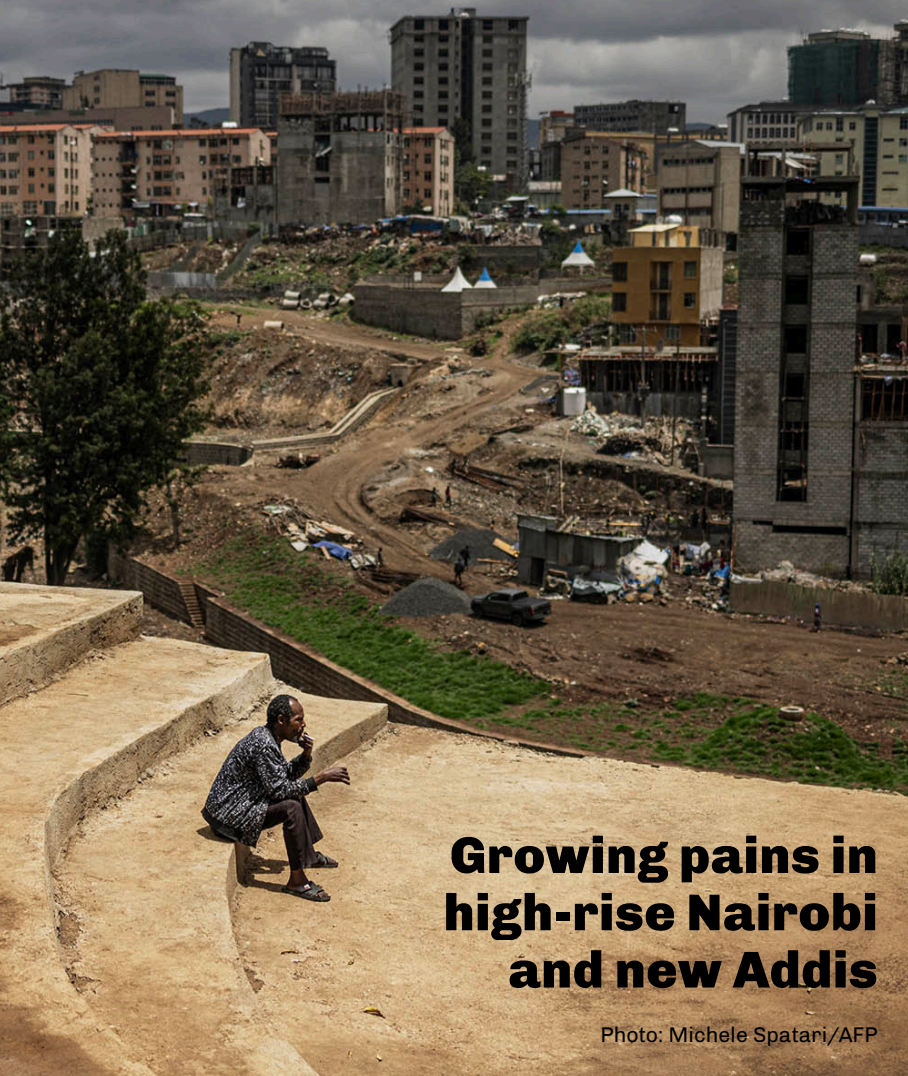


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# The Continent



**Growing pains in  
high-rise Nairobi  
and new Addis**

Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP



**COVER:** Africa is the fastest urbanising continent: 58% of us will live in cities by 2030. We already have 52 cities with a population of one million or higher – same as Europe, according to the African Development Bank. Yet our housing and infrastructure are far more limited by comparison, and half of our urban population lives in high density shanty towns. Leaders must rebuild these cities to give more people better homes and services. But how they do it matters a lot, or this growth will be resisted, and mourned, as is happening in Nairobi (p12) and Addis Ababa (p16).

# Inside:

- **Somalia:** US still won't pay for killing a young mother and her little girl (p7)
- **Sahel:** China intervenes in Benin-Niger border row (p8)
- **Nigeria:** Bobrisky's real offence is apparently being Bobrisky (p19)
- **Data:** Do you trust your country's electoral body? (p23)
- **Film:** Who's more savage, Tiwa or our critic? (p24)
- **Malawi:** 30 years of top dogs' beef (p29)
- **Tanzania:** I tried to start a political party. I failed (p31)



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**Hard to stomach: When food aid gets to Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, it risks becoming a prime target for raiders.** Photo: Alfredo Zuniga/AFP

## MOZAMBIQUE

### Islamic State pits child soldiers against own families

Boys as young as 13 were used by an armed group linked to the Islamic State in a recent raid on the town of Macomia, in Cabo Delgado province, reports watchdog group, Human Rights Watch. Recruiting and using children younger than 15 is a war crime. Witnesses, including some of the boys' relatives, told the watchdog group that dozens of boys carrying ammunition belts and AK-style assault rifles were among the fighters who raided and looted the town on 10 May.

## CARIBBEAN

### More babies will be born free from HIV

Belize, Jamaica, and St Vincent and the Grenadines have eliminated the mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, receiving certification for this milestone from the World Health Organisation. Only 19 countries and territories around the world have been certified for eliminating mother-to-child transmission for this achievement – 11 of them are in the Caribbean. Among African countries, the field is led by Namibia, where only 4% of babies born to HIV-positive mothers got the virus.

## GAMBIA

### Former minister guilty of crimes against humanity

A Swiss court has convicted Gambia's former interior minister, Ousman Sonko (not related to new Senegalese prime minister Ousmane Sonko), for crimes against humanity and sentenced him to 20 years in prison. The 55-year-old, convicted of homicide, torture and false imprisonment, is the highest-ranking foreign official convicted in Europe under universal jurisdiction, which allows prosecution of war crimes and genocide regardless of where they were committed. He plans to appeal.

## TUNISIA

## Lawyers strike after Saied critic's arrest

Lawyers held a national strike on Tuesday to protest the arrest of their colleague, Sonia Dahmani, a critic of President Kais Saied's government. On Saturday, masked

police stormed the bar association's headquarters to extract Dahmani, who had ignored their summons for questioning over sarcastic remarks she made about the country's economic woes. A slew of lawyers and journalists have been arrested under Decree 54, introduced by Saied in 2022 to combat "cybercrime" and "misinformation".



Off Saied rule:  
Demonstrators  
in Tunis protest  
against the arrest  
of Sonia Dahmani.  
Photo: F Belaid/AFP

## NIGERIA

## Ex-central bank boss bust for printing cash

The former governor of the central bank, Godwin Emefiele, has been charged with illegally printing new banknotes and withdrawing billions of naira without presidential approval, as well as a separate charge of fraud. He pleaded not guilty and was released on bail. Prosecutors say, between October 2022 and March 2023, Emefiele ordered the printing of colour-swapped banknotes at a cost of nearly \$12.5-million, without the right approvals.

## LIBYA

## Gaddafi probe to be completed by 2025

Thirteen years after it began looking into possible war crimes committed in Libya during the last months of Muammar Gaddafi's rule, the International Criminal Court has made "strong progress". At the UN Security Council on Monday, prosecutor Karim Khan said he hoped to conclude the investigation next year. The council referred the situation to the court in 2011 after a violent crackdown on protests against Gaddafi's 42-year rule.



**De-looted: Ewuare II receives Benin artefacts repatriated from Britain in 2022.** Photo: Kola Sulaimon/AFP

## COLONIALISM

### Sweden to return 39 stolen artefacts

The Swedish Ambassador to Nigeria, Annika Hahn-Englund, has confirmed to the Oba of Benin, Ewuare II, that Sweden will return 39 artefacts to his kingdom. Some western holders of stolen Benin artefacts have been reluctant to return them, saying they were unsure of who their rightful owners are, and whether they would be properly cared for. In a March 2023 Gazette notice, the Nigerian federal government confirmed the Oba of Benin as their rightful owner and custodian, and has backed a Benin Royal Museum project.

## SOUTH SUDAN

### Conflict watch group sounds alarm on burst oil pipeline

The International Crisis Group warned this week that a burst oil pipeline, which carries South Sudanese oil through Sudan, could ultimately trigger new armed conflict. The pipeline, which transports two-thirds of South Sudan's oil exports, burst in February, but repairs will be difficult given that the north is at war. However, without this oil revenue, the South Sudanese government could run out of money, the local currency could collapse and food prices could shoot up. This would be a recipe for disaster, the group explained.

## ALGERIA

### Lost teenager found 26 years later in neighbour's cellar

A man who has been missing for 26 years was found alive on Sunday, trapped in a cellar just 200m from where he grew up. The neighbour who kept him prisoner has been arrested. Bin Omran, now 45, disappeared as a teen during Algeria's civil war. Omran is receiving medical and psychological care. He said a spell cast by his captor prevented him from calling to his family when he saw them from his prison.

## INTERNATIONAL

## South Africa returns to the World Court to stop Israel in Rafah

Israel and South Africa exchanged sharp words at the International Court of Justice this week, in arguments about additional measures in the Gaza genocide case. South Africa told the court that since its January ruling telling Israel to do everything it can to prevent a genocide, it has killed an additional 15,000 people in Gaza, most of them women and children and is bombing the Rafah border area where over a million displaced Palestinians are penned. A representative of Israel said South Africa's case is "divorced from facts and circumstances".

## SENEGAL

## Sonko hits the ground with his mouth running

In a Thursday speech in the capital Dakar, Senegal's new Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko hit all the region's popular talking points. He questioned the presence of the 350 French soldiers in his country; promised to strengthen ties with the military-led Sahel countries which left regional bloc Ecowas, and asked the West to restrain itself on social issues like LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality in Senegal. Speaking about the French troops, *Reuters* reports that Sonko claimed that "a third of the Dakar region is now occupied by foreign garrisons".

## CULTURE

## More bets on the girl from Jo'burg

The BET awards have announced this year's nominees and leading the motherland pack is South African sensation Tyla, who is nominated for Best Female R&B/Pop Artist, Best New Artist, Viewer's Choice Award and Best International Act. Other African nominees include Ayra Starr (three categories including Best International Act, where she will compete with Tyla), Burna Boy (two categories) and Tems, Dr. Bobby Jones, Makhadzi, Seyi Vibe,



**On and on: South African singer and songwriter Tyla is having more than a moment.** Photo: Angela Weiss/AFP

Asake, Focalistic, Damson Idris and Ayo Edebiri.

# United States

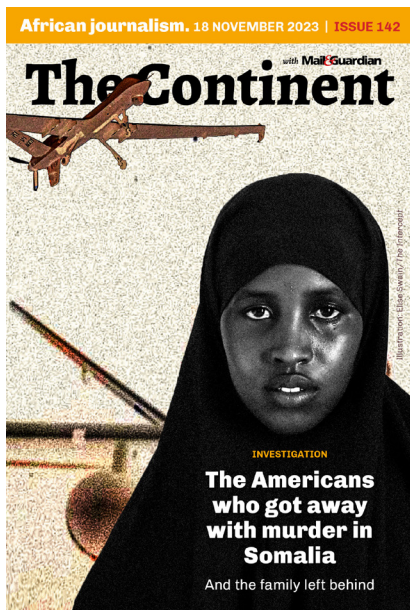
## The empire strikes back – but won't pay

**A new government report confirms what the family of the victims of US drone strikes have been saying.**

Last year, *The Continent* and *The Intercept* co-published an investigation into the deaths of 22-year-old Luul Dahir Mohamed and her young daughter Mariam Shilow Muse, both civilians, in Somalia in 2018. The investigation presented evidence that the pair were recklessly targeted by US drone operators as they tried to flee from the scene of an earlier drone strike. The US admitted killing a mother and child, but said it couldn't determine their identities.

After this story was published, Luul's brother Abubakar Dahir Mohamed wrote to *The Continent* to say the family had been trying to contact US authorities for years, but had been ignored. "For more than five years, we have been trying to contact the US, to demand they acknowledge the harm they caused."

A long-delayed US government report



has just revealed that, in 2022, the US did not compensate a single family of a civilian killed by its military's actions, despite setting aside \$15-million to do so.

After more than 17 years of drone strikes and commando raids in Somalia, the US has carried out 288 declared attacks. US Africa Command claims to have killed just five civilians in that period, including Luul and Mariam. Airwars, the UK-based airstrike monitoring group, says the real number of civilian deaths may be between 87 and 163. ■

# Niger

## Oil pipeline opens – but not without a fight

**China, often indifferent to partners' politics, has stepped into a border row between Benin and Niger that threatened oil flow.**

**T**here is enough crude oil buried under the sand in Niger's Agadem Rift Basin to transform the economic fortunes of one of the world's poorest countries. But there is one big problem: Niger is landlocked yet oil wealth comes from world markets.

When prospectors discovered vast oil reserves a few years ago, the Niger government at the time struck a deal with the Chinese national petroleum company to build a 2,000-kilometre pipeline to the port of Sèmè in neighbouring Benin; and then another deal with Benin, allowing Niger to use their port for oil export.

Nine months ago, that government was overthrown in a military coup. The junta claims to have intervened to fix chronic security issues, but their timing is good: their administration is likely to reap all the early rewards of Niger's oil bonanza.

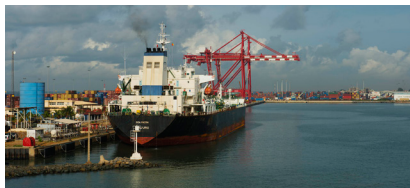
Deposed president Mohamed Bazoum

is under house arrest, replaced for now by General Abdourahamane Tchiani. Tchiani and his Beninoise counterpart, Patrice Talon, do not see eye-to-eye. Talon approved regional sanctions against the junta, although these have subsequently been lifted. In response, Tchiani shut down the land border with Benin, refusing to allow any trade.

Nonetheless, construction of the pipeline continued, and was completed last month to much fanfare.

Celebrations were abruptly halted, however, when Benin said that it would not allow any crude oil exports until Niger fully opened its land borders.

After Chinese diplomatic intervention, a solution has now been found, and the first Nigerien crude is currently being loaded onto a tanker in Sèmè. "That's why we told the Chinese side to take over and talk," said Niger's prime minister. Initially, the pipeline will carry 90,000 barrels per day, potentially increasing to 200,000 as Niger increases production. ■



**Pumped: A 2,000km pipeline is taking oil from Niger to Cotonou in Benin.** Photo: Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty



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# South Africa

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## Diamonds are not forever

**Shaped for generations by the wild profits of its extractive industries, South Africa is contemplating a bleak post-mining future.**

### Kiri Rupiah in Johannesburg

**A**nglo American, the London-listed South Africa-founded mining giant, has certainly seen better days. In February, it posted a 94% drop in annual profits, prompting its shareholders to lose their collective minds. Weeks later, it started getting what some analysts have called “insultingly cheap” offers for a takeover. This week, the company announced the most radical changes to its structure in decades: breaking up the family heirlooms, and selling them off.

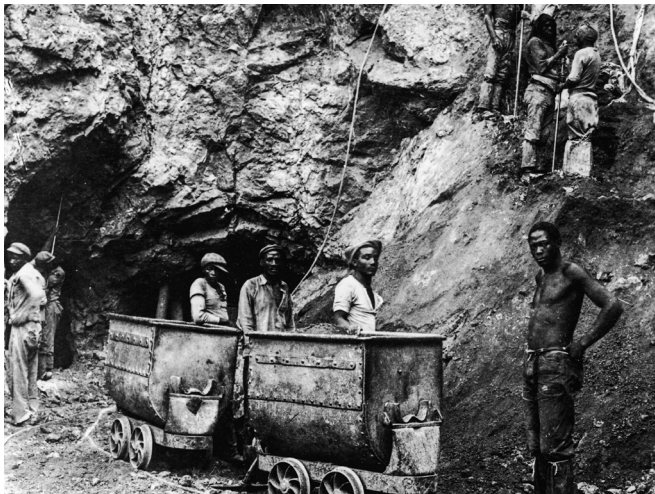
In a Tuesday statement, Anglo said it will either break up with, or sell, De Beers, which has been in the group since 1927. De Beers – the diamond miner founded by Cecil Rhodes in 1888, and later run by the Oppenheimer family – may be listed separately on the London Stock Exchange, according to *Reuters*. The government of Botswana holds a 15% stake in De Beers.

Anglo American also announced that it will demerge from South Africa-based platinum producer Amplat, in which it is a majority shareholder, and sell its steelmaking coal mines in Australia.

These radical changes have come in response to a take-over bid by the world’s largest mining company, BHP, which offered to buy Anglo for \$42.7-billion earlier this month. The offer, like a cheaper one made last month, was rejected. But it has put Anglo executives under pressure to give their shareholders better options.

That this storied company – which for decades was South Africa’s wealthiest – is in this position at all is because of the falling prices of both diamonds and platinum. Platinum is likely to recover, but diamonds may have lost their shine forever. Industrial or lab-grown diamonds are very similar to natural diamonds, but don’t cost as much to produce. “There’s also been less demand for jewellery and many analysts don’t see a future in diamond mining,” mining historian Duncan Money told *The Continent*.

Anglo’s best-performing assets are its copper mines, which is what BHP is really after. Since the early 1990s, Anglo has pushed to expand globally, acquiring copper mines in Chile and Peru, ahead of an expected copper boom. Demand for the metal, which conducts electricity, is



**Rough times:** Miners stand by two mine cars on their track at one of the De Beers mines, Kimberley, South Africa, early 20th Century. Photo: FPG/Getty Images

growing as the world shifts to renewable energy and electric vehicles.

Its proposed restructuring will allow the company to focus on its copper business, and – by ditching its expensive diamond and platinum operations – free up \$1.7-billion a year to do so. Shareholders seem to be buying this new vision: Anglo American’s share price, which shot up after the BHP offer, continued to rise after Tuesday’s announcement.

It may not be such good news for southern Africa, a region Anglo American has exploited for generations. Despite the company’s controversial history – it has been accused of trashing the environment and exposing its workers to deadly diseases – it remains one of South Africa’s largest employers and taxpayers.

“It’s been bad, but once they leave, it may grow even worse,” said Money. “There’s nothing coming to replace these

mines and the livelihoods of millions will be affected.”

It is on these grounds that South Africa’s mining minister, Gwede Mantashe, and its largest trade union, Cosatu, have opposed BHP’s bid. BHP proposes to spin off Anglo’s South African assets, arguing that they are no longer profitable enough. “These companies were built on the back of South African mineworkers and pension funds,” Cosatu said. “The profit they generate is needed to grow the economy and create decent jobs.”

This may be true – after all, mining has underpinned South Africa’s economic growth for over a century. But the country may need to adapt to a new reality, and quickly. “Mining is in a downturn now and there’s a possibility it will never pick up again. That’s something that’s not widely appreciated, especially in South Africa, where there is a sense that mining will be there forever,” said Money. ■

# Nairobi's high-rise future unsettles its upmarket neighbourhoods

City planners say the only way is up. Well-to-do residents, worried about poor planning, disagree.



**Not in my backyard? Nairobi is growing, fast. But are hastily-constructed apartments the answer to its rapidly increasing population? Photo: Jerotich Seii**

## Vincent Ng'ethe in Nairobi

**O**ne Saturday morning in early April, some residents of Nairobi's Kilimani suburb huddled together virtually, to discuss what to do about the rapid transformation of their upmarket neighbourhood.

Known for its lush, well-appointed estates, Kilimani has recently seen an influx of private real estate developers who build massive apartment blocks among single-family houses. Residents complain they leave no room for green spaces, cut down stately, mature trees, and work noisily all day and late into the night.

In another high-end suburb, Westlands, similar concerns were aired in person at a meeting in between residents and a developer who wanted to build 130 units on a riverside plot measuring 1,300 square metres. Residents complained that the developer's traffic projections were inaccurate; that the excavation of new foundations would lead to the collapse of their homes; that the supply of water, which flows from the taps only twice a week, would be further strained; and that sewers would be unable to cope.

The new developments appear to be in line with Nairobi governor Sakaja Johnson's vision for the rapidly growing city. "In 2050, Nairobi will have a population of 10-million people. Shall we expand Nairobi? No. The only place we have to go is up. We just need to improve the water and sewerage," he said in late March, arguing for the relaxing of height limits in the city.

His remarks drew an immediate response from associations representing Kenyan architects, planners, property developers and the residents of some of Nairobi's neighbourhoods. In a joint statement, they said they recognised the need to accommodate the city's growing population but accused the governor of approaching it with disregard for "correct legal procedure and good order".

"It is no longer about serving the citizens of Nairobi; it is about how much money we can collect from the developers, and so the service is thrown out the window," said Florence Nyole, the president of Kenya's association of architects, one of the collectives which

signed the statement.

The statement urged the governor to prioritise sewerage and water networks, solid waste management, public transport, schools, health amenities, open green spaces, and fire and emergency services.

### **Borrowing from the poor**

Unaccustomed to popular protest, Kilimani's well-off residents were not entirely sure what to do to get heard by the city administrators over developer interests. So they turned to someone who knows how to do just that, inviting Daudi "Toure" Anami to their April meeting.

Toure works with the Mukuru Community Justice Centre, an organisation that defends human rights in one of Nairobi's largest informal settlements. In 2020, the community in Mukuru successfully took back a public school that had been grabbed and turned into a private school.

"Toure, how do you mobilise people to come out on the streets for a protest in large numbers?" a moderator asked. "That is where Kilimani will have to go."

Toure emphasised that communication was key – people must realise why these issues matter. "If you just tell people 'tomorrow we are protesting' and they don't know how they are linked to the issue, they might not turn up," he said.

Also on the call was Jerotich Seii, a lawyer with a history of activism, who had previously taken on the country's power utility. She traced the start of her urban activism to an encounter with work crews on a building site. "Last year, when I tried to confront some excavators, I was

Pro-activism:  
Plainclothes cops  
wrassle with  
activist Daudi  
'Toure' Anami  
in 2023. Photo:  
Simon Maina/AFP



roughed up by the contractor doing the excavation, and then I said, no, I have to speak,” she said on the call.

On social media, she began to compile photos and videos of building projects that appeared to be flouting regulations: working into the night after permitted hours, felling trees, and digging from ‘beacon to beacon’, a controversial building practice where excavators work right to the edges of the property boundary.

Seii said Chinese developers were behind some of the largest developments, and has implied publicly that Governor Johnson is fast-tracking permits for them. The governor denies this, and is suing Seii for defamation.

In the Kilimani neighbourhood online meeting, Seii accepted that there was some hypocrisy involved in protesting now, having never done so when poor urban planning threatened Nairobi’s

lower-income areas. “True,” she said. “But sometimes the shoe has to pinch badly. Maybe this monstrosity had to come up right next to me so that every day I watch with horror as they do what they are doing, so it inspires me to act.”

### ‘Not in my backyard’ activism?

The developers have a different perspective. One of them, Michire Mugo, has worked for years in Kilimani. He describes Jerotich Seii and other protesting residents as “entitled” (she, in turn, describes him as a “fixer” for larger Chinese developers).

From its birth when white settlers divided it into European, Asian and African quarters, Nairobi has been spatially segregated. Its poorer residents tend to live in high density neighbourhoods while the well-off spread out in the leafy sections. In this context, concerns about crowding

upmarket estates – where prescriptive bylaws limited dwelling units per plot – risk being dismissed as mere classism.

Mugo told *The Continent* that the nature of property development has changed in Kilimani. “Around 2010, only a few people developed houses and the supply was small,” he said and so new builds targeted the wealthy. But today’s developers, often Chinese firms, go for numbers over price per unit.

Mugo said: “They are comfortable selling in large numbers to satisfy a different market”, particularly studio apartments that work well as AirBnBs.

Kilimani remains popular with developers because it has infrastructure that is lacking elsewhere: water, electricity, sewerage, security and good roads.

According to Mugo, it is the government’s job to expand that

infrastructure to cope with new developments. “We are all taxed. So if Nairobi Water has not found it necessary to expand sewerage, or the government has not allocated money, do you stop development because the sewer has not been developed?”

In the end, nature might get the last word: In April, the long rains drowned much of Nairobi. Rivers burst their banks, flooding homes, making roads impassable, destroying people and homes.

Stung by criticism from other politicians, Governor Johnson ordered a halt to all building approvals and excavations in the city – seemingly an implicit admission that something was wrong.

For now, at least, his high-rise city plans are on hold, and upmarket backyards are once again safe from redevelopment. ■



**Green shoots:**  
Construction site  
for a new building  
on Ndemi Road in  
Kilimani, Nairobi.

Photo: Vincent Ng’ethe

# The complex history of Addis Ababa's Piassa is being erased

City planners want to make it shiny, modern and tourist-friendly.



**Rubble trouble:**  
Addis is being positioned as the Dubai of Africa. Which means Piassa must change – dramatically. Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP

## Maya Misikir in Addis Ababa

**B**ulldozers have knocked much of the Piassa area of Addis Ababa, erasing centuries of history that Ethiopians built there, starting with Menelik II in the late 1800s. It is now nearly unrecognisable.

This was, for decades, the beating, bustling heart of the capital city. Its streets were lined with artisans and

tradesmen, and crowded with people haggling over gold and silver, while sampling macchiatos from its old Italian era cafes. Many of Piassa's buildings were classic examples of the modernist architecture that was, until recently, Addis Ababa's signature style. Then came the bulldozers.

Gates and fences have been torn down, and old buildings have been turned





**Left: The Adwa Victory Memorial museum in the Piassa neighbourhood of Addis Ababa**

**Below: The character of Piassa is being overhauled, along with its masonry and architecture.**

Photos: Michele Spatari/AFP

to dust. Blue corrugated iron sheeting disguises the wreckage as excavators load the rubble onto red lorries, which dump it – along with great chunks of the city’s history – in far away rubbish tips.

The Addis Ababa Corridor Development project calls for wider streets, cycle lanes and modern buildings. Piassa’s narrow cobbled streets and historic buildings must give way to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s ambition to make the capital an East African Dubai.

Abiy intends to transform the capital into a smart, modern city that can deliver a reasonable quality of life for its estimated 5.7-million residents.

“The plan has in mind accommodations for a growing metropolis, including projects for the construction of bicycle routes, spacious pedestrian walkways, better roads, parks, libraries, and additional housing. To improve the quality of life in the city, the project aims to upgrade the outdated drainage systems, upgrade utility networks such as power



and internet,” reported Abren, a diaspora group.

But for some in Piassa the changes have come too fast, and without adequate warning. Some home and business owners have been evicted from their premises, sometimes with just a few days’ notice. Others have been told to modernise their own buildings, at enormous cost.

Renters in one Piassa building were told last month to replace their old, shuttered windows with tinted glass and aluminium frames, at a cost of about \$750 per window. There are as many as



20 windows in some apartment blocks, where the average rent is less than \$120 per month. After residents protested, the order was suspended.

One of the area's most iconic buildings, Hager Fikir – the first theatre in Addis – has been spared. But its historic front gate and an outbuilding, used as a torture chamber by the Italian occupiers, have been razed. “We pushed back, asking for formal letters communicating the decision,” said theatre director Abdulkarim Jemal. “It bought us a few days. But they demolished it anyway.”

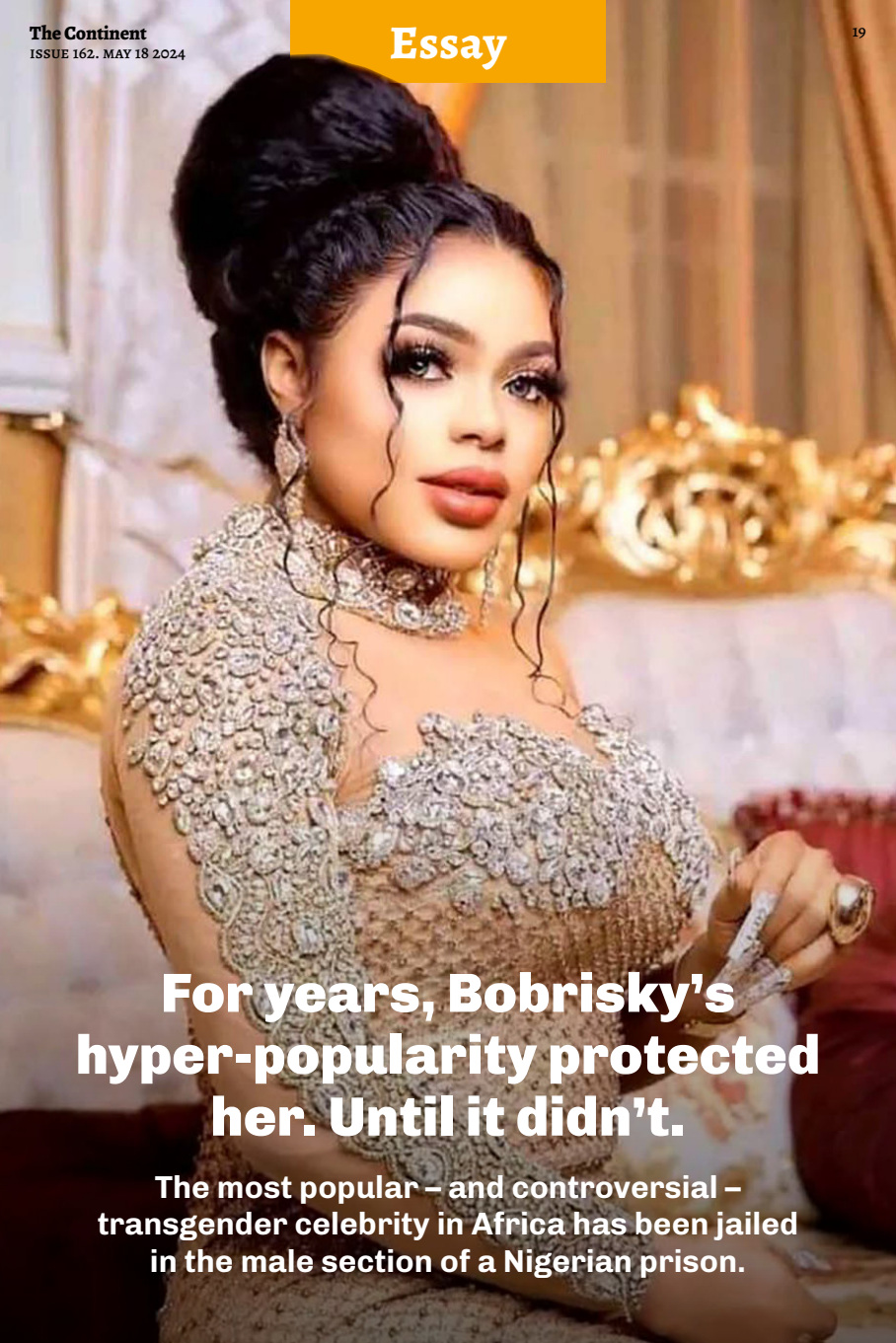
In response to residents' concerns, the Ethiopian Heritage Authority said that buildings in Piassa do not automatically qualify for protection due to their age.

With many buildings already destroyed, that heritage must be preserved in other ways. “We have photos and videos, and we must use these options to pass on the history to the next generation,” said Jemal. ■



**Ups and downs: Piassa's historic past will be relegated to the archives. The future of its residents is less certain.**

Photos: Michele Spatari/AFP



**For years, Bobrisky's  
hyper-popularity protected  
her. Until it didn't.**

**The most popular – and controversial –  
transgender celebrity in Africa has been jailed  
in the male section of a Nigerian prison.**

## Vincent Desmond in Lagos

**B**obrisky is hard to define: socialite, social media influencer, transgender woman, queer icon and, now, guest of the Nigerian Correctional Service.

She is one month into a six-month sentence after being convicted for “spraying”: a Nigerian party tradition in which revellers throw banknotes in the air, or paste them onto their bodies. This amounted to abuse of the naira, according to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Despite the ubiquity of “spraying”, the offence is rarely prosecuted. Before Bobrisky, in February, the anti-corruption watchdog successfully convicted actress Oluwadarasimi Omoseyin on the same charges. On conviction, she was given the option to pay a fine instead of going to prison. Bobrisky was not given that option. Similar charges were last month brought against another socialite, Pascal Okechukwu (aka Cubana Chief Priest).

There is context for these sudden prosecutions: Nigerian authorities are trying to save the face, if not the value, of the naira, after sharp declines against the US dollar. In recent months, forex traders have been rounded up for allegedly engaging in “speculative activities”, while cryptocurrency traders have been accused of sabotaging the currency.

In Bobrisky’s case, however, many – including her detractors – see the conviction as punishment for challenging Nigeria’s claimed conservatism around gender expression and sexuality. Among the EFCC’s court evidence was a video

of Bobrisky “spraying” at a March film premiere, where she set tongues wagging for winning and accepting recognition as the “best-dressed female” in attendance. And within days of her conviction and sentencing in April, the Nigerian government released the news that after a “thorough examination” it could confirm that Bobrisky had not undergone gender reassignment.

### Femme, glam, vexatious and iconic

Bobrisky’s rise to fame was rocky and well-documented, especially by herself. She first became popular on Snapchat for skin bleaching, using products that she sold at the time. Her viral soundbites and



**ScapeGOAT: Bobrisky was jailed for 'spraying' cash at an event in March**

videos then ingrained themselves into popular culture: she is probably the most popular queer celebrity in Africa, with 5-million followers on Instagram.

This was accompanied by constant scrutiny of her sexual and gender identity. On the identity question, her own self-concept has constantly shifted, making her a controversial persona both within and outside the queer community.

But whether she represented or rejected queerness, Bobrisky's continued visibility shone a spotlight on queer Africans. She is a queer icon regardless of her own politics.

"Bobrisky's existence is a story of queer resistance. A rather complex and entertaining one," said Matthew Blaise, a Nigerian activist and founder of Obodo, a queer rights group. "It's suffused with questions of identity crisis, denial and

even communal betrayal."

Bobrisky has on occasion said that she is not queer, but only crossdresses for fame. When police arrested 67 people in Delta State in August saying they were at a gay wedding, Bobrisky said on Instagram that they deserved it because Nigerian law forbids gay marriage.

"I think her life has been very impactful in communicating queered living to people who would not have understood it on paper," said Blaise. "I also believe her to be misogynistic, homophobic, classist and hella problematic."

Nigeria's fascination with Bobrisky demonstrates both the power and limits of the internet for the visibility of the LGBT+ community. It is this visibility that has protected Bobrisky, until now. And it is this visibility on the internet that has largely defined the last decade of the fight



**Agent of chaos:**  
Queer icon or  
problematic  
fave? Photos: @  
bobrisky222

for LGBTQ+ rights in West Africa, even as states have tried to legislate it.

Since the 2010s, many queer Nigerians and Africans have damned the laws that criminalise their lives. This hasn't translated into a legal shift, but it has contributed to a cultural one: it is now impossible to pretend the LGBTQ+ community doesn't exist in Nigeria or Africa. LGBTQ+ activists have been noticeably present in political moments like Nigeria's #EndSARS protests and Kenya's march against femicide.

Of course, Bobrisky's visibility – and her continued freedom, until recently – didn't reflect the wider reality of the average trans person in Nigeria. Many are homeless and exposed to the kind of danger and violence that Bobrisky, for a long time, seemed secure from, thanks to the privilege that comes from wealth and fame. "She had power, influence and access, which put her above a lot of Nigerians," said Blaise. "People are attracted to power and influence."

While Nigeria got its collective knickers in a knot over her award as best-dressed woman at the premiere of *Ajakaju*, Bobrisky appeared to continue her influencer life online, apparently unaffected by the national controversy.

Most trans women have to take a different approach. Just a few weeks later, Liber – a 22-year-old student and trans woman – went to a film screening of her own, and was shocked to wake up the next morning to find her photos plastered all over social media. "I woke up and there were thousands of people saying all sorts of things about me," she said, pausing

between breaths to calm herself down. "It gave me a lot of anxiety about navigating the internet."

### **LGBTQ+ activists have been noticeably present in major political moments like Nigeria's #EndSARS protests and Kenya's march against femicide.**

It also made her scared for her life in the real world. At her university, Liber tries not to draw attention to her gender identity. She spends as little time there as she can and takes cabs in and out.

For lectures, she wears her "Pray You Catch Me" hoodie – a big, black one covering most of her body. But in the aftermath of the online pile-on, she didn't know if all this suffocating masking would be enough. "It gave me so much anxiety about physical violence. It is one thing to live with daily anxiety about violence but I now felt like I had been set up for it."

Bobrisky did not mask.

In her chosen circles, she took up as much space as she liked. This made her a queer icon, but it also made her an exception. But now we know that even this exceptionalism was not enough to protect her. She is reportedly serving her time in the male section of Ikoyi Prison.

We don't know what is happening to her in there, at the mercy of a state that constantly reaffirms its queerphobia; and, for the first time in her highly visible life, she is unable to tell us. ■

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*Vincent Desmond is a Lagos-based writer and researcher.*

# Trust in electoral commissions is low – and dropping

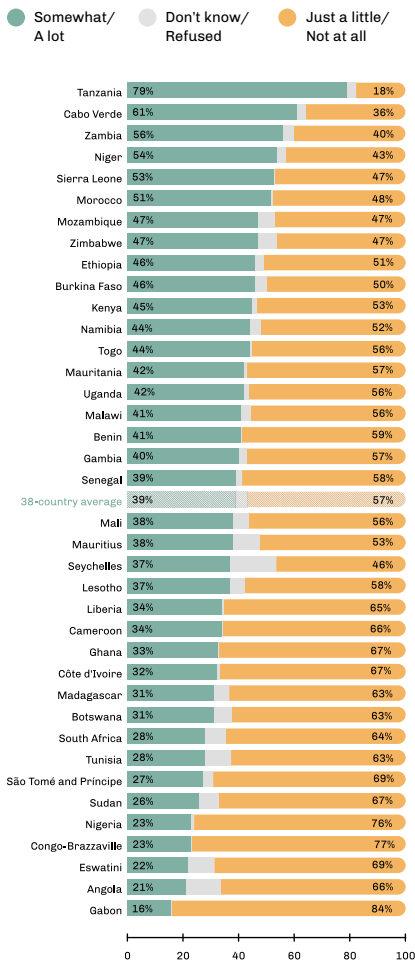
People’s trust in the agency responsible for managing voter rolls, election day logistics and the tallying and announcement of results – the national electoral commission – is a critical factor in whether they accept the outcome as legitimate or challenge it in the courts or on the streets.

Afrobarometer surveys in 38 countries show that, on average, only 39% of Africans say they trust their national electoral commission “somewhat” or “a lot,” while 57% express little or no trust.

Tanzania is an outlier, with 79% of respondents expressing trust in the electoral commission. Fewer than one in four respondents say the same in Gabon (16%), Angola (21%), Eswatini (22%), Congo-Brazzaville (23%), and Nigeria (23%). Trust in the electoral commission is particularly low among urban residents (35%), young people (37%), citizens with at least secondary education (35%), and Central Africans (24%).

Worse, public trust in national electoral commissions is on the decline: across 27 countries where we’ve asked consistently since 2011/2013, it has dropped by 10 percentage points, from 51% to 41%. ■

## Trust in the national electoral commission | 38 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.



## High on their own supply

At least Tiwa Savage's feature film gives us a boppin' soundtrack.

**Wilfred Okiche**

**T**he origin of *Water & Garri*, the debut feature film starring Nigerian pop diva Tiwa Savage in her first lead role, goes back to her 2021 EP of the same title.

Named after the popular staple food made by mixing water with garri – a starchy flour obtained from granulated cassava – the five-track EP included some of the strongest work of Savage's

immensely successful career.

Savage initially conceived of *Water & Garri* as a two-part project and was going to make a visual album à la Beyoncé's *Black is King* (in which Savage and her director Meji Alabi were contributors).

Then the creative juices hit, and the project developed from visual album to short film and then to a full feature. Savage struggled to connect this new direction with the original inspiration and so she made a companion soundtrack album.

Shot in Ghana's Cape Coast, a region that has played host to many Afrobeats music videos, *Water & Garri* is part tourist essay, part vanity project and part extended music video.

None of it is particularly exciting.

Tiwa Savage plays Aisha, a woman who left her home in the fictional Eastside community following a traumatic event. Ten years later, after finding success as a fashion designer in Los Angeles, she returns to the childhood home where she was raised to support a friend, Stephanie (Jemima Osunde), who has also been touched by the violence of Eastside's ongoing deterioration.

It is a fairly commonplace story that *Water & Garri* is dealing with, one that touches on elements like migration, displacement and grieving. Savage's Aisha presents a relatable avatar for audiences to work through their emotions. And while Afrobeats' reigning queen is undeniably a dynamic screen presence, she is unable to bring life or depth to the character, saddled as she is with befuddling dialogue



and unclear motivations.

The writing, credited to Comfort Emmanuel, is incredibly pedestrian. The characters aren't real people and as such the entire thing comes off like a first draft.

**Alabi's visual style is still very much derived from music videos, but the beauty of his sequences are interrupted whenever someone attempts to act.**

While an insufficient screenplay could potentially be salvaged by the style and personality of a confident filmmaker with something to say, Alabi has neither. Best known for his prolific and occasionally exciting music video work, Alabi's relationship with Savage goes back almost 10 years. He has worked on some of her most famous visuals, including the stunning video for her track 49-99.

*Water & Garri* is billed as Alabi's feature debut but as a filmmaker, he hasn't outlined anything of interest. Visually, his style is still very much derived from music videos. The beauty of his sequences are interrupted whenever someone opens their mouth to speak or attempts to act.

Savage – who also receives producer credit – may not be a credible filmmaker yet, but after almost 15 years atop the pop food chain, she is certainly a hitmaker. The feature's soundtrack album is proof.

The titular track, for instance, is a jubilant closer that blends the light highlife grooves of The Cavemen with the ethno-jazz fusion of Cameroon-born Richard Bona. Black Sheriff and Young Jonn ride a turbulent beat on *Kilimanjaro* and Savage gives meaning to torch songs like *Lost Time* and *Love O*.

The *Water & Garri* film project may be dead on arrival, but at least we'll always have the soundtrack. ■



Photo: Film still,  
*Water & Garri*

# 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**

"I sold my soul to Manu Dibango as soon as I heard that song."

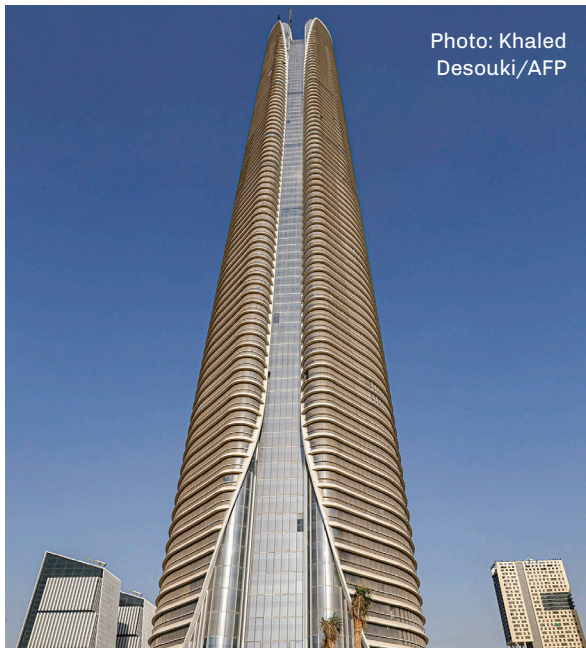


Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP

- 1\_** Name the tallest building in Africa as of 2023 (pictured).
- 2\_** Which country is the building found in?
- 3\_** What is Benin's official language?
- 4\_** What country does the Dahlak Archipelago belong to?
- 5\_** What is the alternative name for Zanzibar Island?
- 6\_** Lake Edward borders which two countries?
- 7\_** Which dictator was the lake renamed after in 1973? (It regained its former name after he was overthrown in 1979.)
- 8\_** Entoto (established by Menelik II in 1884) was the previous capital of which country?
- 9\_** What country is singer and actress Tiwa Savage from?
- 10\_** Manu Dibango created the "most sampled song in African history". What is its name?

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

**I**t's a special occasion, dear reader! No – it's not that one of our more problematic leaders has been removed from office. And, no – the British Museum has not finally realised that the only British thing about it is its name and decided to give everyone their stolen stuff back. The cause for celebration is *Drift's* birthday – this column turns four today!

We thought we would have a dinner party to celebrate, but the guest list situation had us giving up on that plan. For example, we considered inviting some of our ousted presidents like Gabon's Ali Bongo who was removed in a coup in August 2023.

Just as we were about to ask about his dietary requirements, we discovered that he is apparently not eating! According to his lawyers, Bongo and two of his sons have gone on hunger strike in protest over “acts of torture”.

Further to this, they have also filed a case in Paris to denounce the “arbitrary arrest” and “sequestration” faced by members of the Bongo family.

The Gabonese government issued a statement saying they are surprised at these claims and that the Bongo gang are treated with dignity and that Ali

himself often has family come to visit him. According to the government spokesperson, the allegations are “damaging the image of Gabon”.

The next issue we ran into was the seating plan, considering not everyone is on the *best* of terms. Let's start with Chad's president elect, Mahamat Déby, who was last week declared winner of the

country's elections. Unfortunately for him, runner-up candidate Succès Masra filed an appeal at the constitutional council, in which he has called for the election results to be nullified. The council wasn't having it though, and confirmed Déby's win. Still, definitely can't sit those two together!

In a similar vein, relations between

Niger and Benin have been tense since the July 2023 coup that saw Mohamed Bazoum removed from office. The border between them was initially closed as part of Ecowas sanctions. However, when these were lifted, Niger decided that no they would not be reopening that particular border, which hit Benin where it hurts – right in the economy. In response, Benin was all, okay fine, in that case you can't export your fancy crude oil to China through our even fancier port of Sèmè.

## It's our party, we'll laugh if we want to



**CONTINENTAL DRIFT**  
Samira Sawlani



**Is that cake for us? No, it's for Robert Mugabe in 2017, so it's probably stale by now. Where's our cake?! Photo: AFP**

Cue a torrent of drama and bickering, until China apparently stepped in, leading to an announcement from Benin – through gritted teeth, no doubt – that they were lifting the ban on oil exports.

So organising a celebratory dinner would have just been too difficult, and in particular would have been incomplete without the guest of honour: You!

Over the past four years you've been with us through coups in five African countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, and Gabon), a few coups within coups, and a few attempted coups.

We've introduced you to the cast of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, who have overthrown a number of presidents, from Alpha Conde to Ali Bongo.

There have been a ton of elections, some which have brought into the fold first-time presidents like Kenya's William Ruto, Liberia's Joseph Boakai, and Senegal's Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

In other cases we have seen long-term leaders continue to extend their time in office, like Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who in 2022 began his *sixth* term.

We got through a whole global pandemic together! Which illustrated to us once more the failings of many governments but also the unfair global policies and attitudes that saw some of the world's biggest countries hoard vaccines ensuring that African countries were not given a fair opportunity to purchase them.

And in the past year we have seen a devastating conflict tear apart Sudan, creating one of the world's biggest hunger and displacement crises. Indeed, there are parts of this continent such as the Sahel region and DR Congo where insecurity continues to threaten the lives of innocent civilians every single day.

We at *Drift* have week in, week out done our best to keep highlighting these stories which either get too little coverage or do not receive enough attention.

Amid the doom and gloom, there have been many many stories of joy, of the achievements of Africans in every sphere of life, of the power of community, of peaceful transfers of power, and even the positive acts of state (like South Africa standing up for the Palestinians).

Most importantly, we hope that we have made you feel welcome in these pages, and that you were able to laugh with us as we imagine the behind-the-scenes lives of our leaders, for if we didn't laugh – tear gas notwithstanding – we'd just have to cry. ■



**Frenemies:** President Lazarus Chakwera and his deputy Saulos Chilima appear to have (their daggers in) each other's backs. Photo: Amos Gumulira/AFP

# Bury the hatchet today, hatch a plot to bury each other tomorrow

**Malawi president drops charges against his deputy.**

## Josephine Chinele in Blantyre

**M**alawi's vice-presidents never get along with their bosses. It's a 30-year trend that started with Bakili Muluzi and his deputy Justin Malewezi, the first pair to lead democratic Malawi, and seems to continue with the current president and vice-president, Lazarus Chakwera and Saulos Chilima.

Months before the 2004 presidential election, Malewezi defected from the party led by the president he had served under for 10 years, aligning himself instead with opposition leader Aleke Banda. Muluzi may not have liked it but there was nothing he could do.

The pair had been the first to contest for Malawian leadership as running mates under a new Constitution that ushered

in multi-party democracy in 1994. By making the vice-president an elected official, that Constitution made those in the position extremely powerful – and unfireable.

In 2022, two years into their joint leadership, President Chakwera stripped Chilima of all his delegated duties, after the vice-president appeared on a list of 84 government officials who had allegedly accepted gifts from Malawi-born British businessman Zuneth Sattar.

Chilima, who was also deputy to former president Peter Mutharika, was accused of accepting \$280,000 from the businessman. In exchange, Chilima allegedly granted Sattar lucrative government contracts. Chilima denies wrongdoing. Despite the severity of these allegations, Chilima could not be fired – because he was elected, not appointed.

The episode felt like *déjà vu*. Chilima had only entered the alliance with Chakwera after falling out with his boss, former president Peter Mutharika. Before that, then-president Bingu wa Mutharika had brought treason charges against his vice president Cassim Chilumpha. Joyce Banda's deputy, Khumbo Kachali, endorsed her rival in the 2014 election. And, of course, there was the acrimony between Muluzi and Malewezi.

Perhaps it just isn't meant to be between elected presidents and their elected deputies. But if that is the case, Chakwera and Chilima have taken the “conscious uncoupling” route: in public they appeared largely civil, even friendly, with each other, even as the prosecution gathered evidence.

## Can't live with or without them

Then, this month, Chakwera's government dropped the corruption charges against Chilima, triggering even more speculation about how Malawi's perennial power stalemate at the top works – or rather, how it doesn't.

“Discontinuing this case is a calculated move to prevent Chilima from spilling the beans on people close to the presidency,” said Michael Kaiyatsa, who heads the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation.

**“Discontinuing this case is a calculated move to prevent [Chilima] from spilling the beans on people close to the presidency.”**

“I would not read too much into this prosecution, and interpret it as consistent with previous episodes of bad blood between presidents and their deputies,” said Boniface Dulani, a political commentator at the University of Malawi. “Both parties stood to lose from pursuing this case further. It's possible that this is a behind-the-scenes political arrangement with eyes on the 2025 elections.”

This would be ironic: the one time in 30 years that a president and vice-president manage to resolve their differences, is probably the one time they should not have.

“It doesn't give hope for civil society. It's a signal that the fight against corruption is only for small and not big fish as shown here,” said Kaiyatsa. ■

# Has Tanzania *really* become more democratic?

**We tried to register a new political party and found the nation's touted progress to be missing in action.**

**Andrew Bomani**

**O**pposition parties on the continent have significant challenges to overcome if they hope to win power, corruption not least among them, as seen in ruling parties who buy votes or use security forces to intimidate voters. But at least in countries such as Kenya and Uganda opposition parties can form and compete in elections. In Tanzania, which goes to the polls next year, new opposition parties can't even get registered.

I know because I tried.

Believing that Tanzanians deserve a bigger choice of parties – after the main two parties won 97% of the vote in the presidential election of 2020 – I joined forces with a like-minded comrade to form the Independent People's Party.

Like any serious leaders, our first thought was to make the party official by applying to the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties. Little did we know that what is supposed to be a straightforward administrative procedure would become the all-encompassing struggle of our fledgling party's brief existence.

Everything about this process has been made unnecessarily difficult. The

requirements are hard to determine, and communication from the registrar is limited. Despite this, we completed the necessary forms and submitted them on 4 May 2023. And then ... nothing.

It took constant chasing up to get a response a month later. We were then told that further information was required, including proof of our citizenship.

Despite having previously led another political party, and my father being the former attorney general of Tanzania, I was informed that I have failed to prove my citizenship. Not only does this undermine our basic democratic rights, it also threatens to put us at risk of statelessness.

We now understand why Tanzania has not registered a new political party since 2014! This is no way to prepare for a credible election, and belies the idea that the country has become more democratic under President Samia Suluhu Hassan. That's an oversimplification at best – or worse, a misleading lie. ■

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*Andrew Bomani is a political scientist*

*and co-founder of the Independent People's Party.*

*This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*



# THE BIG PICTURE

Bless the reins: Jockeys from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria bolt around the track at the 12th Cameroon International Horse Race Grand Prix in Maroua.

Photo: Daniel Beloumou Olomo AFP



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