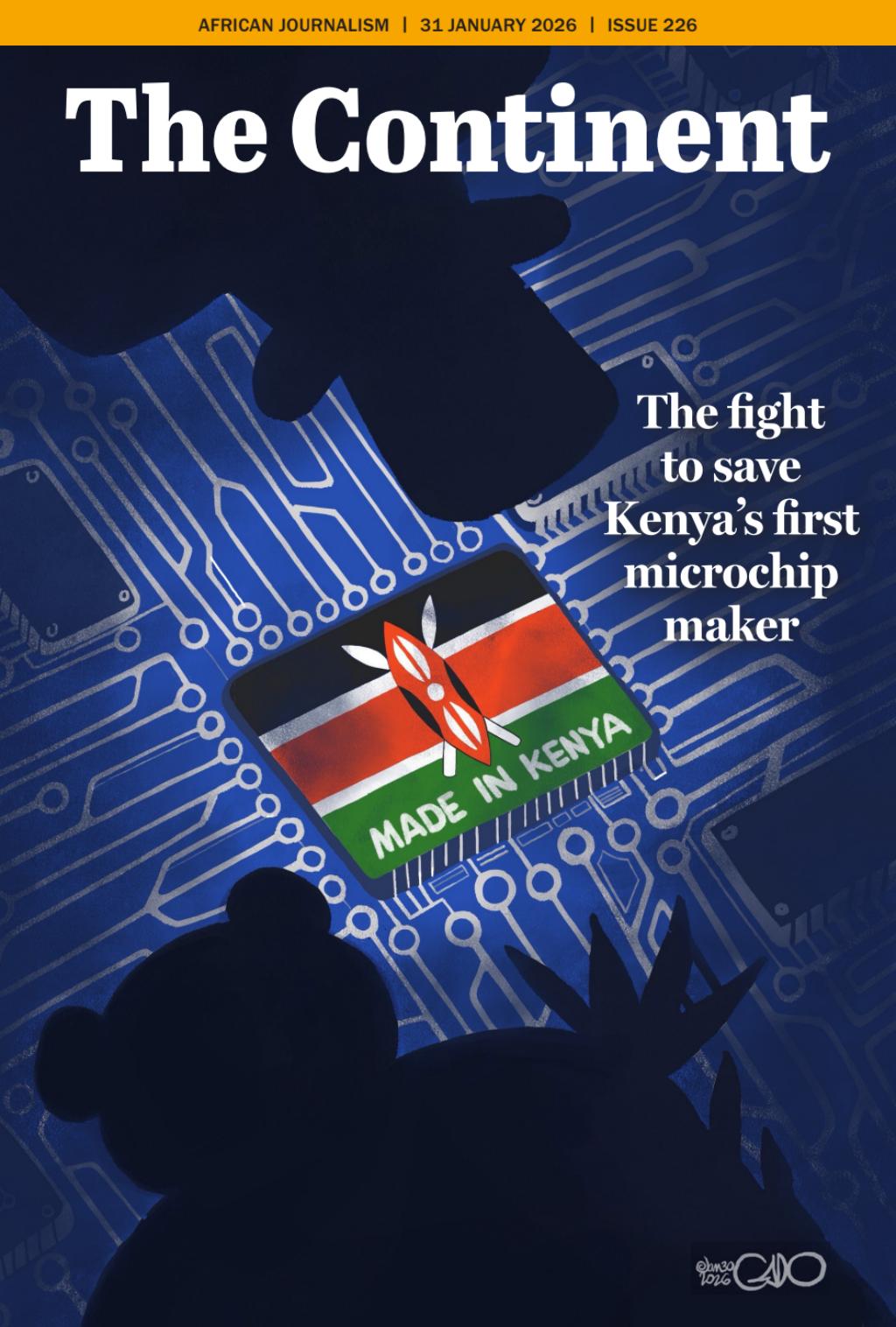
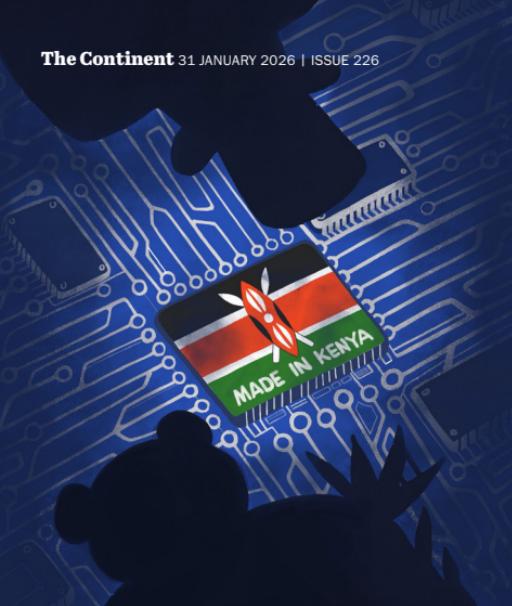


The Continent



The fight
to save
Kenya's first
microchip
maker



COVER East Africa's first semiconductor plant was built to hedge against global supply shocks. Instead, it has become collateral damage in shifting US politics. The small facility in Nyeri in the Kenyan highlands benefited from Washington's brief embrace of "friend-shoring" under Joe Biden, when Kenya was cast as a trusted partner in diversifying chip production away from East Asia. A modest US grant in 2022 gave the project credibility, access to suppliers, and hope of scaling. But with Donald Trump's return to the White House and a sharp turn toward domestic-only industrial policy, that window has closed. The whiplash exposes a hard truth: for small manufacturers in the Global South, geopolitical strategies are fickle and alignment with great-power priorities can vanish as quickly as it arrives (p13).

Inside

- 7 **Nigeria:** Yet another collapse of the national grid
- 9 **South Sudan:** The drums of war are beating
- 11 **Zimbabwe:** Church is not a safe space
- 17 **Goma:** One year of living under the M23
- 26 **Data:** On governments being the peacemakers
- 31 **Analysis:** An unlikely challenger in Djibouti

Thank you for the flowers

The Continent featured in the Global Investigative Journalism Network's just-released list of the best investigative journalism in sub-Saharan Africa. The story honoured was our Issue 200 cover story, on the Zimbabweans who were recruited to vote in Mozambique's election. The story was written by Walter Marwizi and Garikai Mafirakureva, and produced with the Henry Nxumalo Foundation. Also nominated were our news editor Christine Mungai, for her investigation into sexual harassment at Alliance Girls High School for *Africa Uncensored*, and longtime contributor Jack McBrams, who uncovered Malawi's shadow air fleet for the *Platform for Investigative Journalism*.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF



PHOTO: CAMILLE LAFFON/AFP

Moz biz: Rwandan forces guard a Total liquefied natural gas site in Cabo Delgado.

MOZAMBIQUE

We're back on track, we promise

Mozambique and TotalEnergies have formally restarted the company's \$20-billion liquefied natural gas project in Cabo Delgado, nearly five years after it was halted by deadly militant attacks. Construction was suspended in 2021. TotalEnergies said activity would ramp up in coming months, with offshore installation already under way, *Reuters* reports. President Daniel Chopo was bullish that construction should begin within 12 to 18 months. The company also pledged \$3.2-million to support recovery efforts after recent flooding in the region.

AFCON

You get a fine, you get a fine!

The football federations of Senegal and Morocco will pay nearly \$1-million for the "unsporting" behaviour seen at the Africa Cup of Nations final earlier this month. The Confederation of African Football imposed a fine of \$615,000 on Senegal; Morocco was fined about half that, *Al Jazeera* reports. Senegal coach Pape Thiaw was banned for five matches for backing a player walkout and several Moroccan players were suspended. Senegal get to keep the trophy.

ANGOLA

Debt swap in the works

Angola, which will spend 40% of its budget on paying its debts this year, is looking to refinance some loans at lower interest. It plans to secure the backing of low-interest lenders like the World Bank, on the promise that all savings will go to its health sector, *Reuters* reports. Relative to its oil wealth, Angola has strikingly poor healthcare indicators. If successful, it will join a growing list of developing countries like Belize, Ecuador, and Côte d'Ivoire, which got some debt-relief in similar negotiations.



ETHIOPIA

New sparks threaten Tigray tinderbox

Clashes between Ethiopian federal troops and Tigrayan forces in Tigray are raising fears that the region is plunging into renewed instability, even as it reels from recent war, as well as aid cuts. The fighting has forced Ethiopian Airlines to suspend flights to the region, sources told *Agence France Presse* on Thursday. Hostilities have erupted in Tsemlet, western Tigray, an area contested by forces from neighbouring Amhara. Security sources say the situation is deteriorating rapidly. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the 2020-2022 Tigray war and millions were displaced.

TANZANIA

Lobbying for a good image after killings

Tanzania has hired a United States-based lobbying firm linked to allies of President Donald Trump to help to repair strained relations with Washington after its disputed October elections. The two-year contract with the Ervin Graves Strategy Group is worth \$45,000 a month, according to *The Africa Report*. The move comes as US legislators push to review their country's ties with Tanzania after the post-election violence. Government forces reportedly killed hundreds of people to quell protesters, who were angry about what they saw as a stage-managed election.

GABON

Teachers' strike leaves blackboards dusty

Thousands of teachers in Gabon have been on strike for the past six weeks, protesting a decade-long freeze in wages. It is the first wave of unrest under President Brice Oligui Nguema, who seized power in a military coup in August 2023 and then won an election last year. Union members also demand the release of two of their leaders, who were imprisoned for supporting the strike. The government promises it is fast-tracking the review of the salary arrears, and delayed appointments and promotions, but classrooms remain empty.

MALI

No blasts – unless we say so

The Malian government will own 51% of a new company set up to produce explosives for civilian use inside the country, *Africanews* reports. The products are meant to cut reliance on imports for mining, quarrying, and major construction projects. The government's decision to hold a controlling stake in the new company – in partnership with Chinese investors – extends efforts by Bamako to curb militant groups's access to explosives. Other companies also now face stricter rules on prior authorisation, traceability, and stock monitoring.



PHOTO: HENRY NICHOLLS / AFP

Bad luck: Former Nigerian oil minister and Opec boss Diezani Alison-Madueke.

NIGERIA

Oily former minister faces charges

British prosecutors opened a corruption trial in London on Tuesday against Diezani Alison-Madueke, alleging she lived lavishly on bribes while serving as Opec's president. Alison-Madueke, Nigeria's oil minister from 2011 to 2015 under Goodluck Jonathan, is accused of taking cash, luxury goods, and other benefits from companies seeking oil contracts. She denies the charges. Several of her properties have been seized by Nigerian authorities. Two other people have also been charged with bribery offenses, including Alison-Madueke's brother.

KENYA

Pastor's poison pen dooms faithful from prison

Paul Mackenzie reportedly "masterminded" 52 more deaths by writing letters to his cult's followers from his prison cell, encouraging them to starve themselves so that they could meet Jesus. The BBC reports that the deaths took place in Binzaro village, about 30km from the remote Shakahola forest where 429 of Mackenzie's followers, including children, died earlier on similar instructions. Kenyan authorities will add new charges to Mackenzie's rap sheet. He already faces multiple



PHOTO: AP PHOTO/FILE

Shadow of death: Extremist evangelical leader Paul Mackenzie in court in 2023.

counts of manslaughter brought after the discovery of the 429 bodies in 2023.

RWANDA

Kigali seeks payment for bust asylum deal

Rwanda has launched legal action against the United Kingdom over unpaid funds linked to a now-scraped asylum deal, UK media has reported. In a case filed at The Hague, Kigali is seeking \$130-million in compensation after Britain failed to formally end the agreement. The Rwandan government says diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute failed. The plan, agreed in 2022 under then Conservative prime minister Boris Johnson, was cancelled by Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer in 2024 after only four "self-deported" volunteers arrived in Kigali.

LIBYA/ZIMBABWE

Pay back the money: 25-year debt comes due

Libya's central bank has sued Zimbabwe's finance minister and state oil company in a UK court, seeking more than \$100-million over unpaid loans dating back to 2001. The case, filed by the Libyan Foreign Bank, argues that Zimbabwe failed to repay money borrowed through a credit facility for fuel imports. A judge has given Zimbabwe until the end of the month to respond. The lawsuit highlights Zimbabwe's deep debt crisis, which left the country owing about \$21-billion and locked out of global financial markets.

NEWS

NIGERIA

Another entry in the long log of Naija blackouts

Small businesses in a powerless country are paying for a failed Bretton Woods experiment.

JUSTINA ASISHANA IN MINNA

BOLAJI Azeez runs a photocopy and printing business in Minna, Niger State. When the national electricity grid collapsed on Tuesday, he had to reprice a bulk order to cover the cost of generator fuel, irritating his client.

“He paid,” Azeez says. “But not without grumbling.”

It was Nigeria’s second national grid collapse in a week. There have been at least five countrywide power outages in the past 12 months. The grid keeps failing because an old, under-capitalised transmission system is being run with thin generation margins, a fragile gas supply, and weak commercial incentives, so even routine disturbances cascade into countrywide collapses.

The most recent incident affected all major distribution companies in the country’s 36 states, with authorities blaming a “voltage disturbance”.

A recent survey found that the average Nigerian company experienced more than 300 outages a year. The World Bank says Nigeria loses 5% to 7% of



Power struggle: A shop in Lagos charges dozens of phones overnight, for clients without electricity.

GDP a year to its lack of reliable power. At \$25-billion, this is one of the largest structural drags to its economy.

The utilities that generate and transmit electricity in Nigeria were privatised over the past decade. That “did not bring about the outcomes expected”, admits the World Bank, whose economists often recommended privatisation drives.

Homes and businesses are paying the price of the failed experiment as they resort to expensive generator fuel. Nigeria has so many diesel generators it is estimated they can generate eight times more electricity than is available on the national grid. ■

LESOTHO

‘Return the land’ leader says his life is in danger

After 156 days in detention, threatening text messages have followed the MP home.

TŠOLOANE MOHLOMI IN MASERU

LAND-RIGHTS activist and MP Tšepo Lipholo has sought police protection, saying he fears for his life after receiving what his party describes as persistent death threats sent via text messages.

Lipholo, an MP with the Basotho Covenant Movement (BCM), has been agitating to reclaim what he says are Lesotho's former territories from neighbouring South Africa. This would include areas in the Free State, Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, and Eastern Cape.

He was arrested in July for what the government called “uttering seditious words”, inciting public violence, and harming the reputation of the royal family. The charges were later escalated to treason. In the weeks before his arrest, Lipholo had declared himself

paramount chief of Basutoland – the country's colonial name, saying the official king had sold the country to South Africa. His proclamations followed an unauthorised trip to the United Nations in New York in January 2025 to agitate for the return of the “lost” territories.

Lipholo was granted bail on medical grounds in early December, days after his story appeared on the cover of *The Continent*.

Police spokesperson Mpiti Mopeli declined to comment on whether Lipholo had been granted police protection. “We are not at liberty to divulge issues pertaining to Lipholo's security, because in doing so we might potentially compromise the subject, so those details remain private and confidential,” he told *The Continent*. ■



PHOTO: KHOSALENG KOLO

Reclamist: Tšepo Lipholo is adamant that South Africa must return vast tracts of land to Lesotho.

SOUTH SUDAN

Tensions soar as Juba seeks to retake Jonglei

The South Sudanese army is preparing to retake seized towns from opposition forces.

GARANG ABRAHAM MALAK IN JUBA

Civilians and aid agencies in three counties in Jonglei State have been ordered to evacuate the region immediately. To “re-establish law and order”, the army is launching a fight to retake towns seized by opposition forces, its spokesperson Lul Ruai Koang told the *Associated Press* on Monday.

The region is seeing renewed fighting between government forces loyal to

President Salva Kiir and an armed opposition aligned with former first vice-president Riek Machar. More than 180,000 people have already been displaced in Jonglei State.

The contested areas have been under the control of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition. In mid-January, the movement claimed it had captured 23 prisoners of war, including senior government officers, during clashes in Pajut. The government responded by sending more troops to northern Jonglei. The region is seen as an opposition stronghold.

The military buildup has alarmed observers, who warn South Sudan may be sliding back into full-scale war. The actions by both sides breach a 2018 peace deal that ended a five-year civil war which killed some 400,000 people.

The escalation began in December, when opposition forces seized a series of government outposts in central Jonglei. Machar has been under house arrest since March and was charged with treason in September in relation to a separate attack on a military base in Nasir. His allies say these developments are political persecution.

This week, United Nations officials met South Sudan’s humanitarian affairs minister to press for faster aid delivery, warning displacement and civilian needs are rising rapidly as fighting spreads. ■



PHOTO: FLORENCE MIETTAUX/AP

Dire state: South Sudanese women queue for rations at a food aid hub in Jonglei state.

New here?



Get *The Continent* delivered for free every week.

Message +27 73 805 6068 on [WhatsApp](#), [Signal](#) and [Telegram](#), or email read@thecontinent.org and send "Subscribe"

THE TEAM

Lydia Namubiru Editor-in-Chief

Christine Mungai News Editor

Refileo Seiboko Production Editor

Matthew du Plessis Managing Editor

Gado Cartoonist

Simon Allison International Editor

Wynona Mutisi Illustrator

Yemsrach Yetneberk Illustrator

Paul Botes Photo Editor

Sipho Kings Publisher

Dumi Sithole Distribution

Evania Chiza Finance

Kiri Rupiah Communities Editor

Divine Dube Community and Growth

Ashleigh Swalle Designer

OUR PARTNERS

The Continent has received support from the following institutions: 11th Hour Project, African Climate Foundation, Africa No Filter, African Union, Amplify SA, Ford Foundation, Fred Foundation, GIZ, Luminate, National Endowment for Democracy, Mott Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Pulitzer Centre and the Swiss Philanthropy Partners.

FEATURE

Power, abuse and silence

At least three prominent pastors in Zimbabwe are facing allegations of sexually abusing their congregants.

JEFFREY MOYO IN HARARE

ZIMBABWEAN pastor Walter Magaya is facing four new rape charges. Magaya was released on bail last month from detention that related to five separate counts of rape, but was rearrested this week and remanded again. He faced similar cases in 2016 and 2019.

Magaya, founder of the Prophetic Healing and Deliverance ministries, is also facing 78 counts of fraud. His nine rape charges underscore what activists describe as a deepening crisis of sexual

abuse in the country's churches.

At another church, the Majestic Holy Church of God, in Cold Comfort, Harare, founder Ngonidzashe Masvinu appeared in court in July 2025, facing multiple counts of rape. *The Continent* spoke to one of his accusers, former congregant Thandekile Mvundla* who grew up in the church. She says Masvinu exploited her trust and fear.

“He read the Bible for me, then told me I was given to him by the Holy Spirit,” Mvundla said. “He said if I refused, I would be punished by the Holy Spirit.”



Prophetic: Pastor Walter Magaya was accused of rape in 2016 and 2019. He faces multiple new charges.

Mvundla said she lived with the abuse for years before telling her parents last January and eventually leaving the church. “I was traumatised. I am still depressed. He [wanted] to beat me if I went against his will.”

Another former congregant, Mavis Chari*, alleges the pastor began abusing her at age 15 and that it went on for six years. “He said I was his wife and, if I refused to sleep with him, I would die mysteriously,” she said.

According to his own biography, Masvinu served a five-year prison sentence from 1996 after being convicted of raping a minor. He did not respond to multiple attempts by *The Continent* to seek comment on the new allegations.

At another apostolic church, Johanne Masowe eChishanu in Mabvuku, four women known to *The Continent* say they were separately assaulted during private prayer sessions with their leader, Agrippa Mugadza. One, Linda Chinemo, said she reported the matter to Mabvuku police station. The police say the case is still being investigated and declined to comment further.

Chinemo believes the perceived lack of action has discouraged other women from coming forward. “After I told my husband about it, he left me,” she said.

Pettina Rugango described being called aside by the pastor during an all-night prayer session. “I followed him innocently. [He] said something had to be done to save my life before it was too late. I was in shock and only realised later that I’d been raped,” she said.

Mugadza denies these accusations,

telling *The Continent* the women were attempting to extort him. Church elders said the allegations were aimed at tarnishing the pastor’s image.

Women’s rights advocates and some religious leaders say these cases reflect a broader national problem: congregants who experience abuse are silenced by stigma or fear or retaliation – or that they won’t be believed.

Mugadza denies these accusations, telling *The Continent* the women were attempting to extort him.

The public profile of alleged perpetrators can also contribute to frustrating justice, said Reverend Elitha Moyo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe. “When religious leaders, looked up to as moral guides, are implicated in such abuses, it can create an environment of fear and silence.”

Zimbabwe’s minister of women affairs, Monica Mutsvangwa, said: “My mandate is to empower our women and make sure they have access to information to use the laws and policies to criminalise those who trample on their rights.”

Zimbabwe’s laws prescribe a minimum 15-year sentence for rape, but survivors say its reporting mechanisms are intimidating and inconsistent.

“We need to create safe spaces for rape survivors to speak out and seek justice without fear of victimisation,” said activist Bridget Mashayahanya. ■

FEATURE

Kenya's first chipmaker caught in superpower crossfire

The nascent manufacturer initially thrived under Washington's 'friend-shoring' strategy. Now it's being elbowed aside by Trump's 'America First' imperative.



PHOTO: DANIEL PLAFKER

ALEXANDRIA WILLIAMS IN NYERI

EAST AFRICA'S first semiconductor manufacturing plant is tucked between rolling tea plantations in central Kenya. It occupies a repurposed lecture hall on the campus of Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Nyeri, one of the

country's top technical schools. Inside, mostly young mechatronics engineers move about briskly in lab coats, passing through glass doors, washing their hands, and pulling on hairnets and shoe covers. Beyond the final door lies a cleanroom, where silicon wafers glint under sterile lights.

The plant's prized innovation is a thin-film lithography machine that engineers have dubbed "Ol Borana". It was designed in-house and assembled locally from imported parts to ensure local engineers understood every chip component and could repair or rebuild them if global supply chains failed.

The enterprise's founder is Anthony Githinji, who started Semiconductor Technologies Limited (STL) in 2018 after a 30-year career in the United States semiconductor industry. STL's lab is tiny compared to the vast manufacturing plants that supply global electronics brands. Yet even here, decisions made in Washington are rippling through the sterile halls.

STL's dance with US politics began with a positive moment in 2022. The global supply chain for chips was under strain, disrupted by the Covid pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine. Both factors exposed the world's deep dependence on East Asian semiconductor hubs. In response, then US president Joe Biden promoted a strategy known as "friend-shoring": spreading chip production to US-allied locations like Kenya.

At the time, a large share of chips used in cars, weapons systems, and industrial equipment were manufactured in Taiwan, a flashpoint in US-China relations. Washington increasingly viewed this as a national security risk. Friend-shoring, the prevailing theory went, would build redundancy outside China's orbit.

This marked a breakthrough for STL, Kenya's only semiconductor

manufacturer. In early 2022, the company received a \$1.3-million grant from the US Trade and Development Agency.

Compared to STL's ambitions, the grant was modest. Currently, STL is producing experimental runs. Beyond that, Githinji's full vision is to produce up to 30,000 wafers a month for government and industrial clients. That requires about \$350-million for equipment alone.

But the US government partnership still mattered because it brought access to suppliers, buyers, and discounted raw materials such as silicon wafers. It recognised that Kenya could play a role in an industry dominated by East Asia, Europe, and the US, a vote of confidence that had the potential to sway other investors.

Until that point, Githinji's team had sustained the work through a mix of self-financing, institutional support, and



Ante-Trump: Biden-era US trade official Enoch Ebong and STL founder Anthony Githinji in 2024.

PHOTO: SUSAN WALSH/AP

grants from the Mastercard Foundation.

Githinji struggled to convince investors. Many of them didn't believe that Kenya had the education system, infrastructure, and workforce needed for competitive chip manufacturing.

Then US politics shifted again with Donald Trump's second presidency, which began a year ago. The new administration in Washington dropped friend-shoring for a more inward-looking approach, prioritising domestic production over external supply chains. Programmes that had positioned Kenya as a strategic partner quietly fell away.

The new administration in Washington dropped friend-shoring for a more inward-looking approach, prioritising domestic production over external supply chains.

Without the promise of sustained US partnership, STL's path to the scale Githinji envisioned is narrowing again. The company has sought alternative funding, including £300,000 from the United Kingdom, according to Lorna Muturi, its lead engineer. But attracting customers requires proof of scale – and proving scale requires much more capital than that.

Not the end of the road

Githinji remains convinced Kenya has the fundamentals it needs to play a role in the industry. "Kenya has everything it needs to be a semiconductor

powerhouse," he argues, pointing to the country's mineral resources.

A 2023 geological survey identified more than 950 mineral deposits countrywide, including copper and aluminum, both essential to electronics manufacturing. Germanium has been identified in Kenya's Rift Valley. Niobium, a superconducting material, has been found in Mrima Hills, drawing interest from US, Chinese, and Australian investors.

"This surge of geopolitical interest tells us something," says Dr Nashon Adero, dean of the School of Mines and Engineering at Taita Taveta University. He calls for resource agreements that build local capacity instead of just extracting value.

The fate of Kenya's chipmaking industry might not be decided only by external demand and partnerships, anyway. "We aren't just building chips," Githinji told *The Continent*. "We're trying to build resilience in a continent that has depended on others for critical technology."

Photos on the lab's walls echo this eye on both internal and external demand: a plaque from US weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin, as well as mock-ups of chips for secure communications for Kenya's county governments.

But vision, experimental labs, and raw minerals do not an industry make – and local market demand is often too low in the early stages. Tshilidzi Marwala, former vice-chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, points to South Africa's experience with a university-



PHOTO: DANIEL PLAFKER

based semiconductor lab. "There was no market beyond the institution itself. Cleanrooms are extremely expensive to maintain," he said.

A single cleanroom, essential for protecting sensitive microchips from dust, can cost upwards of \$2-million. STL operates three.

The Vietnam fix

Kenya is not alone in the fallout from shifting geopolitics on microchips. Vietnam, another US ally, also began building its semiconductor industry with backing from Washington. When US funding slowed, Vietnam's government

stepped in with \$500-million in public investment for its first manufacturing plant. Today, Vietnam is widely regarded as an emerging semiconductor hub, having attracted major investment in chip assembly, testing, and advanced packaging. Like STL, its entry into the industry began at the lower end of the value chain.

At STL, wafers still move through cleanrooms etched by machines built far from Silicon Valley. Whether they mark the foundation of a Kenyan semiconductor industry or another casualty of a chaotic geopolitical moment remains to be seen. ■

REPORT

Banking on the brink

With limited access to their own cash, Goma residents are finding hustle-ready ways to cash in – and get it out again.

PROSPER HERI NGORORA IN GOMA

ONE YEAR ago, Goma had normal banking services, including 24-hour ATMs. Now, residents have to scramble for workarounds to access their money. Bank branches in north and south Kivu closed when the regions fell to the AFC-M23 political-military group in January and February last year.

Residents of Goma who happen to hold international cards cross the border to Gisenyi in Rwanda just to withdraw cash at ATMs. The fee for an international withdrawal can be as high as \$15, which is steep for people drawing small amounts like \$100. They withdraw Rwandan francs, which then have to be converted into United States dollars or Congolese francs for local spending. (Even before the AFC-M23 takeover, businesses in Goma ran on both Congolese francs and US dollars).

Holders of local cards may travel to Beni and Butembo – each about 300km away from Goma – for cash withdrawals. The two towns remain under the Kinshasa government's control and so banks are operating as normal.

For many other people, digital wallets have emerged as an unexpected lifeline.

Benjamin Ahadi, a student in Goma,

says he had installed the Access Bank app on his phone “just for prestige” before the banking crisis began. It has come in handy. “All I do now is connect my [bank] account to my M-Pesa account, send [myself] mobile money, and easily withdraw what I want.”

“More and more people are coming to withdraw money through Airtel Money, Orange Money, or M-Pesa,” says Joyce Balibuno, who runs a mobile-money shop in Goma. “Mobile money has existed for a long time, but withdrawals have really taken off recently.”

Balibuno charges a fee of 3% for customers who want to withdraw their cash in dollars, which she says reflects the cost of sourcing US currency from multiple suppliers. She is happy to offer local currency withdrawals free of charge, making her profit on the prevailing exchange rate instead.

Agents used to charge as much as \$6 for a \$100 withdrawal (6%) but AFC-M23 authorities have ordered them to charge no more than 3% or risk penalties.

The 3% is still steep, says Muisha Buunda, a Goma resident who still has access to his Equity BCDC account via the bank's mobile app. He says imposing 3% on each transaction is painful at a time when people must manage their



Regal tender: Cash may still be king in Goma, but digital currencies are the real power behind its throne.

money tightly because of the uncertain future.

M23 and Kinshasa point fingers

Responsibility for the bank closures has become a point of contention between M23 rebels and Congolese authorities. The co-ordinator of the AFC – the Congo River Alliance political movement that includes the M23 – accuses the government in Kinshasa of deliberately blocking access to civilians' savings, describing the move as a war crime.

“They ordered the banks not to open. The banks are holding people's savings on [President Felix] Tshisekedi's orders,” Corneille Nangaa Yobeluo said.

The government previously claimed banks were avoiding the region of their own accord because of US sanctions targeting some AFC-M23 leaders. “No

bank can legally operate in a region controlled by an armed group that's under US sanctions. Don't be fooled, these auxiliaries are not allowed to use US dollars in any way,” government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya said at a media briefing last year.

Banks themselves have offered limited explanations. In a July 2025 statement, Equity BCDC said its branches in Goma and Bukavu had been temporarily closed “due to the security situation”.

Augustin Witanene, a Goma-based digital technology expert, says the crisis underscores the need for wider adoption of digital tools across the country.

“You can see how online banking makes life in Goma a little easier,” he said. “A few years ago, when banks closed, it was impossible to access your money at all.” ■

PHOTO ESSAY

The year of scars

First came violence, then Goma's economic collapse.



WORDS AND PHOTOS: MOSES SAWASAWA IN GOMA

IT'S BEEN a week of heavy and painful remembrance as the city of Goma marks one year since its fall to anti-government rebels last January.

The capital of North Kivu province was plunged into chaos when Congolese government troops and allied Wazalendo militia unsuccessfully resisted the city's takeover. The opposing side was the March 23 Movement (M23), a Rwanda-backed armed wing of the Alliance Fleur Congo (AFC) political group. In the

weeks after those battles, thousands of dead people were collected by Red Cross workers and mass burials were organised, with the bodies sometimes left in mass graves. Armed militiamen carried out large-scale looting and the banks and airport were closed.

A year on, Amina Sanane Kahindo remembers everything in chilling detail. "It's as if it were yesterday," she says, gazing into the distance.

On the night of 26 January 2025, as the city descended into panic, four soldiers broke into her home. "They asked us for money", she recalls. "My husband handed them \$300".

The men, whom she describes as government-side fighters, each counted the money in turn, before the last one slipped it into his pocket.

"They said it wasn't enough, that they wanted more," she says. That's when everything changed.

"They threw my husband to the ground and shot him three times in the chest. He let out a cry, then nothing."

The soldiers then turned to her. They knew her name. Kahindo now believes that they also knew she was responsible for managing the funds of a neighbourhood microfinance club.

Trembling, she handed them 750,000 Congolese francs (about \$326). It still wasn't enough. She added 50,000, then

60,000 francs. To no avail. The men ordered her to lie on the ground. "We came for two things: to take the money and to kill," she remembers them saying.

Then the shots rang out.

Three bullets in her ankle. Then more. "They asked me to count the bullets. My foot was torn apart," she says. Kahindo was bleeding so much she thought she had lost control of her bladder.

The soldiers accused her of rejoicing at the M23's entry into the city. She says they told her: "You were happy, weren't you? We're going to show you there will never be peace."

One of them pointed the gun towards her head and Kahindo instinctively





raised her hand. He shot at her and Kahindo passed out. Her 10-year-old daughter saw the soldiers turn her over twice, convinced she was dead. They tried to rape the girl but backed off when she begged them to stop.

Finally, one of the soldiers ordered the others to leave. Before doing so, they fired off shots into the house's wooden walls. The ordeal lasted nearly three hours.

When the armed men left, neighbours alerted Red Cross workers, who took Kahindo to hospital. "When they lifted me up, the pain was too much," she says. "I asked them to let me die but they refused."

She did not leave the hospital until July, after several surgeries.

Her legs and hands still bear the scars of that night. But it's the loss of her husband that has broken her. "Life no

longer has any real meaning," she says.

Kahindo's tragedy is part of a wider pattern. Angry, disorganised, and humiliated by their defeat at the hands of the AFC-M23 fighters, pro-government forces engaged in acts of violence, including looting, theft, sexual assault, and summary executions, before leaving Goma in a hurry.

Acts of violence and brutality have been attributed to AFC-M23 fighters, too. In all this fighting, it is ordinary citizens who have paid the highest price.

The horror of those weeks has then been followed by a yearlong economic crisis in Goma, where banks and microfinance institutions remain closed. Many residents have been forced to travel to neighbouring Rwanda to access their funds, where they are subjected to high withdrawal fees. It's a capital flight out of Goma.

In the city centre and in Birere, shops have reopened but business is deeply depressed. "The economy is not working. We are suffering. Nothing works without the banks," says Maurice

Mugaruika, a money-transfer agent.

As it marks the end of its first year under M23 fighters, Goma is surviving but the scars of battle are still visible – in bodies, in minds, and in pockets. ■







COMMUNITY

What have you done because of *The Continent*?

One of the questions in our Big Annual Survey™, to which 1,500 of you responded.

“Telling another human being they are cool.”

“I talked to other people.”

“*The Continent* helps me to see my Africa as my glass-half-full continent. As my place of home and of opportunity. And of connectedness. By reading proper, positive news you help me feel more grounded and that I belong.”

“*The Continent* has put fire to my pan-African spirit.”

“I have enjoyed a renewed faith in journalism.”

“Sharing news to improve literacy around political issues.”

“I started reading more news because I failed the quiz. 😂”

“Bought books by African authors.”

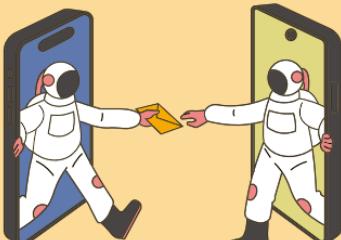
“I have business in Africa and I keep myself updated with relevant news. I use the news to talk to my clients and sound more informed.”

“I use it in my teaching! I also share with other educators to use.”

“I have changed my voting strategy.”

“Strive to empower the disenfranchised.”

“Through its example, *The Continent* has made me more conscious about seeking out good reporting about Gaza.”



Got this paper from a friend?

Subscribe for free: message +27 73 805 6068 ([WhatsApp](#), [Signal](#), [Telegram](#)) or email read@thecontinent.org

DATA

Conflicted about conflict resolution

THIS WEEK has seen two days dedicated to peace between communities: International Day of Peaceful Coexistence (28 January) and Africa Day of Peace and Reconciliation (31 January). What do Africans think of their government's attempts to prevent or resolve violent conflict?

Trend analysis across 29 countries shows that, after a drop in performance, the tide may be turning. Almost half (49%) of citizens say their government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" in addressing violent conflict, down from 56% in 2016/2018 but up from 45% in 2021/2023.

Still, nearly as many (46%) rate the

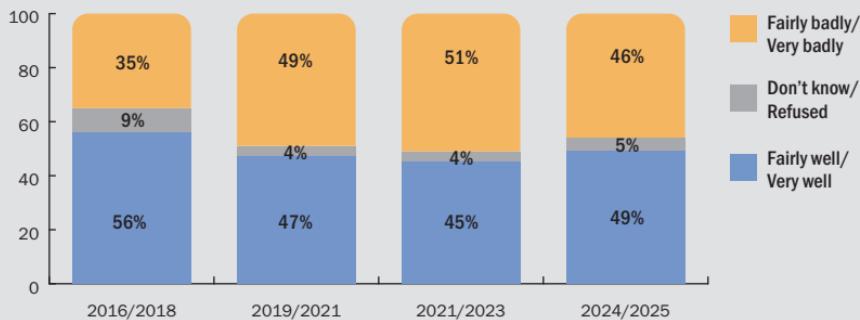
government poorly, suggesting that respondents are, well, conflicted.

In Nigeria, home to ongoing insurgencies by militant extremists, bandits and separatists, perceptions of government performance have fallen by 36 percentage points since 2017 to just 17% approval.

Gambians (-33 points), Cabo Verdeans (-30), Basotho (-30), Namibians (-27), and Emaswati (-26) are also far more critical. In fact, the decline in Eswatini was even steeper (from 72% in 2018 to 18% in 2022) before recovering to 46%.

By contrast, Moroccans (+30) are much happier with their leaders' efforts than before. ■

Government preventing or resolving violent conflict | 29 African countries | 2016-2025



TC TOUR REVIEW

BY ODANGA MADUNG



PHOTO: ISRAHAY YAW/AP

Strictly come streaming

IShowSpeed's Africa tour was a revelation in platform-era public culture, despite its framing as spontaneous fun. In the algorithmic glare, context is traded for visibility and we get access stripped of meaning.

IN MANY African households, there's an unspoken protocol for receiving visitors: sweep the compound, pull the covers off the furniture, and bring out the good plates. The visitor must leave with only good things to say.

Now scale that instinct to continental

level to receive a visitor whose 50-million YouTube subscribers promise global visibility, and you get the spectacle that was the month-long IShowSpeed Africa tour.

Twenty African countries brought out the good plates for 21-year-old Darren Watkins Jr, better known as the livestreamer IShowSpeed, or just Speed.

He got stadium access, government helicopters and motorcades, traditional dances, local delicacies, athletic stunts, meetings with important people, and moments with wildlife and monuments. At each stop, a crowd surged to bind it all together, as African hospitality met the creator economy.

Ethiopia gave him raw meat, the eskista dance and the country's tourism minister as a guide. Egypt gave him three hours inside the Pyramids of Giza, the first-ever livestream allowed in that space. In Ghana he got a local name and met Kwame Nkrumah's daughter.

The 28-day livestream marathon had local fixers racing to produce the perfect viral moment and governments stretching to update their soft power game for the platform age. City streets became sets for a live production. And millions of fans did the unseen labour of filming, clipping, and sharing to keep the machine running.

Peter Gacheru, the managing director of IMG Events in Nairobi, admits he had never heard of Speed until he saw



Vroom to manoeuvre: Speed made pit stops in 20 African countries over the course of a single month, during which he streamed for 118 hours, reaching a peak of 418,300 simultaneous viewers on YouTube.

his stream in South Africa. A few days later, he got an unexpected call from Speed's team to orchestrate his tour of Kenya. His assignment was to "script the unscripted", the team told him.

The itinerary would be loose and the details had to be kept under wraps. Gacheru says that even with 21 years of high-level event management, the Speed engagement stretched his skillset and team to the absolute limit.

It turns out making a scripted moment feel random and authentic actually requires Cabinet-level resources. Ethiopia's tourism ministry co-ordinated Speed's tour of the Merkato market and wider Addis Ababa. In

Egypt, there were days of co-ordination between archaeologists, heritage-preservation officials, and all levels of authority and technicians to ensure stable internet inside a 4,500-year-old tomb so that millions could watch Speed walk through burial chambers.

Looks great, but doesn't mean much

Across the tour, ceremonies not intended for mass broadcast were repackaged as livestreamed content. In Eswatini, Speed received the name "Logijimako" (the one who runs), at a restructured Kubutseka initiation ceremony - a royal occasion with specific cultural and political meaning.

At a sacred shrine in Benin, Speed called voodoo masquerades “robots”. The spiritual and cultural custodians were present, but their meanings were not.

Platforms prioritise immediacy, reaction, and scale, not explanation or context. As a result, in the economies they have created, culturally significant practices are reduced to visual spectacle stripped of meaning and interpreted primarily through audience reaction and algorithmic amplification. What could be meaningful is merely attention-grabbing.

The tour also revealed the limits of the spectacle’s ability to drown out reality. A cheetah scratched Speed during a staged race in South Africa. In Nigeria, people aggressively chased his car, demanding money. Bottles flew at him at a stadium in Algeria. In Senegal, his bodyguard nearly collided with a truck. In Côte d’Ivoire, someone attacked him during a traditional dance lesson. Uncontrolled crowds surged dangerously in many places.

A game changer, but for who?

“This tour changed my life for the better. It opened my eyes. Africa is not what I thought,” said Speed at the end of it all. “It sparked something deep within me... to come back to the motherland.”

May the lives of the fans whose unpaid labour fuels the machine be as changed.

If you have spent any time around IRL livestream fandom, you recognise the fans’ hustle. A livestreamer arrives and waves of people break into a run,



PHOTO: CAMILLA RIGHETTI/AFP

Blaze of glory: A tense IShowSpeed makes his getaway after an event in Soweto on 2 January.

phones up, filming before they have even found the subject. In half-sprint, half-selfie, they scan for the moving centre of gravity. This isn’t just mindless celebrity worship. It’s what work looks like in the attention economy that streaming platforms have engendered.

Appearing on Speed’s portable attention factory even for a few seconds gets you seen by millions of people across the world. It can quite possibly change your life.

So hope fans like Mamba, a Nairobi artist. He had made a piece of threaded art featuring Speed and believed he would get a sliver of that Speed magic if he could only get close enough for a picture or clip with the star. A viral piece of content would mean skyrocketing page views and more enquiries about his art. ■

Uri Ludger contributed to this review. We would like to publish more reviews of live culture and subcultures. Send your pitches to pitch@thecontinent.org

The Quiz

- 1 In which African country is the Tomb of Askia (pictured) located?
- 2 From which country does former footballer Didier Drogba hail?
- 3 What animal is in the middle of the Egyptian flag?
- 4 Pasteur Bizimungu was the president of which country from 1994 to 2000?
- 5 What is the capital of Benin?
- 6 What currency is used in the Central African Republic?
- 7 True or false: English is one of Angola's official languages.
- 8 Which desert is believed to be the oldest in the world?
- 9 Antananarivo is the largest city of which country?
- 10 Which country is pop star Tyla from?



HOW DID I DO?

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

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

"Deserting your post: Bad. Posting your dessert: Worse. Embedding posts in your desert tomb: Nailed it!"

PHOTO: MICHELE CATTANI/AFP

ANALYSIS

An insider challenges the Djiboutian president

**President Guelleh seeks a sixth term.
Former aide Alexis Mohamed stands in his way.**

DOMINICA MARCO

DJIBOUTI goes to the polls in April. It may be another coronation for President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, who has been in power since 1999. In November, parliament hastily pushed through a constitutional amendment to remove the 75-year age limit for president, clearing the way for Guelleh, 77, to run for a sixth term. Term limits were removed in 2010.

But there may be a wild card – of sorts.

The Guelleh administration has typically defended the constitutional changes that enabled his 36-year rule as necessary for stability. As presidential adviser and government spokesperson for more than a decade, Alexis Mohamed was part of that choir. But he resigned from his position in September and announced his presidential candidacy in December. This time, he is decrying “democratic regression”.

Mohamed’s decision is a rare breaking of ranks by someone in the president’s close circle. He was the face of Djibouti’s international diplomacy. By breaking away, he reveals the limits of a system that cannot tolerate internal dissent, signalling cracks that may reshape

governance if the international and domestic actors respond.

In an interview with *The Continent* Mohamed said he initially believed reforms were possible from within the system. But the removal of the age limit, which he describes as an “institutional red line”, convinced him that “meaningful change could no longer come from inside the state alone”.

Mohamed has experience working with foreign powers, including France and the United States, which bolsters his credibility in challenging the establishment of a country whose foreign relations play an outsized role in national policy. Djibouti sits at a strategic point in the Horn of Africa, in which all global



Breaking ranks: Alexis Mohamed is challenging his former boss for Djibouti’s presidency.

powers want a presence to monitor global sea routes. On the other hand, Mohamed's candidacy may not land well with voters. Many Djiboutians are wary of any challenge to the establishment that might lead to unrest.

"People are largely waiting patiently for change rather than pushing for confrontation," said a Djiboutian political analyst, who preferred to remain anonymous. "The lesson from the region, particularly Somalia, is that overthrowing a government often leads to chaos rather than peace or stability."

And voters inclined to vote for the opposition might see Mohamed as a state-approved candidate, given that he served a president who distrusts outsiders deeply. He denies his loyalty to Guelleh was ever deep, painting himself as an officer who served "principle" and "the republic" not "a system".

"The reality is simple: I have never belonged to the president's party, nor have I been part of his government. I have always exercised my duties independently, without frequenting the circles of power or serving as a figurehead," he told *The Continent*. "The majority of my fellow citizens know this and know what I stand for."

Mohamed's insistence that he served independently in one of the most sensitive advisory roles in the state, speaks to how power works – and is seen to work – in Djibouti. Public institutions tend not to function as autonomous centres of authority, but as shells animated by loyalty to the president.

To vote for him, anti-establishment

Djiboutians would have to perceive Mohamed as having been an atypical public servant who discharged his duties for reasons beyond fealty to Guelleh.

But the odds such voters will even have a chance to vote fairly are slim. Even though the result of the April election seems predictable, the state continues to repress challengers.

The 2025 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, ranked Djibouti 168th of 180. "The media landscape is completely locked down and limited almost exclusively to state media," said the NGO.

Politically motivated detentions are not uncommon, according to Ali Ibrahim, a Djiboutian journalist who has lived in exile since 2000. Speaking to *The Continent* from Sweden, Ibrahim said detainees include women, young people, and former officials. Sometimes people are jailed just for belonging to clans seen as hostile to the regime.

Mohamed himself lives abroad, for his own safety. He says genuine opponents to the regime are either in prison or exile. It's uncertain if the government will even allow opposition candidates to campaign freely. In the last election in 2021, Guelleh ran against Zakaria Ismail Farah, an unknown businessman. Better-known opposition figures boycotted the vote. Guelleh won easily, with 98%; Farah fled abroad. ■

Dominica Marco is a freelance journalist reporting on conflict, politics, and human rights. This piece was published in collaboration with Egab

Big Pic

Squidish Game: A chaser in rural Uganda scores during a training session for Quadball, a broom-based sport inspired by a dystopian book about youths who are taken from their families and forced to survive in a prison-like institution.

PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP



The Continent is a member of the Press Council of South Africa. This means we adhere to its Code of Ethics. It also means that there's an independent body you can reach out to with a complaint about our reporting. That process is on their website – www.presscouncil.org.za.

**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of The Continent and The Friday Paper

The Continent is published by All Protocol Observed, a not-for-profit based in South Africa. Our home is dedicated to creating a space for African journalists to do quality journalism, which we then get to you wherever you are. For suggestions, queries, complaints, or to make a donation, please contact us at read@thecontinent.org.