the debris in Mathare, along with at least 30 others. They say she was killed by the flooding from the Mathare River, which burst its banks. I say she was murdered – by the same failures of governance she spent so much of her life railing against.

Mama Victor, as everyone called her, was a household name in Mathare and all informal settlements in Nairobi. She lost two sons – Victor, 24, and Benard, 26 – when they were shot by a trigger-happy police officer during the post-election

violence in 2017. A photograph of her, wailing next to the bodies of her dead sons, became a defining image of that terrible period. It awoke a rage inside her.

“Three people were taken to the morgue that day. Two had come from inside me,” she said. “After their death there was nothing left to fear.”

She dedicated the rest of her life to the fight against extrajudicial executions, becoming an outspoken and effective advocate for Kenya's poorest and most-marginalised communities.

And boy, did she fight.

She invited other mothers of slain sons to create the Victims and Survivors Network. She offered counselling, collected data, turned up at police stations when there was a suspicious death. She named and shamed government officials and police officers she believed to be complicit.

“Bullets in the hands of rogue cops are a dangerous weapon,” she said. “It prevents mothers from seeing their children grow into adulthood. A privilege that was stolen from me and so many others.”

It emerged that Mama Victor died alongside Jacinta Adhiambo, one of the network's founding members. “Jacinta



**Mama Victor:**  
**Benna Buluma**  
 campaigned tirelessly,  
 from drafting  
 memoranda, holding  
 protests and sitting in  
 committees, to making  
 porridge for children  
 in Kenya's slums.

Photo: Peace Brigades  
 International – Kenya  
 Project/Facebook

went to Mama Victor's house for refuge, thinking it was safe because it was concrete and had an iron roof," said Ruth Mumbi, a Mathare community activist. "They died with Jacinta's two children and Mama Victor's two grandchildren."

In life, any time a woman lost a child to a police bullet, they would call Mama Victor first – and she would always be there for them. At one point she rallied a bus full of women to Kianjakoma, in eastern Kenya, to show solidarity with the parents of Benson Njiru (22) and Emmanuel Mutura (19), allegedly murdered by police officers. She documented these stories, and the impact of extrajudicial executions on the women left behind, in a book called *They Were Us*.

Her wins came at a cost. She was threatened, stalked, intimidated, and harassed by strangers she was convinced were law enforcement officials.

This casual labourer, who made her living doing domestic work in Eastleigh,

had struck fear in the hearts of some of the most powerful people in the city.

I knew Mama Victor for six years, but I really got to know her last year at Missing Voices, a coalition to end enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Kenya. She campaigned tirelessly: drafting memoranda, writing press releases, holding street protests, sitting in technical committees. We bonded as we made porridge together and served it to kids in the slums.

She will be remembered for her valour, and her decision not to stand by when it came to condemning lawlessness. She gave her all to a system that was determined to fail her. It did fail her: she was silenced, ultimately, by flooding her government should have protected her against.

May Mama Victor's soul rest in peace, even as her struggle continues. ■

---

*Njeri Kimani is a Kenyan journalist and human rights defender*

# Kenya



Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

## Burst dams, washed-away bridges and lost lives

The worst floods in 30 years took the country by surprise – despite the president styling himself as a global climate-change campaigner.

**Lydia Namubiru**

**S**outhern Kenya is the best Kenya. Its lush green landscapes spread from the dramatic escarpments of the Rift Valley in the west, through Nairobi's highlands, down to the Masai Mara's

expansive plains and on to the sweeping beaches of Lamu, Malindi and Mombasa in the east. But it has taken quite the beating over the past two weeks.

Rains that started in the middle of March have been historic in their intensity. Bursting rivers and dams, and



causing flash floods that have destroyed lives, homes and infrastructure.

The catastrophes began with the swelling of the Mathare River in the early hours of 23 April. Gushing through the densely populated, low-income area named after the river, the waters swept aside shanty houses, children and adults. At least 40 bodies have been pulled from the river so far, but at least two dozen residents are still missing, according to the Mathare Social Justice Centre.

Three days later, at least 10 people died when a lorry crossing the swollen River Kwa Muswii in Makueni County overturned. The next day, busloads of travellers were stranded at Kona Punda when the River Tana burst, damaging a section of the Garsen-Lamu highway.

Meanwhile, in the capital Nairobi, major roads like the Thika Superhighway and the Eastern Bypass were flooding



in several places, to the point of being impassable or nearly so.

The most shocking incident would come on 29 April, near the Maai Mahiu town of Nakuru county. Deep in the night, a water channel built in the 1930s burst its walls and sent water and mud downhill, flooding at least 100 homes. At last count, more than 70 people had died.

On the heels of that tragedy, the Talek River in the Masai Mara burst its banks on Wednesday, flooding pricy resorts and forcing the evacuation of tourists. At one resort, tourists spent the night perched on water tanks to escape the rising waters gushing through their booked accommodations.

Reeling from the scale of it all, Kenyans have blamed everyone and everything.

President William Ruto has blamed climate change, which he has consistently identified as the greatest challenge facing Africa. In turn, he and his government are being blamed by traumatised survivors – just the latest in the succession of governments that have failed them. “If anyone claims my mother died because of climate change, just know they are

lying. It was the government that killed her,” Collins Obondo told *Al Jazeera*. He is the son of activist Benna Buluma, who drowned in Mathare on 23 April.

“My mother spent years fighting for the neglected people of the slums,” Obondo said. “And it was that same government neglect that killed her.”

The Institution of Surveyors of Kenya blamed a general disregard for planning and zoning regulations by property developers, and on the destruction of wetlands as people settled into riverside areas like Mathare.

But all agree on one thing: Kenya was just not ready.

This is despite Ruto’s very public warnings on the danger of climate change, and after Nairobi’s hosting of the inaugural Africa Climate Summit last year. But speaking in Maai Mahiu on Tuesday, he admitted that Kenya doesn’t have a plan. “We must have a complete plan to manage our affairs in the context of the new normal, the new reality of climate change.” ■



**Utter disaster:**  
A girl stands next to a damaged car buried in mud after flash floods tore through the village of Kamuchiri, near Maai Mahiu, on 29 April. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

# Facebook aids and abets Somalia's war against journalists

**Meta's community standards are supposed to protect users from bad or distressing content. Instead, they are protecting the government from criticism.**

**Abdalle Mumin**

**R**eferring to my interview with exiled Somali journalist Mohamud Carab, Facebook sent him this message on 10 April 2023: "Your post goes against our Community Standards on dangerous individuals and organisations."

In the interview, I, a veteran editor, recounted my harrowing experiences within Mogadishu Central Prison and the egregious human rights violations perpetrated by the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (Nisa).

Despite its clear public interest, Facebook removed the interview without further explanation for the takedown, even when it reinstated it after an appeal from the journalist.

In Somalia, Facebook has evolved into a primary news platform and communication channel, indispensable for both locals and the diaspora. Its own figures say it has 2.4-million users in Somalia. That would be more than 16% of the Somali population.

As traditional Somali media has

struggled, Facebook has become a major source for breaking news on both political and security matters. Federal and regional authorities, as well as al-Shabaab militants, use it to disseminate their propaganda and shape public discourse.

The platform does little to protect journalists. It is hard enough already to be a journalist in Somalia. Every day we navigate conflict zones and endure censorship, harassment and targeted violence from both the state and al-Shabaab. Facebook exacerbates these challenges.

You can trace the crackdown on critical journalism via Facebook back to June 2019 when 16 local journalists and citizens had their accounts suspended or permanently closed because of their dissenting views, as Amnesty International reported.

In its 2022 offensive against al-Shabaab, the Somali government found a new pretext for further stifling dissenting voices. The Somali Journalists Syndicate – of which I am the secretary-general – documented dozens of cases of Facebook suspending the accounts of legitimate

journalists or removing their content.

This was facilitated by mass reporting, a favored tactic of Somali authorities including abuse of Facebook's Community Standards, facilitated by Nisa, the National Communication Authority, and the Ministry of Information. Journalists reporting on insecurity, allegations of corruption and government failures in safeguarding civilian populations, particularly in Mogadishu, find themselves targeted.

Facebook's own flawed moderation system, ill-equipped to comprehend content in the Somali language, has made this abuse of its community standard easy, leaving journalists vulnerable to arbitrary account suspensions. Critical content – including articles, video interviews, and news reports implicating government entities in cases of torture and sexual violence – are routinely removed or restricted, exacerbating the erosion of press freedom in Somalia.

**Facebook's flawed moderation system, ill-equipped to comprehend content in the Somali language, has made this abuse of its community standard easy**

The consequences are felt offline, too: in March this year, journalist Sugaal Moalim Mohamud, who is employed by a state media outlet, was suspended and had his salary cut after he published a Facebook post criticising the conduct of Somali government military operations.



**Targeted: Abdalle Ahmed Mumin was arrested in on 'security-related charges' in a crackdown on media critical of the state.** Photo: Hasan Ali Elmi/AFP

While advocacy groups have demanded accountability from Facebook, the platform's silence persists.

And government officials have hinted that Facebook's role in this is not just passive. In June 2023 the deputy minister of information, Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adala, said the government had reached an agreement with Facebook to curb content related to al-Shabaab. There is no clarity over what this means, or who determines problematic content; nor whether there are any safeguards in place to protect independent journalism.

Without meaningful intervention from Facebook and a commitment to safeguarding users' rights, the suppression of dissenting voices through online platforms will persist, perpetuating a climate of censorship and impunity. ■

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*Abdalle Mumin is the secretary-general of the Somali Journalists Syndicate*



## PHOTO ESSAY

# Adrift

**F**elipe Dana and Renata Brito won the Africa Open Format category of the 2024 World Press Photo Contest. Their winning project was prompted by a grim discovery off the coast of Tobago in May 2021: a Mauritanian boat full of dead men. The two journalists set out to investigate.

Many migrant vessels taking the frequently used but increasingly treacherous Atlantic Ocean route from

West Africa to Europe never arrive. Caught in the dangerous currents, they find themselves adrift and end up as “ghost ships” in the Caribbean.

Dana and Brito’s visual investigation gathers forensic evidence through a network of sources across three continents to identify one of the men on the May 2021 “ghost ship” as Alassane Sow, bringing closure to his family in Mali.

**Photos: © Felipe Dana and Renata Brito, Associated Press**





**Above: Young fishermen walk into the ocean to board an artisanal fishing boat in Nouakchott in Mauritania.**

**Below: Residents walk around the central market area in Selibaby.**



**Above: The wreck of a pirogue lies on a beach near Nouadhibou, Mauritania. Many migrants use such vessels to reach Spain's Canary Islands.**  
**Below: Moussa Sako from Mali had never seen the sea before he boarded the boat he would be rescued from 22 days later, adrift in the Atlantic.**



**Above: Djibi Koume – son of Oumar Koume, left – was among the 43 people who boarded the ill-fated boat that was found drifting off Tobago four months later. Below: A mortuary worker opens the door of a refrigerator used to store the remains of the migrants recovered from the Tobago 'ghost ship'.**



**Above:** Some of the clothing found on the deceased migrants.

**Below:** Journalist Brito texts Alassane Sow's aunt, May Sow, to check if a button-down shirt found among the remains, belonged to her nephew. A DNA test later confirmed that the shirt belonged to Alassane Sow.

# For women, electoral hurdles are higher

**M**en still hold three times as many parliamentary seats in Africa as women. Are elections fair if women don't have a fair chance of winning?

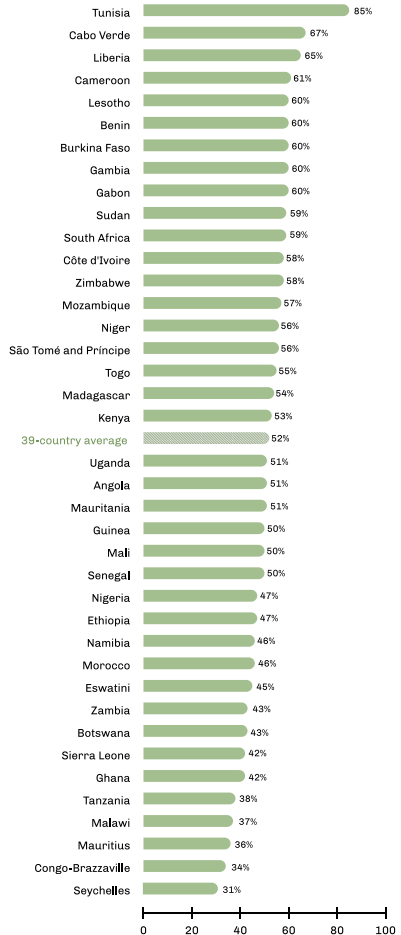
Afrobarometer surveys in 39 countries show that 75% of Africans say women should have the same chance as men to vie for political office. Majorities agree in all surveyed countries except Sudan, where 53% say men make better political leaders and should be given priority as candidates.

Support for women in politics has ticked up over the past decade (by four percentage points across 30 countries). But a woman may be discouraged from seeking office by other expected consequences of her candidacy.

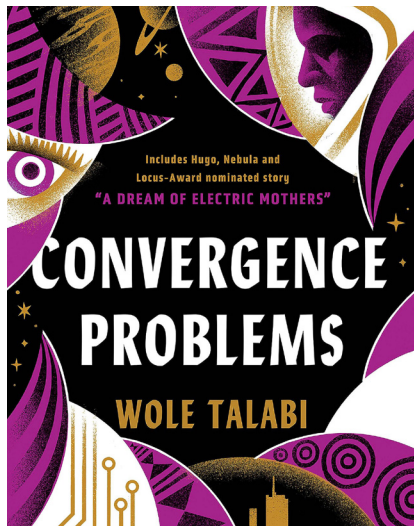
While 79% of Africans think a woman running for office will gain standing in the community, 52% consider it likely that she will be criticised, called names, or harassed, and 40% say she will probably experience problems with her family.

The expectation that female candidates will face criticism or harassment from the community is especially widespread in Tunisia (85%), Cabo Verde (67%), and Liberia (65%). ■

## Women likely to face criticism or harassment if they run for political office | 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.



## Imperfection is future-proof

This is Wole Talabi at his best, dazzling with tales of wisdom, wonder and woe.

Jacqueline Nyathi

Perhaps because of his background as an engineer and certainly because he was an early reader of science fiction, Wole Talabi is a master of literary futurism. But Talabi has said he doesn't feel constrained by genre, and much of his short fiction is a blend – a “continuum of the fantastic”.

*Convergence Problems* is a collection

that displays this literary philosophy to full effect. In *Debut*, AI makes art on its own while the Hugo- and Nebula-nominated novelette *A Dream of Electric Mothers* blends ancestral belief with technology in an imagined future.

Talabi keeps his eye firmly on the present, too, with stories like the excellent *Nigerian Dreams*, which examines migration, and *Abeokuta52*, where Nigerian citizens pay a high price for the country's development. *Abeokuta52* is our favourite of the two hermit crab stories in the collection; the other story is *Comments on your Provisional Patent Application for an Eternal Spirit Core*.

*Ganger*, a novella, imagines a post-apocalyptic Nigeria with people divided by class into arcologies and villas under a dome. *The Million Eyes of a Lonely and Fragile God* is reminiscent of the movie *Gravity*. The heartbreaking *Embers* is about a man stranded in time when the rest of the world and his village move on from oil, leading to tragic consequences.

*Saturday's Song* references the nightmare god Shigidi from Talabi's debut novel: *Shigidi and the Brass Head of Obalufon*. Included in *The Continent's* top five novels of 2023, *Shigidi and the Brass Head of Obalufon* was a finalist in the Nebula awards and nominated for the British Science Fiction awards.

*Convergence Problems* illustrates why Talabi is not just one of our favourite African writers but one of most exciting science fiction writers on the world stage today. ■

# 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**

"Was that waterfall always there or did it come to hide from TLC stans?"

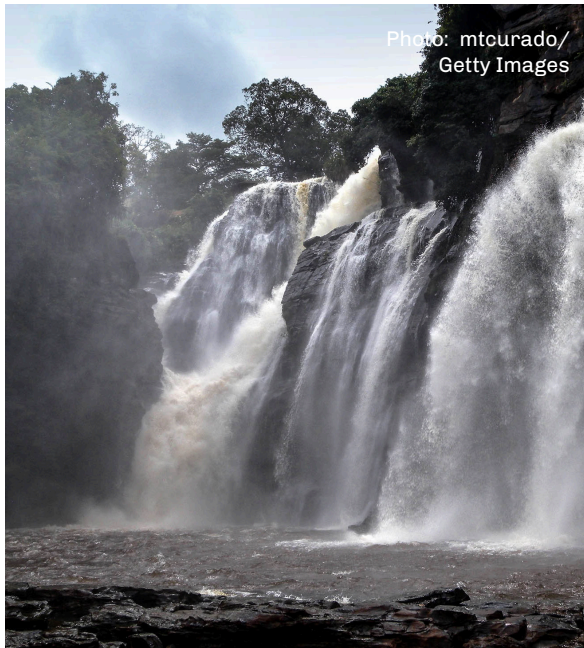


Photo: mtcurado/  
Getty Images

- 1\_** Which country celebrated the 30th anniversary of its first democratic elections on 27 April?
- 2\_** What is Mali's national currency?
- 3\_** What colour is in the middle of the Nigerian flag?
- 4\_** True or false: Togo voted in presidential elections this week.
- 5\_** What is the name of Zimbabwe's new currency?
- 6\_** Who was the first and only president of Zaire?
- 7\_** Who was the first chairperson of the Organisation of African Unity?
- 8\_** What is the Organisation of African Unity known as today?
- 9\_** Which country was previously known as Ubangi-Shari?
- 10\_** In which country are the Chutes de Boali (pictured) found?

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



Once upon a time, we conducted our lives with control and discipline. But all of that went out the window after we learned how to read, and discovered books. Book dealers are devious. They'll do anything to get you hooked. First they give you a sample. Here, they said, have a library card. Yay, free books! Read as many as you like.

Then they defunded, and closed all the libraries! And what choice did they leave us? We were hooked. So we traded our library cards in for credit cards and spent all our money on books the way our leaders spend all our money on tear gas: lavishly, with abandon, and more than a little destructively!

We enjoy non-fiction too, but have been immersed in novels of late, to take our minds off current events, if only for a while. As usual our leaders were not far from our thoughts, because they too are partial to untethering themselves from reality.

And so we were moved to think up a reading list for the next sitting of the African Union book club. For those that love to travel, like Kenya's Billy Ruto, *Around the World in Eighty Days* should do the trick, right? And Togo's Faure

Gnassingbé, who inherited the presidency from his daddy, would surely relate to *The Little Prince*.

For the Coupdashians, do you suppose *Game of Thrones* would be too on the nose? For the leaders they ousted, like Alpha Condé in Guinea and Mohamed Bazoum in Niger, Chinua Achebe's classic *Things Fall Apart* might be a better fit.

And for those well-dressed types who prefer to be fawned over by their first ladies, *The Liar, the Witch, and their Wardrobe* could very well fit the bill.

Although, when we think about the havoc their political shenanigans have wrought on our bank balance in this economy, *Les Misérables* and *Nervous Conditions* start to seem apt.

We don't know if members of the junta in Burkina Faso are avid readers, but what we do know is that they keep a close eye on the media. The latest episode of *Keeping Up With the Coupdashians* comes to us from Ouagadougou where authorities announced a two-week ban on several media houses over their coverage of a Human Rights Watch report that accuses the army of carrying out human rights abuses against civilians as part of counterinsurgency operations.

## Throw the book at 'em



**CONTINENTAL DRIFT**  
Samira Sawlani



**You mad, bro? CNN's Larry Madowo's 'negative' coverage of the floods has touched Kenyans on their studio.** Photo: Wikipedia

Burkinabè authorities deny the claims, branding reports that soldiers “summarily executed at least 223 civilians, including at least 56 children in two villages on February 25th 2024”, as baseless. And then they shut down the broadcasts of the BBC, VOA, and TV5Monde, and blocked access to the websites of *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, APA, Ecofin and Deutsche Welle. Which is all very *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* if you ask us.

Meanwhile, Chad is getting ready to run its elections in a few days. Vying for the presidency on 6 May will be transitional leader Mahamat Déby, who took over when his dad Idriss Déby Itno died in April 2021. Junior will be running against nine other candidates – including his prime minister, former opposition leader Success Masra. But Junior is of course the favourite to win, so for him we might suggest *In the Name of the Father*.

Books really are a wonderful way to find a little escape from reality, but some days there are not enough stories in the world to take our minds off the harsh realities around us.

We are writing to you from Kenya where heavy rain and flooding has taken lives, destroyed homes and ruined livelihoods.

Similar weather conditions have also been plaguing Burundi, Tanzania and Rwanda in recent weeks. It's devastating. But in and amongst it all people have also been coming together to raise funds and gather supplies for those affected.

Governments could take a page or two out of their book, instead of adding to the misery, as is their wont.

Chaos in point: because of the floods, Kenya's education ministry decided to delay the reopening of schools. Fair enough, that's probably for the best. But they announced it on social media at 1am on the day students were due to return!

Some individuals and politicians have been critical of journalists like CNN's Larry Madowo for covering the flooding in such depth. But it's not a journalist's job to give you “nice” news and do PR for the government; they're there to tell you what's really going on. Lashing out at a journalist's lack of “patriotism” and blaming outsiders isn't going to help.

If the news is getting too much, it's not unreasonable to want to escape reality, if only for a bit. But maybe instead of disappearing into *Pride and Prejudice*, we could all show a little more *Sense and Sensibility*. ■

# A democracy in danger

**Talk of supposed Mauritian stability is drowning out the country's very real democratic challenges.**

**Harry Booluck**

**M**auritius is often described as one of Africa's best democracies. After escaping military rule in the 1970s and 1980s, it developed a reputation for moderation, effective economic management and peaceful transfers of power. But ahead of elections, scheduled for November 2024, this is changing.

The current government, led by Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and his Militant Socialist Movement party, has gradually extended control over the country's electoral system and wider society. Following allegations of election-rigging in 2019, the state has become increasingly intolerant of dissent, and introduced proposals for a new Information and Communication Technologies Authority with the power to monitor and decrypt social media content. Today, academics are afraid of speaking out lest it harm their careers; the same is true for many other critical voices.

There is also concern that the creation of a new police strike force had less to do with its mandate – increasing the capacity of the security forces to deal with drug traffickers – and more to do with enabling the government to harass opponents. In some cases, critics of the government have

been arrested on “provisional charges”, and must remain in police custody despite the lack of a clear evidence that would justify prosecution.

**Today, academics are afraid of speaking out in case it harms their careers and the same is true for many other critical voices.**

As a result, while Freedom House – which measures the level of freedom around the world – still classifies Mauritius as a democracy, it also reports that the quality of civil liberties has fallen steadily since 2019. This trend is not lost on the Mauritian people: satisfaction with democracy fell to a low of just 32% in 2022, from 72% 10 years earlier.

Opposition parties have been vocal about these challenges. But the country's reputation for stability means their worries are not being heard. Unless that changes, the 2024 elections could be the worst in the country's history. ■

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Harry Booluck is a political commentator who writes for the Mauritius Times and L'Express. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



# THE BIG PICTURE

Hump day: There are several breeds of dromedary in Egypt, including the Falahi camel, bred for burden; the Maghrabi, raised for meat and milk; and the iconic Sudani, for riding, racing and selfies.

Photo: Jewel Samad/AFP



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