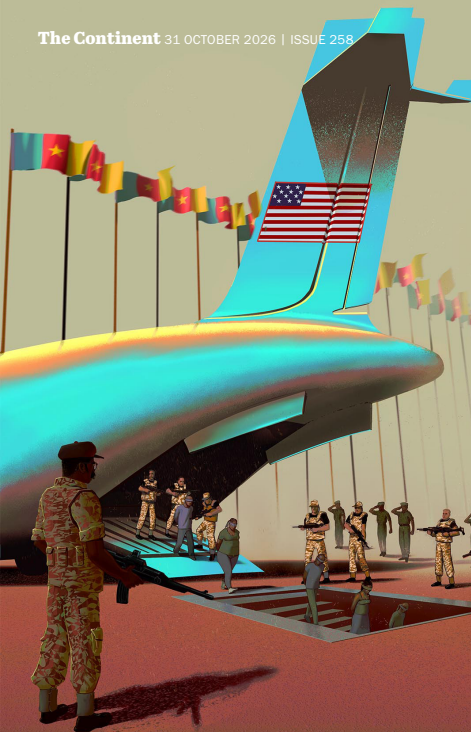


The Continent



A one-way
ticket to limbo

ILLUSTRATION: SHEED SORPLE



COVER: For months, the United States has been deporting people to countries that are not their own, despite court orders. Human Rights Watch recorded more than 530 people expelled to 14 African countries. *The Continent* spoke to detainees in Cameroon, sent there under a secretive agreement with Washington. Evidence points to US financial leverage – it is sending millions in military aid – and possible Cameroonian interest in returning political opponents. Meanwhile, deportees remain detained without clear legal status or certainty. As one official said to Human Rights Watch: “The point is to scare people.” (p13).

Inside

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Africans of the Year

We have closed our reader nominations and have our final list of Africans who are doing important, cool and interesting things. Thank you for all your suggestions. The edition comes out in time for Detty December/Dezemba/whatever you celebrate. You can use it to spark a conversation with a stranger.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA

Durban eyes Africa's first Olympics

South Africa has thrown its hat into the ring to host either the 2036 or 2040 Olympic games, *Reuters* reports. Durban was selected as the host city, despite being dropped as the 2022 Commonwealth Games host after not meeting deadlines. Its Olympic committee will present the country's bid in November. If approved, Durban would be the first African city to host the Olympics. South Africa previously scored an African first in 2010 when it hosted the Fifa World Cup.

TANZANIA

More natural gas discovered in Mnazi Bay

Tanzania has announced a new discovery of natural gas, the first such find in a decade. The natural gas was discovered in Mnazi Bay in the south of the country, the *BBC* reports. Energy Minister Juma Homera said the new well should begin production next month. In recent years, the country has encouraged the use of locally available natural gas, which is cheaper than petrol, to power vehicles. Many drivers have converted their vehicles to run on both petrol and gas.

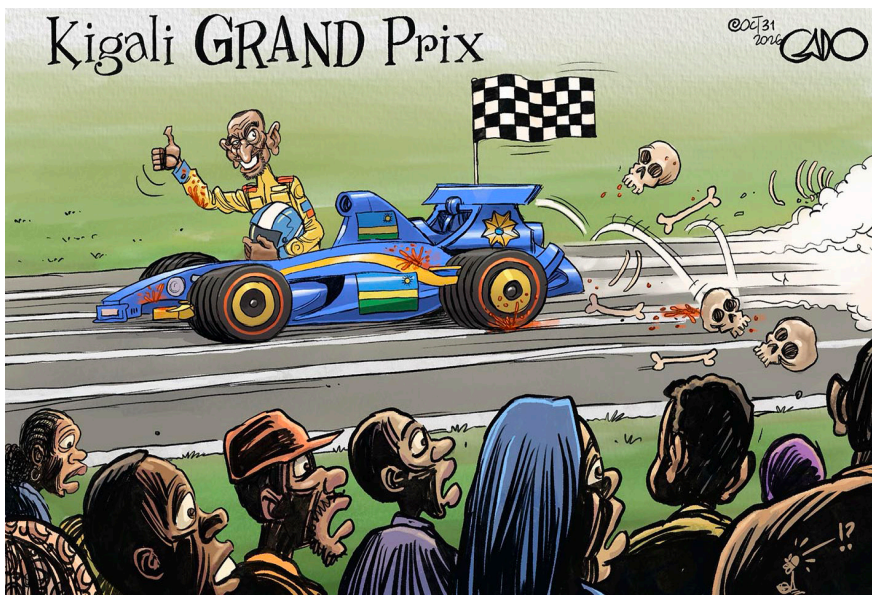


More cowbell: King Charles III waggles cowbells at a parade in the Bahamas.

COMMONWEALTH

Britain to address its slavery legacy

King Charles III is set to discuss the British legacy of slavery at a summit with Commonwealth leaders, *The Guardian* reports. The king arrived in the Bahamas on Tuesday for his Caribbean tour (including Guyana and Antigua and Barbuda) and confirmed he will discuss the topic as pressure for a dialogue on slavery reparations escalates. Britain transported some 3.1-million to 3.4-million Africans across the Atlantic before the slave trade's abolition in 1807. Caribbean leaders have also urged the king to apologise for the atrocities of slavery.



RWANDA

New sanctions for backing rebels

The United States has imposed sanctions on Rwanda's defence ministry over allegations it is militarily backing the March 23 Movement rebel group, the *BBC* reports. This follows sanctions against Rwanda's army and four senior military commanders in March 2026. Rwanda denies backing or supporting M23, which took control of Goma and Bukavu in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2025. The US also imposed sanctions on Rwandan bank Zigama Credit and Savings Society for providing M23 troops with financing.

NIGER

Niamey says Chad's bad, ups French resistance

Niger has accused Chad of launching a drone strike that killed two civilians and wounded others, *AFP* reports. According to Nigerien authorities, the drone struck Salvador Pass, located in a remote mining region near its borders with Algeria and Libya. The area is notorious for smuggling and militant activity. Niamey accused France of backing the attack and described it as an aggression. It demanded compensation and vowed to refer the matter to the United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council.

SOMALIA

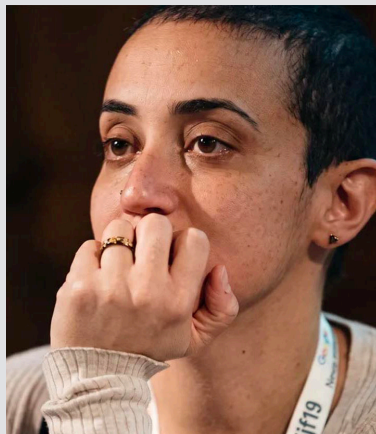
UN political mission ends with a whimper

The United Nations political mission in Somalia concludes this weekend, marking the end of more than three decades of successive UN efforts, *AP* reports. Somalia has had to rebuild since the 1991 collapse of its central government and still battles terrorism by Al-Shabaab. African Union troops are expected to continue supporting Somali forces fighting militants. UN Secretary-General António Guterres acknowledged the country still faces significant political, security, and humanitarian challenges and called for sustained international support.

GHANA

Better butter up both sides or else we're toast!

Ghana's foreign minister, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, said his country has received support from Russia in its bid to join Brics as a partner. The minister met his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa summit. Ghana is hoping the move will help it to attract investment, expand trade, and strengthen its economy. At the announcement on Wednesday, Ablakwa hurriedly added that this is not meant to replace its relationship with Western allies, stressing Ghana's non-aligned position.



Muzzle: A court fined Lina Attalah \$53,500 and shut down the Mada Masr news site.

EGYPT

Crackdown on independent voices

A Cairo court has ordered news site *Mada Masr* to close and fined editor-in-chief Lina Attalah for managing an unlicensed website. Her lawyer said Attalah had applied for a licence three years ago but received no response. The trial was conducted at breakneck speed – in a single hearing, the charges were confirmed, a judgment pronounced, and a fine of 3-million Egyptian pounds (\$53,500) was imposed. Earlier this month, six journalists working at *Matsadaash* were arrested and accused of supporting the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.



PHOTO: UPDF

SOUTH SUDAN - UGANDA

Charcoal feud shows no sign of dying down

Juba has denied claims by Kampala that charcoal transported across its border and sold in Uganda is financing armed groups, the *Daily Monitor* reports. In 2023, Uganda restricted commercial charcoal production and trade in its northern regions to curb deforestation. Ugandan traders say this forced them to bring charcoal in from South Sudan. Despite paying taxes and getting permits in both countries, their shipments are now blocked. The dispute is at a stalemate, as households dependent on charcoal for cooking fuel have few alternatives.

Burning issue: Charcoal seized in north Uganda is distributed to community members.

JOINING the DOTS

YUSUF OMOTAYO

At the third Russia-Africa Summit in Moscow this week, two of Africa's biggest countries –

Nigeria and South Africa – sent deputy ministers and career diplomats rather than senior political leaders. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa attended the last summit in 2023, as did Nigeria's vice-president at the time. Both countries are currently navigating tensions with Washington. United States President Donald Trump

has accused Nigeria of a Christian genocide, although relations improved slightly last year when the US sent military support. Risking a Russian visit months before a general election might invite unwelcome scrutiny. Instead, President Bola Tinubu announced he was going on a spiritual pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, promising to pray for the nation. South Africa faces its own tensions with Trump, who has accused the country of persecuting its white citizens. Despite being a Brics partner with Russia, it seems now is not the time to be seen to be too chummy with Putin. ■

NEWS

DIPLOMACY

The UAE wants to lead the United Nations. Yes, really.

Kenya appeared to welcome the UAE's bid, only to distance itself a day later. That diplomatic whiplash captures the politics of a candidacy that's drawn fierce opposition from Sudanese human-rights advocates.

CHRISTINE MUNGAI IN NAIROBI

ONE YEAR after El-Fasher fell to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the United Arab Emirates is fronting a top diplomat to become the next secretary-general of the United Nations.

Sudanese civil-war survivors, human-rights experts, and policy strategists strongly oppose Lana Nusseibeh's nomination. She is a long-serving UAE diplomat and foreign affairs official who has extensively denied the country's human rights abuses. At a press briefing hosted by Crisis Action, former Human Rights Watch head Ken Roth called Nusseibeh an "utterly inappropriate candidate", criticising her past public denials of the UAE arming the RSF.

The opposition comes amid a greater international consensus on the UAE's role in enabling mass atrocities in Darfur. UN experts and the United States government have found credible evidence that UAE

actors supplied the RSF with weapons and financing.

This support was a decisive factor in the RSF's capture of El-Fasher and the subsequent atrocities committed against civilians, said Nathaniel Raymond of the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab.

The UAE has continued to deny that it arms or supports the RSF.

Nusseibeh has been endorsed by all six Gulf countries – the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain. Somaliland is also supporting her bid, though it is not a UN member state.

Kenya briefly appeared to support her bid when prime cabinet secretary Musalia Mudavadi cited her experience in multilateral diplomacy.

But Kenya's foreign affairs principal secretary Korir Sing'oei quickly walked that back the next day in an X post. He clarified that Nairobi had not endorsed any candidate and was "following keenly" (sic) the ongoing campaigns. ■

NIGERIA



PHOTO: LIGHT ORINE TAMUNTONYE/AP

Car pool: Supporters of the All Progressives Congress at a rally in Kaduna last Saturday.

Prado giveaway drives Nigerians to the edge

YUSUF OMOTAYO IN LAGOS

ON SUNDAY Dayo Israel, the youth leader of Nigeria's ruling All Progressives Congress, distributed seven Toyota Prado SUVs to mobilisers ahead of next year's general elections. The act sparked outrage among Nigerians.

In a video showing off the vehicles, Israel thanked first lady Oluremi Tinubu for her "continuous support to the party structure", suggesting she played a role in procuring the cars.

It's the latest flashy display by

President Bola Tinubu's party. The APC has removed the fuel subsidy and floated the naira, which has increased Nigerians' cost of living. The president described the economic situation as "painful but necessary".

Abigail Adedamola, a member of the opposition Nigeria Democratic Congress, said the president's call for sacrifice was a one-sided affair.

"They are buying expensive cars in a country where the majority don't know where their next meal is coming from," she told *The Continent*. ■

ALGERIA

Niger borrows troops as frosty stand-off thaws

This is Algeria's first military deployment on foreign soil since 1973, when it sent soldiers to support Egypt in its war against Israel.

MADJID SERRAH IN ALGIERS

ALGERIA has agreed to send troops to Niger in order to protect the two countries' shared energy and economic interests.

Parliament approved the deployment after a request from Niamey. In late August, Algeria sent four fighter jets to Niger to thwart a coup attempt.

The two countries are partners in the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline project, currently being built. It will move Nigerian gas through Niger to Algeria and onwards to Europe.

Algeria has also built a power plant in Niamey, which was officially opened in June. Both are involved in oil exploration in northern Niger, led by Algeria's state-owned Sonatrach in partnership with Niger's national oil company.

The support is a turnaround for

the Algeria-Niger relationship. Until recently, the countries were on sour terms after Algeria condemned Niger's 2023 military coup.

Two years later relations worsened when Algeria shot down a Malian drone near their shared border, leading Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, as members of the Alliance of Sahel States, to recall their ambassadors from Algiers. Things improved this year when Niger President Abdourahmane Tiani visited Algiers.

The deployment arrives as Algeria's rival, Morocco, aims to deepen relations with regional states by giving them access to the Atlantic Ocean and plugging them into the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline. This is a separate gas project on the West African coast.

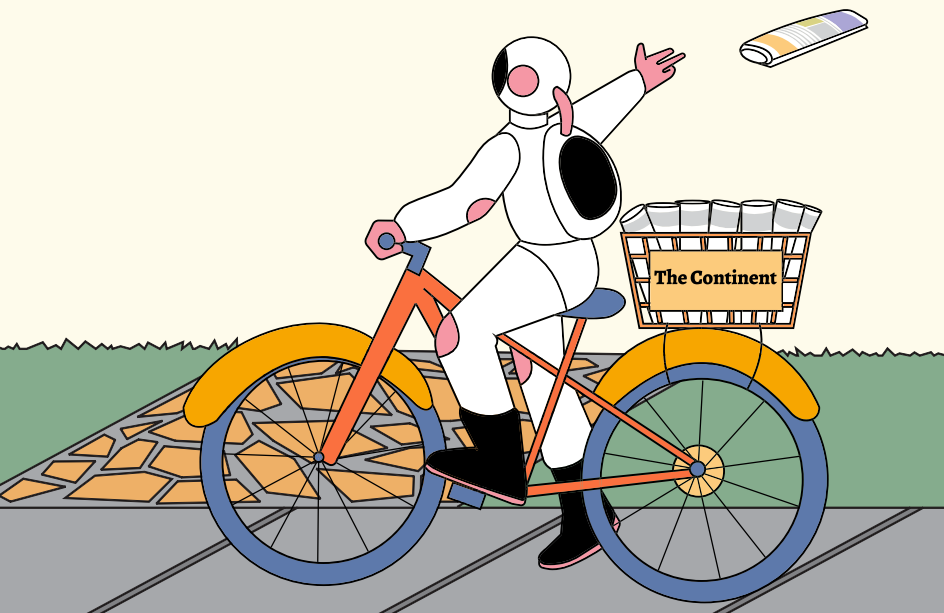
"Algeria has lost a significant part of its networks of influence in this strategic region," geopolitical analyst Raouf Farrah told *The Continent*.

This is the result of the diplomatic crisis surrounding Niger and Mali's 2024 withdrawal from the Algiers Peace Agreement, which sought to end conflict between the Malian government and Tuareg-led separatists.

Farrah stressed that military support had to be accompanied by economic investment, social development, and political solutions to the multiple crises facing the Sahel. ■

Reading is resistance

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KENYA

Sleepless in Nairobi

For decades, Kenya offered refuge to dissidents fleeing repression across East Africa. Now, abductions and forced returns are endangering the promise of a haven.

ROBERT AMALEMBA IN NAIROBI

THE ABDUCTION of Tanzanian opposition activist Twaha Mwaipaya last weekend on the outskirts of Nairobi has renewed concerns about the safety of political exiles in East Africa.

On Wednesday, Kenyan activists approached the high court in Nairobi, seeking to compel authorities to produce Mwaipaya in court.

“We have credible information Twaha is still in Kenya and have engaged cross-border assistance to ensure he is not illegally extradited and remains safe,” Collins Mango, the advocate who filed the case, told *The Continent*.

The Chadema youth-wing activist has been advocating for a new Constitution and police reforms in Tanzania. A letter purportedly from the Kenya police circulated online this week, claiming he had been found at the home of

Tanzanian journalist Hilda Newton.

Police spokesperson Muchiri Nyaga dismissed the letter as fake, adding that investigations into Mwaipaya’s disappearance had begun. Neither Nyaga nor government spokesperson Charles Owino returned *The Continent*’s request for further comment.

There is growing concern over regional co-operation in pursuing dissidents. In May, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan called for joint action against dissidents who cross borders into neighbouring countries during a press conference with Kenyan President William Ruto.

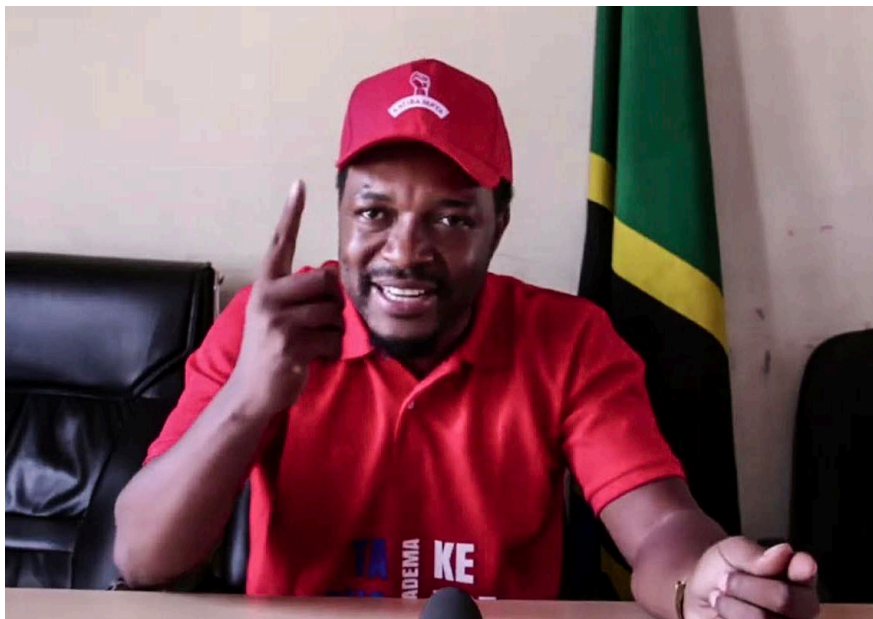
Mwaipaya’s abduction comes days after the killing of Robert Kabera, a staunch critic of Rwandan President Paul Kagame. His body was found in Uganda, where he had been living.

“If Tanzania has a case against Mwaipaya, it should pursue his extradition and afford him due process and a fair trial according to Kenyan law,” said Anthony Asimwe, vice-president of the Uganda Law Society. “No criminal allegation justifies bypassing the law and denying a person access to judicial safeguards.”

A growing pattern

Mwaipaya’s case is one among a growing number.

In February 2022, Tanzanian human-



Disappeared: Tanzanian activist Twaha Mwaipaya was abducted outside Nairobi last week.

rights defender Mshabaha Mshabaha Hamza survived an abduction attempt in Kenya. In January 2025, journalist and activist Maria Sarungi Tsehai was abducted in Nairobi by armed men. She was released hours later after a social-media outcry when videos of her abduction went viral. Tsehai had moved to Kenya after receiving threats in Tanzania.

In November 2024, Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change was abducted in Nairobi. He was taken to Uganda, where he faces treason charges.

Besigye's defence counsel Erias Lukwago was himself abducted in Kampala and has been detained

without trial since June. That same month, Kenyan lawyer Martha Karua, who is part of Besigye's defence team, was denied entry into Uganda.

Four months before Besigye was abducted, 36 members of his party were arrested in Kisumu, Kenya and forcibly returned to Uganda. They now face terrorism-related charges.

The Pan African Solidarity Network has called on Kenyan authorities and regional and international institutions to take co-ordinated action against alleged abductions and cross-border repression.

The organisation has also called on Kenyan civil society to apply sustained pressure on the relevant authorities. ■



PHOTO: WELBA YAMO PASCAL FILE / AP

FEATURE

Give us your poor, your huddled masses, our dissidents and cash

Cameroon is accepting third-country deportees from Washington through a secretive agreement. Evidence points to US financial leverage and Cameroon's interest in political opponents being returned. But the terms are not public and deportees face restricted rights and uncertain futures.

NOUAYOU NGOUNOU BORIS JOËL
IN YAOUNDÉ

DANIEL* speaks to *The Continent* in a noisy café in Yaoundé. He's allowed to be here for only a few hours – at nightfall, he must return to a detention facility in the city.

He's among 54 people the United

States has deported to Cameroon since the year began. Daniel is Kenyan and says he fled persecution in his home country, seeking asylum in the US. A court there granted him protection from being sent back to Kenya. So, Washington sent him here.

"Nobody came to tell us why we are here, what will happen to us, or what

process we have to go through,” he says. “Nobody came.”

The conditions at the detention facility are grim. Every week, someone at the facility contracts malaria and has to be taken to hospital.

“There are mosquitoes everywhere,” Daniel tells *The Continent*. “The water is dirty. There are rats.”

Permission to leave during daylight hours was granted only after detainees staged a one-day hunger strike two months into being locked up. They must still return for an evening roll-call. And they don’t have access to their passports, Daniel says.

Since January 2025, US President Donald Trump’s administration has signed deals with at least 36 countries – 14 in Africa – to accept foreign nationals

who cannot legally be expelled to their own countries because of a court injunction.

Human Rights Watch has tallied at least 536 third-country expulsions from the US to African countries between January 2025 and August 2026 – more than five times the previous year’s total.

Cameroon agreed to a deal with the US in December and the flights began almost immediately. Daniel’s was the second to land. The first two flights carried 17 people from nine African countries.

All but one of the deportees on those first flights had won a US court’s protection against being returned home. Most identify as LGBTQIA+ and same-sex relations are dangerous or illegal in their home countries. Others were

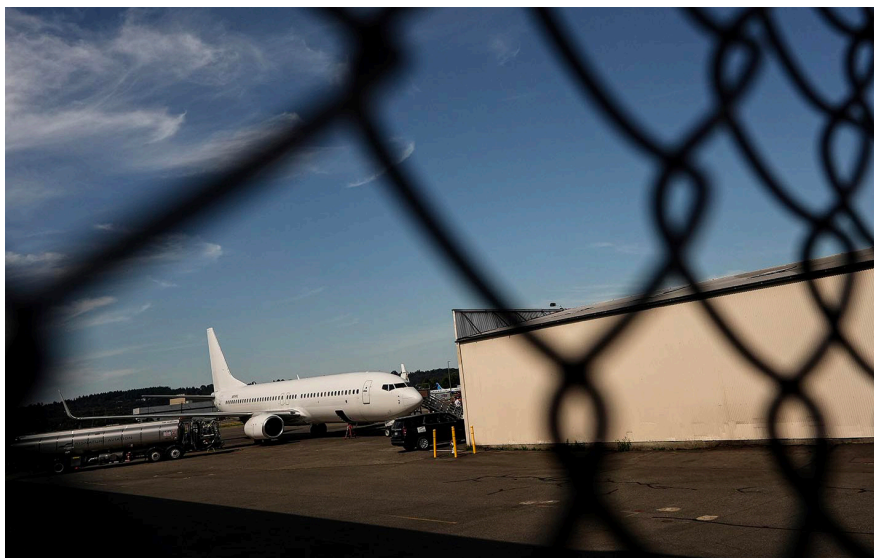


PHOTO: LINDSEY WASSON, FILE/AP

Frosty deception: An ICE flight at King County International Airport-Boeing Field, in Seattle.

fleeing political persecution. On arrival in Cameroon, authorities locked them up with no legal basis.

What was in it for Yaoundé?

Cameroon has never publicly explained why it agreed to receive non-Cameroonians deported from the US. But the timing of a US funding decision and reporting on the negotiations offer clues as to how Washington secured the deal – and what Yaoundé may have hoped to gain.

On 9 January, six days before the first deportation flight, the US state department awarded \$30-million to the Cameroon operations of the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR. A US federal spending record describes the funding as being “in support of third-country national arrangement negotiations”. According to the *New York Times*, Washington withheld the payment until Cameroon agreed to accept deportees.

The UNHCR said the funds were not earmarked for deportations, but the timing suggests humanitarian aid was used as leverage.

Yaoundé may also have had its own political calculations. A senior Cameroonian official told the *New York Times* the arrangement amounted to “blackmail”, but said the government hoped the US might deport Cameroonian dissidents in return. Armed separatists have been fighting the state in Cameroon's English-speaking regions since 2017.

There is no public evidence that a reciprocal deportation arrangement was

formally included in the deal.

The secrecy is the problem, says Cyrille Rolande Bechon, executive director of Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme Cameroun.

“In reality, we don't know much about the content of this agreement,” she tells *The Continent*. “It is illegal. There is no legal basis that can explain or authorise it.”

The UNHCR said the funds were not earmarked for deportations, but the timing suggests humanitarian aid was used as leverage.

The agreement also sits within a broader economic relationship. In December 2025, the two countries signed an \$850-million health-security agreement, including \$400-million in US funding. In August, the US embassy announced \$7-billion in potential investment and trade opportunities.

“What Cameroon gains is precisely what the health agreement covers – and the money flowing to UNHCR,” political scientist Faustin Etouke told *The Continent*. This week, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Cameroon was getting \$35-million in military aid from the US.

On 15 October, *The Continent* met a migration official at the ministry of external relations in Yaoundé. He refused to discuss the deal's terms, stating: “For now, it's secret.”

The Continent also contacted UNHCR Cameroon and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) – the UN’s migration agency – in the country for comment. Neither of them responded.

Directly to detention

In an exchange of diplomatic notes, Yaoundé provided assurances to the US that third-country nationals would be treated according to international legal obligations and not be subjected to torture or persecution.

But Samuel*, a Zimbabwean deportee, tells *The Continent* he was first detained in the US. He was then put on a plane, in shackles, without being told where he was going.

He was in the air for more than 30 hours.

On landing, the group bypassed immigration. “They took us from the plane directly to the [detention] centre,” Samuel says. The centre is run by Cameroon’s ministry of social affairs. The IOM provides food, but little else.

The detainees tell *The Continent* toiletries and clothing were initially provided but have been scaled back. Requests must now be made monthly and are not always met, so the deportees have to buy what they need. But they cannot make a living.

“We have no ability to work, because we don’t have papers,” Daniel says. No one has shown them the documents that accompanied them from the US.

Joseph Awah Fru, a Cameroon-based lawyer representing 36 deportees, is challenging the deportation deal in Yaoundé’s administrative court. His application seeks to suspend the agreement, arguing that deportees face *refoulement* – the unlawful forced return of individuals to countries in which they face persecution.

Fru explains the deportees had already received protection against removal from the US. Although this is more difficult to obtain than asylum – requiring proof that persecution is more likely than not – it offers fewer rights and does not prevent the US from deporting



Hellhole: The migrant centre in Yaoundé is run by Cameroon’s ministry of social affairs. Deportees are given food but little else, and they are not permitted to work.

PHOTO: FORBIDDEN STORIES



Ten-hut: Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide, an army combat unit of the Cameroonian Armed Forces, stands at the 51st celebration of Unity Day in Yaoundé in 2023. PHOTO: AFP

individuals to a third country.

Fru's case is also demanding that the terms of the agreement between Cameroon and the US be made public.

"We are not challenging the ability of Cameroon or the US to enter into bilateral agreements as sovereign states," he tells *The Continent*. "But if you enter into an agreement... the people of the US should know, and the people of Cameroon should know."

In the US, a federal court struck down the policy in February and an appeals court largely upheld that ruling on 18 September. But about a week later, the US Supreme Court paused it and agreed to hear the case in December. The flights continue.

Washington defends the policy. The US department of homeland security says third-country removals are "an

essential public safety tool", and that its Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency receives diplomatic assurances deportees will be safe. When deportees leave the agency's custody, it said, it is no longer responsible for them.

That leaves deportees like Daniel in limbo. What he wants is refugee status – and with it, a future. "With that status, I could plan something other than going back to my country," he says. "Right now, I fear for my life."

But he still feels pressure to leave. "These IOM people are pushing us to go back to our countries," he tells *The Continent*.

That, he says, is not an option. ■

*Names changed to protect sources from reprisal. This story was published in collaboration with Egab

ANALYSIS

Right into the bear's arms

Russia remains a minor trading partner for Africa. But for some governments, its military support is indispensable. That gives Moscow influence far beyond what its trade figures suggest.

BEVERLY OCHIENG

ONLY 22 African heads of state attended this week's Russia-Africa summit in Moscow, down from the 43 who attended the inaugural gathering in 2019. But this does not necessarily signal a retreat in Russian influence.

Moscow has built a presence in parts of Africa that is less about trade than about guns, political survival, and access to resources.

At this year's summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin again presented his country as a "non-predatory" partner, promising to support African development and self-sufficiency.

The economic numbers tell a more modest story. Russia-Africa trade reached about \$27-billion in 2025, against Africa's \$348-billion trade with China, \$83.3-billion with the United States, and \$66.5-billion with Britain.

Putin has promised to double trade by 2030, but Russia's war in Ukraine constrains its capacity to deliver.

Moscow's more consequential foothold is in security. Since 2015, Russia has signed more than 50 military agreements across 39 African countries.

In Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, military rulers who rejected Western security partnerships have turned to Moscow. Russian personnel also operate in the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Equatorial Guinea.

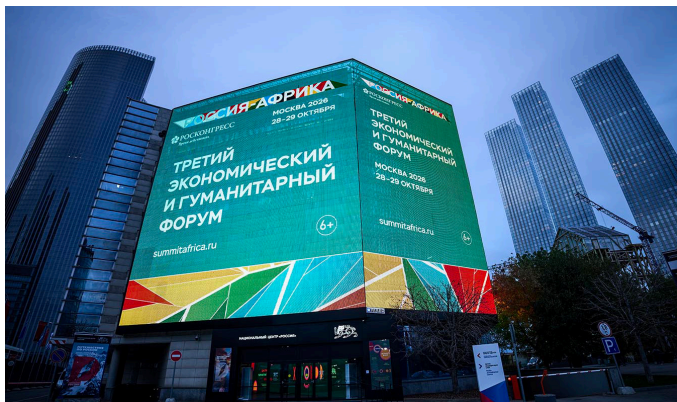
These arrangements offer African governments weapons, training, and armed support. For Moscow, they provide access and influence.

Russia also presents itself as a diplomatic broker, including between Ethiopia and Eritrea – supplying Ethiopia with advanced weapons and maintaining military ties with both.

Civilians on the front lines

But the consequences for civilians complicate Putin's description of a benign partnership. Human Rights Watch last week accused Malian forces and Russia's Africa Corps of attacks that indiscriminately killed civilians. Russian-backed security operations have not ended insurgencies in regions it operates in, primarily the Sahel.

Russia's recruitment of Africans for its war in Ukraine has also continued, many of whom have been recruited through coercion or deception.



Tools of the trade:

The Russia National Centre in Moscow, where the Russia-Africa Summit took place this week.

PHOTO: ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO

Ukrainian intelligence figures reported this month by *Bloomberg* put the number recruited into the Russian military at over 5,400. Recruitment reportedly rose sharply this year in Burundi and Zimbabwe, as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Cameroon.

The shift came after efforts by Kenya, Botswana, and South Africa to prevent their nationals from travelling to Russia for purported employment opportunities.

Moscow speaks of helping African countries with economic growth and development – which also supports Russian commercial interests.

In Mali, Russian companies are engaged in gold and lithium mining. Russian firms also have interests in Guinea's bauxite, Niger's uranium, and Burkina Faso's gold. The projects may increase processing capacity and generate revenues for host countries, but they also give Moscow commercial footholds in countries in which it is

gaining security influence.

Russia has been working to make this involvement politically acceptable. The amplification of Russia's presence, influence, and capacity is largely attributed to its use of narratives, state media, and ability to co-opt pre-existing anti-Western sentiment.

News agency *Sputnik* opened bureaus in Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg this month and Russia intends to open cultural centres in 14 African countries in the coming year, including Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Sierra Leone.

Between now and the next Russia-Africa summit, Moscow will likely favour political visibility, which will concentrate its initiatives in African countries where governments are receptive to security co-operation, resource partnerships, and narratives that challenge Western influence. ■

Beverly Ochieng is based in Dakar and is an associate director at Control Risks

We love to hear from you

UNLESS you're a 2026 subscriber (hi!), you'll remember our most recent Big Annual Survey™, in which 1,481 of you took part. In it, we asked you to tell us about your Happy Place™. We'll be sharing a few of those responses with you this season. Look out for our mascot Astro, who's hiding somewhere in each illustration.

"I like to snoop around my own back garden to see what's decided to grow itself this year,"



ILLUSTRATION: NADIA DHAB

PHOTO ESSAY

Swallowed by the sea

PHOTOS: OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP

AYETORO in southwestern Nigeria has lost about 15m of land to the sea a year since 1987.

The town was founded in 1947 as a Christian fishing community. Two decades ago, it had a population of about 30,000; since then, it's dwindled to some 5,000 people owing to coastal erosion.

That erosion is the result of climate change; mangrove deforestation; and offshore oil exploration and extraction – all of which have led to a rise in sea levels.

This year's Super El Niño is expected to have severe consequences for Nigerian coastal communities, according to the Nigerian Meteorological Agency.

Effects are likely to include severe temperature increases, sea-level surges, and stress on marine ecosystems. Fish will migrate to deeper, cooler waters, putting the livelihoods of fishing communities like Ayetoro at risk.

Freshwater wells are also at risk, owing to potential saltwater contamination. ■



The broken shells of buildings destroyed by rising seawater in Ayetoro, Ondo State, one of Nigeria's most visible examples of the vulnerability of communities living on the Atlantic coast.



The skeleton of a power substation in Ayetoro lies broken and barnacled by the rising waters.



Children play amid the ruins of buildings claimed by the sea. The Atlantic Ocean is gradually but relentlessly swallowing Ayetoro's homes, schools and other infrastructure.



King Oluwambe Ojagbohunmi, the sixth king of Ayetoro, stands outside his palace. It once boasted 100 rooms but now only 12 remain, with an entire floor already lost to the sea.





For many in Ayetoro, where the community has lived alongside the ocean for generations, the question is no longer whether the sea will take their home, but when.



Coastal erosion is now an enduring threat, stalking displaced families who rebuild their homes and lives further inland – only to see the water reach them again.

DATA

Not-so-sweet 16

IN 1971, bowing to public pressure, the United States lowered the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years so that young men old enough to be conscripted to fight in Southeast Asia were also allowed to cast a ballot. Most African countries, newly independent, followed suit.

And people even younger? Somaliland is the only place in Africa where under-18s can vote; its threshold is 15 years.

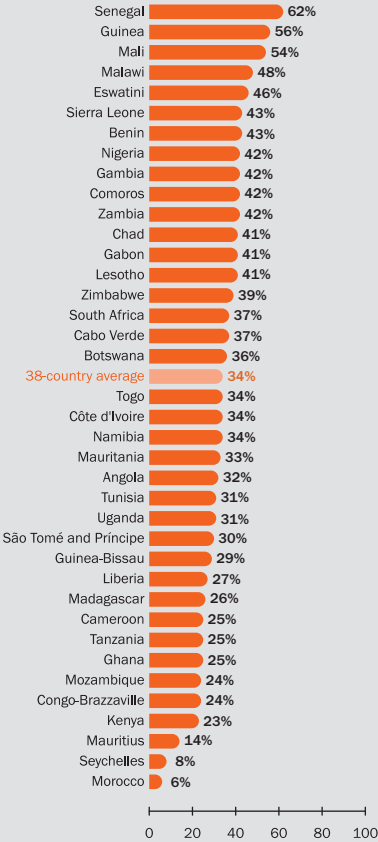
Ahead of Africa Youth Day coming up on 1 November, what do people aged 18 and above think about lowering the voting age to 16?

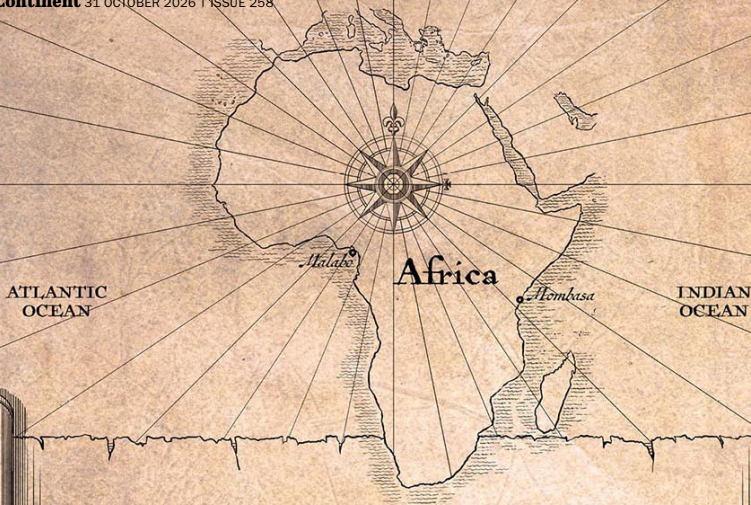
On average, they are more likely to disagree (62%) than agree (34%) with the idea. Some countries are more open to the proposal, including majorities in Senegal (62%), Guinea (56%), and Mali (54%). Meanwhile, fewer than one in 10 Seychellois (8%) and Moroccans (6%) want the voting age to be lowered.

Perhaps surprisingly, the youth (those aged 18 to 35) are hardly more supportive than older generations.

Given Africa's youthful demographics, letting 16 and 17-year-olds vote could make a big difference. But as we covered in Issue 208, the continent's youth are less politically engaged than their elders – except in protests. ■

Lower voting age to 16 |
38 African countries | 2024/2025





FERRY TALES

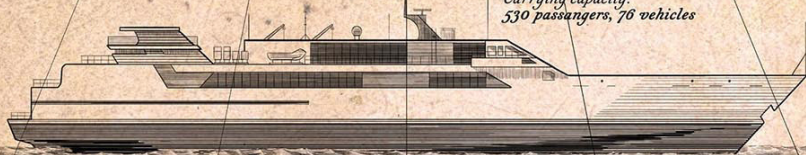
LIMITED SERIES

Curated by Gado | Story by Hadrien Degiorgi

San Valentin Ferry

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Carrying capacity:
530 passengers, 76 vehicles



Likoni Ferry

Mombasa, Kenya



ILLUSTRATION: YEMS RACH YETNEBERK

A terminal decline

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

HADRIEN DEGIORGI

EQUATORIAL Guinea is a geographical curiosity: its territory comprises a mainland bordering Cameroon and Gabon, as well as several islands in the Gulf of Guinea.

Bioko Island is the largest, dominated by Pico Basilé and its 3,007m summit. The island is home to the city of Malabo and 20% of the country's two million people live there.

To reach the mainland – some 250km away – islanders rely largely on ferry services. In fact, Malabo is closer to Cameroon (32km away) than the rest of Equatorial Guinea.

On average, there's only one crossing per week, depending on the weather. In favourable conditions, the journey to Bata, the mainland's largest coastal city, takes about 12 hours. The state-run *Djibloho* vessel – long known as the “people's boat” – was retired in 2019 because of dilapidation and age.

Since then, travellers and cargo depend on private ferry operators, who charge between \$45 and \$100 for a crossing. The primary ones are the *San Valentin*, as well as the *Elobey* line of ferries, owned by a Moroccan infrastructure and construction conglomerate.

Many islanders now prefer flying. It costs more, but there are several flights each day. And the travel time is just 45

minutes.

Piracy presents another reason to fly. The waters around Bioko, extending southwards toward Cameroon and Nigeria, have long faced armed robbery, cargo theft, and crew kidnappings for ransom.

During 2020, the peak year for piracy in these waters, there were more than 120 incidents. Ships had to be escorted by the navy and kitted out with onboard citadels, alarms, and armed security guards. Attacks have since declined because of these measures.

However, another structural shift threatens ferry traffic. In January 2026, the government announced plans to move the capital from Malabo to Ciudad de La Paz on the mainland.

The relocation aims to bring governance closer to most of the country's territory and population. Authorities also cited security concerns, noting a 2009 seaborne attack by gunmen on Malabo's Presidential Palace.

Moving the capital and its operations will take years. In the meantime, Bioko's residents will keep their deep attachment to the ferry service that defines their connection to the rest of the country. ■

Hadrien Degiorgi is an independent reporter whose work combines writing and photography. He has been based in Côte d'Ivoire for several years



ILLUSTRATION: AURORE PASQUALI



MUSIC REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



Swooning in bloom

An inescapable sense of growth runs through Somi's work.

WHAT Does It Take to Bloom? is the latest studio album by trailblazing jazz vocalist, songwriter, and actress Laura Kabasomi Kakoma, also known as Somi.

The Grammy-nominated artist was born in the United States to parents of Ugandan and Rwandan origin and has always centred her African roots even as she's circled the globe in pursuit of her artistic endeavours.

Somi's influences are as eclectic as they are focused – earlier in her career

she was mentored by Hugh Masekela and she holds a PhD in creative practice from Harvard.

She is the kind of versatile artist who can make *The Lagos Music Salon*, a 2014 album inspired by her 18-month stint in Lagos and, eight years later, turn in *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba*, a ravishing tribute album.

What Does It Take to Bloom? is Somi's first collection of new material in six years and features songs recorded in Dakar, Lagos, Paris, and New York.

The album's central thesis is about blossoming and finding freedom to just be, even as the surrounding world aims to sabotage the soul. Somi turns inwards, probing the self, inviting her mother along for the ride to provide grounding wisdom.

Somi's creative partner on the record is Benjamin James, one half of the Nigerian highlife duo The Cavemen. They make a dynamic team, creating tunes that could be future jazz and highlife staples given proper attention.

The album's centrepiece is its title track, a swooning rumination on growth as much about a human life as it is the plants that give Somi and her mother plenty of inspiration. *So You Want to Be a Woman*, featuring saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin, brings a fiery jazz sensibility to Somi's passionate account.

This is a searching and soulful record that releases its pleasures in waves. ■

The Quiz

- 1 Which country's capital is N'Djamena?
- 2 Abdourahmane Tiani is the president of which country?
- 3 Which country's currency is called the metical?
- 4 Who is the only African footballer to have won the Ballon d'Or?
- 5 Which country does footballer Temwa Chawinga represent?
- 6 Which country's capital city features the Christuskirche (pictured)?
- 7 Malabo is the former capital city of which country?
- 8 Which city hosted this year's Russia-Africa Summit?
- 9 True or false: Algeria has both a president and a prime minister.
- 10 What is Cameroon's most populous city?



HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to **+27 73 805 6068** 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

"To feel at home in a kirche it helps to know a little German. But knowing a medium or tall one will also do in a pinch."

Big Pic

Print is read: An archives officer searches through archived newspapers at the Fraternité Matin newspaper's premises in Abidjan. Journalists in Côte d'Ivoire have raised the alarm about state attempts to shackle and control their profession.

PHOTO: SIA KAMBOU/AFP



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