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# The Continent



**The election  
that nearly  
didn't happen**

Photo: John Wessels/AFP



## THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

There are candidates. There are campaigns. There is an actual election date. On Sunday, citizens of Senegal finally head to the ballot box to choose their next president – despite the best efforts (or worst, depending who you ask) of the man currently in the job (p14).

## We're taking a break ...

Every 10 editions, The Continent takes a publication break to allow our small team to rest and recuperate – and catch up on all the reading we've missed while racing to beat our deadlines. Our next edition is Saturday 13 April – look out for some new features and fresh looks. In the meantime, if you would like to support our journalism you can donate at [thecontinent.org/donate](https://thecontinent.org/donate)

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- **Review:** The *Blood & Water* kids are growing up (p21)
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## EGYPT

## Europe flings more keep-them-out cash at North Africa

The European Union has pledged to give Egyptian authorities \$7.4-billion in a deal that includes the understanding that the North African country will tighten its borders, especially with Libya. The Libya-Egypt border is one of the main points used by people making the journey from Africa to Europe via the Mediterranean. Last year, the EU agreed to help Tunisia with its budget, in a \$1.3-billion deal that included \$160-million for curbing migration. The bloc also funds the Libyan coast guard to intercept migrants in the Mediterranean.



**Peril on the sea: A soldier stands guard over 147 migrants rescued after their boat sank off Tripoli's coast. Photo: AFP**

## SOUTH AFRICA

## Speaker's home raided in graft probe

The speaker of the National Assembly, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, has been placed on "special leave" over allegations that she demanded bribes worth R4-million (\$210,000) from a military contractor. She denies any wrongdoing, and has promised to hand herself over to the police "in due course". Opposition parties have called on her to resign. On Tuesday, her Johannesburg home was raided by police, and prosecutors are expected to file charges imminently.

## ETHIOPIA

## Bank glitch causes fly-by-night wealth

The state-owned Commercial Bank of Ethiopia suffered a \$40-million run after a system glitch on Saturday allowed clients to withdraw and transfer sums exceeding their bank balance. The glitch appears to have happened between midnight and 2am. Despite the hour, on some university campuses, police reportedly had to disperse long lines of students who noticed and ran to the nearest ATM. The bank is threatening to prosecute clients who don't refund the money by this weekend.



**Stepping up: India has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of people trapped in extreme poverty.**  
Photo: Daniel Berehulak/Getty Images

## INDIA

### **Extreme poverty has very nearly been eradicated**

Only 2% of Indians live on less than \$2 a day, the international cut-off for extreme poverty. This is according to researchers who analysed data from the country's latest national survey on household expenditures. Writing for the Brookings Institution, a US-based think-tank, economists Surjit Bhalla and Karan Bhasin said that the number of people in extreme poverty declined from 12.2% to 2% in the last decade. Even when a slightly higher poverty line of \$2.15 a day is used, poverty has dramatically reduced in India.

## NIGER

### **Breaking up is hard (It's not me, it's coup)**

The status of the 1,000-strong US contingent in Niger hangs in the balance after the spokesperson of the country's junta announced the revocation of a 12-year counter-terrorism co-operation agreement between the two countries. (Never mind that many of the junta's troops were trained under that same agreement.) The US has been grovelling to keep its \$250-million base in Niger going, starting with a long delay in recognising the events that brought the junta into power last July as a coup.

## SUDAN

### **War comes to visit Al-Bashir in hospital**

The military hospital at which former Sudanese dictator Omar al-Bashir was receiving treatment in Omdurman completely ran out of supplies. This was after the city was besieged by the Rapid Support Forces, the paramilitary group led by al-Bashir's former protector, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. Despite frequent and credible reports of his brutality, al-Bashir used to call Dagalo "Hamayti", which means "my protector". That morphed into Hemedti as Dagalo is best known today. Bashir has since been moved to a secure military site, his lawyer told the *BBC*.

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC****Opposition leader on trial for defamation**

The trial of Crépin Mbolli-Goumba, an opposition leader in the Central African Republic, began on Wednesday. Prosecutors want him to pay a fine of 125-million CFA francs (\$207,000) and go to jail for a year, for calling four magistrates and the justice minister corrupt. He was arrested after offering documentation to support his accusations and asking authorities to investigate further.

**UNITED STATES****Duping parents to line the pockets of corporations**

United States government agents pressured regulators in at least 17 countries, including Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa, to keep policies on baby formula lax. This is according to the non-profit newsroom *ProPublica*, which reviewed decades-worth of letters from US officials, records of the World Trade Organisation, and other documents. The US agencies appear to have done this at the behest of corporations in that country that produce expensive “baby food” that often makes babies overweight or offers no extra benefit compared to much cheaper cow’s milk.



**Muhoozi the boss? The president's son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba.** Photo: Peter Busomoke/AFP

**UGANDA****Museveni gives top army job to his son, the tweeting general**

Uganda’s president of 38 years, Yoweri Museveni, has stoked long-standing speculation that he is grooming his son for the presidency, by appointing him to head the army. General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, known to the rest of Africa as the general whose trash-tweeting caused a diplomatic incident between Uganda and Kenya, has had a meteoric rise through the ranks of the Ugandan army. More recently, he veered into partisan politics, gathering a pressure group “for change” around himself.

## ALGERIA

## Presidential election brought forward

The Algerian presidency said on Thursday that the country's presidential elections will happen in September, three months earlier than scheduled, giving no reason for the change. The current president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, was elected in 2019, after year-long pro-democracy protests ended the two-decade rule of Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Tebboune's regime cracked down on the pro-democracy Hirak movements that set the stage for him by banning their demonstrations and arresting many of the activists. Thursday's



**Poll dancer: Abdelmadjid Tebboune fans celebrate his victory in Algeria's 2019 elections.** Photo: Ryad Kramdi/AFP

announcement came after a meeting with legislators and army leaders.

## GHANA

## Cable chaos brings Starlink into the mix

Communications Minister Ursula Owusu Ekufu told Parliament on Monday that the country is planning to give Elon Musk's Starlink company a licence to operate in the country. This follows last week's internet disruptions that cut connectivity in Ghana to 25%, after several undersea internet cables were damaged. Starlink provides internet connectivity using low orbit satellites, and its terminals and routers are much more expensive than mobile network ones, but connect over a wider range. Only seven African countries have licensed Starlink.

## EGYPT

## Cairo gives in to IMF and hikes fuel prices

On Friday, the Egyptian government issued a notice increasing the price of fuel. Egypt, which produces about 700,000 barrels of crude oil a day, keeps domestic gas prices low as a matter of policy. But it agreed to let the market drive them as a condition for a \$3-billion aid package from the International Monetary Fund in 2022. The country did not implement this condition, however – until now, when it is seeking an additional \$5-billion from the fund. At \$0.3 a litre at most, Egyptian pump prices remain affordable compared to most other African markets.

# Togo

## How to build a dynasty using the tools of democracy

**Faure Gnassingbé and his father have ruled for 58 years, combined. He might rule for years to come.**

**W**hen a new Togolese Parliament – due to be elected on 20 April – convenes, the members will have a big proposal to consider: Do they change the government from a presidential system, where the top honcho is directly elected, or do they make it one where the winning party or coalition appoints the head of government as an act of Parliament?

The proposal, which also includes the option to stretch the presidential term from five to seven years, is being polished by the country's law reform commission, according to *Radio France International*.

Some Togolese see this as just another sleight of hand to extend Gnassingbé dynastic rule: Faure Gnassingbé was installed by the military in 2005 after his father died. There was so much backlash

to his ascendancy that he offered to resign in the first week. But he stayed.

In 2019 the Constitution was amended to limit presidential terms to two. That amendment was not applied retroactively. It instead reset the count, allowing Gnassingbé to run in 2020, even though he had been in power for 15 years at that point. He can also run in 2025.

Togolese activist Farida Bemba Nabourema said on X that the proposals mean Gnassingbé “will no longer be elected but appointed by the Parliament he himself has constituted through fraud”.

Practically, it means that if the new Parliament adopts the latest constitutional amendment proposal, Gnassingbé could return as Togo's first president under the parliamentary system. His first elected term could end in 2027, with the option of seven more years, if only the term extension is adopted. ■



**Got Togo: Faure Gnassingbé may still be president in 2034 thanks to 'resets' and reforms.** Photo: Michele Spatarì/AFP

# Sport

## Meet Africa's fastest man

**Fresh from conquering the All Africa Games, Emmanuel Esemé has the Olympics in his sights.**

**Daniel Ekonde**

**E**mmanuel Esemé nearly gave up on his dream of running really, really fast for a living. In 2020, after just a couple of international athletics meets, he took a job as a civil engineer in Edea – 180km away from the sprint training facilities in the capital Yaoundé. It was only an intervention from his trainer and the Cameroon Athletics Federation that persuaded his company to transfer him back to the capital, so he could continue to build his athletics career.

On Tuesday, Esemé repaid this faith in his abilities by taking gold in the 100m at the All Africa Games in Accra. He did it in 10.14 seconds, which is not even his fastest time – that would be the 9.96 he ran in Switzerland last year. This is Esemé's third gold medal in as many years, after first place finishes at the Islamic Solidarity Games and the Jeux de la Francophonie.

“My goal is to put Cameroon on

the map in athletics,” Esemé told *The Continent*.

His focus turns now to the Olympic Games in Paris, which begin in July.

There he will face swift competition from all over the world, and not least from fellow Africans Ferdinand Omanyala (Kenya) and Letsile Tebogo (Botswana). But his team reckons that Esemé is only getting faster.

“We are working on technical aspects like the way he accelerates, his body composition and shape,” said his trainer Rui Norte. “He is a very talented guy.” ■



**Carry on: Cameroon's 100m megastar Emmanuel Esemé isn't even flexing here and yet.** Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan/AFP



# DRC

## Bujakera is free – but not exonerated

**Imprisoned journalist spent six months in ‘the antechamber of hell’.**

Last September, while waiting for a flight at Kinshasa-N’djili Airport, security officials approached Stanis Bujakera and asked for 30 seconds of his time to ask him some questions.

Those 30 seconds turned into six months of imprisonment for one of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s most prominent journalists. He was released on Tuesday, after a Kinshasa court found him guilty of “spreading false information”. The judge imposed a six-month jail term – equal to the time he had already served.

The case against Bujakera, and the verdict, seems to have been designed to silence him. Much of the evidence against him appears to have been fabricated, according to an investigation by Congo Hold Up – a consortium of media organisations that includes *The Continent*.

“[Bujakera’s] conviction and sentencing is alarming because it seeks to justify his months in detention and sends a frightening message to the broader



**We stan: DRC authorities jailed Stanis Bujakera but failed to get him to reveal his sources.** Illustration: Nzilani Simu

media community,” said the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Bujakera said conditions in Makala Prison resembled “the antechamber of hell”. He described how more than 14,000 prisoners occupy a facility built to hold just 1,500, with a dire shortage of sanitation facilities. Authorities took his phones and tried to get him to reveal his sources. They did not succeed.

For now, 33-year-old Bujakera – who was recognised as one of *The Continent*’s Africans of the Year in 2023 – will take a break, and spend time with his family. But then he is going to get back to work.

“We will end up making independent journalism triumph in this country,” he said. “No matter what the cost.” ■

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# Egypt

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## EDITOR'S NOTE:

*The name of the author has been changed because the Egyptian government is extremely sensitive to any reporting that says things are not going well for people. The Committee to Protect Journalists lists 13 journalists in jail on charges of publishing “anti-state” and “false” news.*

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# Potato kebabs, onion soup: inflation hits Ramadan menus

**Protein is critical for people breaking their fast during Ramadan. But soaring food prices mean Egyptians are now struggling to make ends meet. And Egypt has a history of food insecurity leading to revolution – as its current leaders know all too well.**

By Sarah Ahmed\*

Like millions of Egyptians, Iman Ibrahim, a housewife in Cairo, traditionally buys large quantities of chicken and red meat ahead of Ramadan.

Protein-packed meals are essential after lengthy hours of fasting, especially for the children in her family of five. But this Ramadan she's learning new cooking tricks (from the social media accounts of other housewives and content creators) to get the protein.

These tricks include “The Poor Kebab” – so named because it's made from potatoes and smoked onion – and

“faux soup”, made from boiled onions with spices. Cutting red meat out of kebabs, and chicken or meat stock out of soups, is the only way she can afford to get by this season. For chicken meals, she makes do with wings, heads or feet. A whole chicken costs 150 Egyptian pounds (\$3.20) and her husband, an accountant, makes £3,000 a month.

A severe shortage of hard currency in the import-dependent Egypt has led to several currency devaluations over the past few years, including one that came days before Ramadan. Food and beverage prices keep surging. The state statistics agency's data shows that consumer prices

rose by about 6% between January and February alone.

Egyptians on the street would say that the numbers don't show even half the picture.

Nesma Anwar has taken Qamar el-din, the popular Ramadan drink, off her menu. Made of dried apricot paste, its nutritional value and natural sugars make it ideal for breaking the fast. But it now costs E£100 – up from E£30 last Ramadan – so she has resorted to an alternative recipe that uses artificial food colours. She suspects that turning to less nutritional food options has contributed to her son's severe anaemia.

Sharing her husband's E£5,000

monthly salary, Rabab Mahmoud has to make similar cuts. The Suhoor meal, which Ramadan observers have before sunrise to prepare for the day's fast, used to include eggs, fava beans, and cheese. The beans have gone from E£34 a kilogram last year to E£100. Egg cartons have gone up from E£120 to E£150.

She told *The Continent* that this has forced her to make cuts: "We just have cottage cheese for Suhoor."

### Hungry history

In this austere environment, content on economical recipes has garnered thousands of views on social media. Most of it is on cheaper alternatives to animal



**Carb cycling:** A delivery biker balances a tray of freshly baked bread on his head as he navigates the al-Darb al-Ahmar district in Cairo. Photo: Amir Makar/AFP

protein. In one video, a woman teaches people how to make four meals out of one chicken. Another shares her recipe of pasta and a small amount of chicken fillets that could feed up to three people for E£80.

Advice on affordable recipes is a useful intervention for some, but the seams may not hold very long, analysts fear.

High food prices have often led to political instability in Egypt. During World War I, imperial Britain drove inflation up and caused food shortages in Egypt as it doubled down on extracting resources from its colonies to fund its fighting.

This contributed to the 1919 Egyptian revolution. In 1977, students and workers protested against then-president Mohamed Anwar El-Sadat over price hikes. Food prices and shortages were also one of the factors that drove protests against the late President Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

And some people do blame the government for the current situation. Khaled Rahouma, a professor of economy at the University of Damanhour, said one dimension of the problem is the government's lack of control over the retail market.

But for all the failings of the Egyptian state, it had little control over some major drivers of food price inflation, such as Russia's war in Ukraine and the global economic downturn that followed the Covid-19 pandemic.

As *The Continent* reported then, in the midst of this crunch, disaster capitalism struck, with grain multinationals driving

food prices even higher with speculative buying and hoarding of food.

It is now a problem for Egyptian mothers and authorities to meet. And when hacks like cheaper recipe alternatives are not enough, the crisis spills onto the streets. In the four years since April 2020, when Covid was declared a global pandemic, at least 29 of the protests that have happened in Egypt were about the cost of living, according to data from the Armed Conflict and Location Database.

Saied Sadek, professor of political sociology at the American University in Cairo, said the protests were unlikely to reach historical levels because Egyptians are disillusioned with the experience of mass protests since 2011's Arab Spring. They see them as events that bring chaos and little change. And, the state has grown even more repressive against free expression.

**In the four years since April 2020, when Covid was declared a global pandemic, at least 29 of the protests that have happened in Egypt were about the cost of living.**

So these bread and butter protests might be different from 1919 and 1977. "It will be in the form of sporadic demonstrations in the suburbs that could be reined in, but not widespread protests," said Sadek. ■

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*\*Name has been changed. This article has been published in collaboration with Egab.*

# Senegal



Up in smoke:  
Senegal's reputation  
for stability and  
democratic rule has  
seen better days.  
Photo: Seyllou/AFP

## The election everyone's been waiting for

### Bakary Demba Sy in Dakar

**P**resident Macky Sall claims that he never leaves the presidential palace without a copy of the Constitution. It is ironic, then, that it was Sall who precipitated Senegal's worst constitutional crisis in decades – a crisis which *should* be

resolved on Sunday, when citizens finally get the chance to vote.

Getting to this point has been a long, dangerous and demoralising road for a country that – with good reason – considers itself to be a paragon of West African democracy. Senegal has never had a coup. It has never before delayed



**All aboard? Passengers queue in Dakar for tickets to travel on the regional express train, one of President Macky Sall's heralded infrastructure projects.**  
Photo: Seyllou/AFP

elections. It has witnessed multiple peaceful transfers of power.

This time threatened to be very different, however. As he approached the end of his second term in office, Sall pointedly refused to rule out running again. This sparked widespread protests and international trepidation, ultimately forcing him to confirm late last year that he would indeed step down – as required by that document that he carries around in his suit pocket.

But the political brinkmanship did not stop. Popular opposition figure Ousmane Sonko was in and out of prison, facing multiple criminal charges that he claims are politically motivated.

One of those charges resulted in a conviction that disqualified him from running for office. There were widespread protests from his supporters, who believe that he is being persecuted by the ruling party – prompting a brutal, deadly crackdown by security forces.

Then, last month, Sall made a declaration that shocked the nation – elections, due in February, would be

postponed until December. This would give him an additional eight months in office. He said this was necessary to sort out confusion over who exactly was running for president.

The Constitutional Council disagreed, ordering him to set an election date immediately. With no more room to manoeuvre, Sall complied. He scheduled the election for 24 March, giving candidates just 13 days to campaign. He also promised to step down on 2 April, no matter what happens on Sunday.

### **Frontrunners**

At the ballot box, voters will choose from 19 presidential candidates. Only one is a woman, and only two are considered to have any real chance of victory: Amadou Ba, a former prime minister from the ruling party; and Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who is leading the opposition Pastef party after Sonko's suspension.

Like Sonko, Faye was imprisoned on what he claims were politically motivated charges (both were released earlier this month as part of a general amnesty for



**That's Sall, folks: President Macky Sall confirmed on 22 February that he will step down on 2 April, no matter how the elections play out. His reluctance to set a poll date or confirm his departure had set Senegal on edge.** Photo: Michele Cattani/AFP

“incidents related to political protests”).

Fatima Sarr, a journalist at *Intelligences Magazine*, says both these candidates are attracting considerable support at their campaign events, but cautions against drawing sweeping conclusions. “Do these people who follow them have their voter cards? Are they going to vote or not?”

Given the short campaign window, there are no reliable opinion polls, but most analysts agree that this will be a tightly fought and unpredictable vote. Voter turnout is likely to be key to the result, with a higher youth vote skewing towards the opposition.

If no candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, there will be a run-off election

(no date for that has been set).

Ba’s supporters argue that continuity is just what Senegal needs. They point to the Sall administration’s strong track record on infrastructure projects, including a new international airport, an improved highway network, and the completion of Dakar’s Train Express Régional, a light rail system.

“Amadou Ba is a statesman, a relaxed person, and his programme is very convincing given that he intends to continue the projects of President Macky Sall,” says Hawa Sy, a ruling party supporter.

Penda Khalifa, a communications student, says that she will vote for Faye.



“When I read his programme, I realised that he did not omit any aspect and that he attaches great importance to other localities, because it must be said that Senegal is not limited to Dakar.”

The Pastef party manifesto also contains some radical proposals, including replacing the CFA franc – a controversial regional currency pegged to the euro – with a national currency.

Not everyone is convinced. “If Ousmane Sonko were the candidate, I would vote for him,” says Boubou Sow, a car washer in Dakar. But Sonko is not allowed to run, and Sow thinks that

43-year-old Faye is just too young for the land’s highest office.

After months of turmoil, Sunday’s election – and a potential run-off – will not solve all of the country’s political problems. But it should tell us who will take Sall’s place in the Presidential Palace – if, that is, the current president is as good as his word.

“The erosion of trust,” writes political scientist Amy Niang in *The Conversation*, “is such that the Senegalese public still doubts Sall’s commitment to fulfil his obligations and facilitate an orderly handover.” ■



**The young and the restless: A supporter of the coalition of anti-establishment candidates holds up a portrait in front of a banner of presidential candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye in Dakar on March 10, 2024. Photo: John Wessels/AFP**

# Stepping away to fall in love again

**Professional sports is mentally taxing. But only now are athletes beginning to speak openly about their struggles.**

**Leonard Solms**

**T**his season of the English Premier League should have marked out South African forward Lyle Foster as a player who deserves a place among the world's elite footballers.

In his first seven appearances for Burnley FC in the league, he scored three goals and made two assists. That was such a big deal for the club, which is fighting to avoid relegation, that the club owners gave the 23-year-old a five-year contract.

But just weeks into the contract, a shadow darkened Foster's door. In November, the club announced that Foster was stepping away to receive specialist care for his mental health.

Speaking to South Africa's MSW radio station months earlier, Foster had revealed that he struggled with depression and anxiety, contemplating suicide at his lowest point.

Foster's openness about mental health struggles is rare in professional sports. But in South Africa it is growing. Proteas Women cricketer Sinalo Jafta has been open about her struggles with alcohol, and Robyn Moodaly temporarily stepped

away from Banyana Banyana duties to attend to her mental health last October.

"I was with the national team from the age of 16. As the years went by and I was playing at the bigger tournaments, things started to creep up," Moodaly tells *The Continent*.

She says a lot of her triggers came from the environment. "The politics inside the camp and outside the camp. It gets to a point where it just becomes too much. You just need to step outside and try to fall in love with the game again or with life in general," says Moodaly.

The midfielder who first played for the national team in 2011 is now spending time with her family and focusing on her club season with JWV FC. She believes her time away has helped her regain her reverence for the game, and she is open to a return to the national team in the future.

Liam Reid, who was with the Cape Town Tigers in the 2022 and 2023 seasons of the Basketball Africa League, understands that grind down all too well.

He also took a break from the game due to mental health issues. "Training two or three times a day, seven days a week, it's a struggle. It's physically exhausting; it's

mentally exhausting,” he says.

Much of the pressure to perform is internalised.

“Even before I joined the Tigers, everybody knew me as a basketball player. It basically becomes your personality,” says Reid. By last season, the constant onslaught of pressure during practice had pushed Reid into a dark place. “I understand it, but at some point it does get to your head. It took me to such a dark mental place that I got a distaste for basketball,” he says.

Reid took a step away from training and playing and poured his energy into running his family’s coffee shop in Cape Town. But in February, he came back at short notice to answer a call-up for the South African national team.

But it’s not just what happens in camps, training grounds or the pitch that grinds athletes down.

Sports psychologist Dr Koketjo Tsebe, who worked with Banyana Banyana at the 2023 Fifa World Cup, says that in South African sport, mental health issues are often interconnected with the broader societal challenges in the country.

“They are interlinked – the sociopolitical factors obviously inform how sport is run and operated. All of these factors do also link to the lives, at times, of athletes,” she says.

Unemployment in the country has remained above 30%. That means stiffer competition for every opportunity that exists, including in sports.

The country’s wider economic and governance challenges also limit the availability of mental health support.



**Top: Liam Reid took time out from basketball to help at his family’s shop. Below: Dr Koketjo Tsebe says mental health issues are tied to societal issues.**

Tsebe feels that psychologists are still treated as ad hoc consultants in the sporting industry. “I wish that we could prioritise mental health ... it needs to always be included,” she says.

But for now, athletes have the brave examples of the likes Foster, Jafta and Moodaly and Reid who are going public with their mental health struggles.

“They are encouraging others to come forth and say: ‘We are struggling. Can we be assisted? Remember: it was a taboo where you are labelled ‘unfit, incapable or struggling,’” says Tsebe. ■

## Where do you get your water?

**A**nother World Water Day (22 March), another sad – but necessary? – reminder of how little progress we’re making toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal and African Union Agenda 2063 objective of clean water for all.

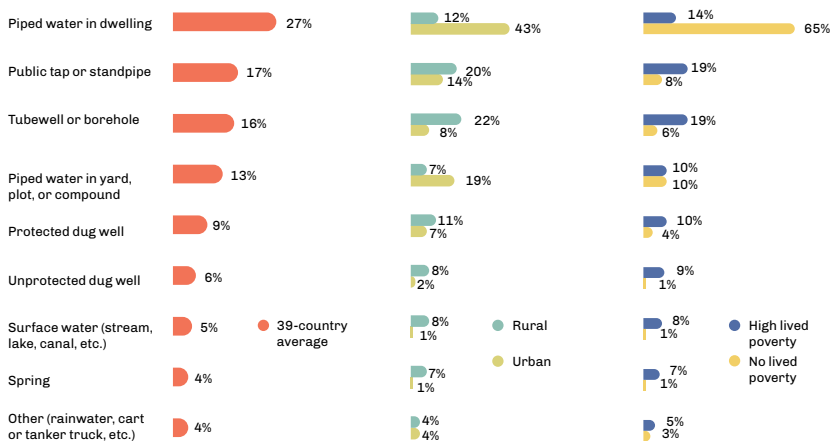
In fact, by Afrobarometer’s on-the-ground measure of how often people report going without enough water for household use, the situation has got worse since 2014/2015: 55% experienced water shortages at least once during the past year (up from 45%), and 23% did so frequently (up from 19%).

On average across 39 countries, only

about one quarter (27%) of households enjoy piped water in their dwelling, including just 12% of rural and 14% of poor households. Another 13% have piped water in their compound, while about a third rely primarily on a public tap or standpipe (17%) or a tube well or borehole (16%). About one in four look mainly to dug wells, surface sources (such as streams, lakes, and canals), springs, or other sources (tanker trucks, rain, etc.).

Compared to their urban and better-off counterparts, rural and poor households are far more likely to rely on public taps or standpipes, tubewells or boreholes, wells, surface sources, and springs. ■

Main sources of water for household use | 39 African countries | 2021/2023



**Source:** Afrobarometer is a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.

# Back to school (and back to the good stuff)

Losing the plot isn't so bad  
– it's character-building.

Wilfred Okiche

**B**lood & Water, created by the Cape Town-based Gambit Films, is the rare Netflix series to win itself a fourth season.

This distinction hasn't come without challenges. The high school drama was subject to delays stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic and, possibly thanks to needing to accommodate a rapidly growing cast of teenagers, it underwent a bizarre switch in creative direction toward more pulpy, grown-up material.

The third season was a creative nadir that regrettably leaned into the gratuitous violence Netflix execs (or algorithms?) appear to want to build much of their African programming around.

The good thing about hitting rock bottom is that there is nowhere to go but up: with its fourth season, *Blood & Water* is just about back on track, and more aligned with the young adult sensibilities of its first season.

The show started with plucky high school student Puleng (Ama Qamata) infiltrating the exclusive Parkhurst College while attempting to investigate



Photo: Blood & Water

the curious case of a girl she believed to be her switched-at-birth sister.

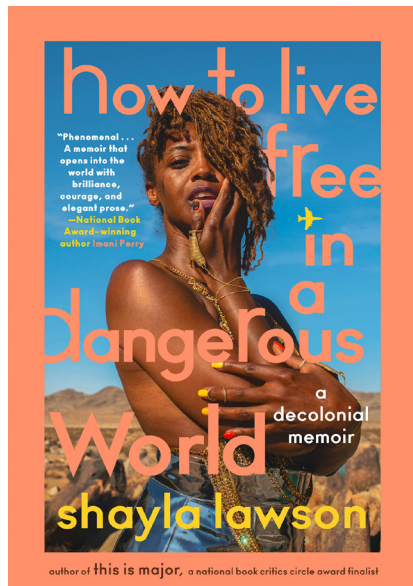
Although that mystery has since been resolved, the complications surrounding it have not. The vacuum created by this resolution allows the show to take a moment to step back into the inner lives of some of the Parkhurst characters as they begin to consider life beyond school.

This allows for a refreshing change of pace as the creators make their way back to character development – something they had traded for plot mechanics.

That detour is not completely reversed, however. In a bid to keep viewers stuck to their sofas and streaming ever onward, a clunky kidnapping mystery has been stitched into the show's upholstery.

But *Blood & Water* is at its finest when depicting teenagers just being teenagers, which is to say having fun, being messy and needlessly complicating their lives.

More of that, please. ■



## The journey inward, and then out again

In travel we discover not just the world, but who we can be within or without it.

Jacqueline Nyathi

How many essay collections by Black women have you read? Memoirs? How about travelogues? Only Nanjala Nyabola's *Travelling While Black: Essays Inspired by a Life on the Move*? Add Shayla

Lawson's *How to Live Free in a Dangerous World* to your shelf.

There's long been a perception that Black people don't travel. Happily, Black people themselves are changing this perception in small and large ways (see Travel Noire on Instagram, for example). Far more importantly, Black women's voices are still so rarely heard, particularly in non-fiction about life experiences, making books like Nyabola's and Lawson's crucial records.

Lawson has visited and lived in many fascinating places, but this is very much a book about their personal journey: inward, to find themselves and in the process to find liberation; and outward, to give that liberation to the world.

If that sounds a little mystical, it doesn't diminish how valuable, readable and entertaining these essays are.

Lawson uses place as a tether, a placeholder, if you like, to confront issues affecting Black people – tackling Blackness, relationships, gender, time, disability and illness, sex, privilege and liberation, among other things.

Lawson is a deeply engaging writer; I sat with their book all weekend, only putting it down to look things up or to say "Hmm ..." and make notes. I do confess to picking this up in the first place to read about their time in Zimbabwe, and that delivered spectacularly!

Through their journeys and meditations on them, Lawson brings healing, care and affirmation to the woundedness of Black women's hearts. ■

# 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've reached the top and had to stop and that's what's bothering me."



Photo: Guy Peterson/  
The Washington Post  
via Getty Images

- 1\_** Name the Senegalese town (pictured) that was the capital of French West Africa from 1895-1902. (Hint: the capital switched to Dakar in 1902.)
- 2\_** Which river does this island town lie on?
- 3\_** In which country is the All Africa Games taking place?
- 4\_** When do Senegal's presidential elections take place?
- 5\_** In which year did Macky

Sall become president?

- 6\_** The piastre was which African country's currency until 1834 when it became the pound?
- 7\_** After colonialism, Nubia was divided between which two countries?
- 8\_** What is Eswatini's former name?
- 9\_** Cabinda is an enclave and province of which country?
- 10\_** What is Eritrea's capital city?

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

**O**ut with the old, in with news! This week, we've been having a wardrobe clear-out, dear reader, and deciding whether to go for a new look. The whole struggling-writer-in-athleisure thing has served us well, but it's starting to wear a bit thin. Literally. What do they make these tracksuits from, anyway – recycled constitutions?

Our struggle had us thinking about the fashion challenges faced by our leaders, and realising that many of them are actually quite the fashion icons – from the equestrian-based millinery of South Sudan's Salva Kiir to the coup-resistant couture of the Francophone gang. (Denis Sassou-Nguesso's perfectly tailored suits spring to mind, lovingly stitched together

from the blood, sweat and taxes of the Republic of Congo's citizenry.)

But who knows, they might want to switch things up too.

Over in Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni is likely on the lookout for new kicks, seeing as his son keeps trying papa's shoes on. (“No Muhoozi! I just made you the boss of the army, that will have to do for now. And don't you dare coup me!”)

Kenya's President William Ruto often drops round in deadly drip to show off his latest taxes, and to tell us we'll go to hell if we don't support said taxes (already there, boss) – all while wearing Christian Louboutin shoes and Stefano Ricci belts.

We have often spoken about the gilded glamour and military chic of the Coupdashians of Mali, Guinea, Gabon,

Niger, and Burkina Faso – other trends come and go but camouflage is for life. Just like your presidencies, apparently!

Who needs a model democracy when you're the only new model your army needs, after all. Why, we should get them all onto the catwalk some day. The theme could be “Dress to Impress and/or Oppress.”

### Army go, amigo

Alas, not all would be able to attend. The Americans definitely won't be there. Not only because they are much too busy trying to look like they're not actively supporting a genocide elsewhere, but also because they are not in the best of books with the junta in Niger right now.

A spokesperson for the government said this week that they were revoking a military co-operation agreement with the

## Who put the war in wardrobe?



### CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani





**Suited to power: Denis Sassou-Nguesso takes a twirl in what must surely be the fanciest outfit taxpayer money can buy.**

Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP

United States “with immediate effect”. The pact was passed down to the junta by their predecessors, and allowed for American troops to be stationed at a US airbase in the country as part of counter-terrorism efforts in the region.

The announcement came after a delegation from Washington met with Nigerien officials and apparently raised concerns regarding Niger’s friendship with Russia and Iran, and that’s when things really kicked off: The junta accused the US of having a “condescending attitude” and declared that the pact was unconstitutional and violated Niger’s sovereignty.

No sign of any troops exiting Niger just yet, though. The US says it’s in communication with the junta (do Please-Call Me messages really count though?) so maybe they’re not *quite* out of fashion yet?

Definitely out of style (and out of their minds) are lawmakers in The Gambia who

this week debated a proposal to reverse the ban on female genital mutilation. The practice was made illegal in the country in 2015, however, MP Almameh Gibba, who introduced the Bill in Parliament, seems to think that reversing the ban will safeguard “cultural norms and values”.

If anything is truly in fashion this year it’s elections – and this season the belle of the ball must surely be Senegal, which goes to the polls this very weekend – despite the best efforts of President Macky Sall, whose attempt to delay them until December was thwarted by Senegal’s Constitutional Council. If he was going for “fashionably” late then he clearly overshot.

In an interview with the *BBC* this week, Sall said he did “nothing wrong” in trying to postpone the polls, even though it prompted protests in which three people were killed. “I have no apology to make,” he insisted. Literally “Sorry, not sorry”.

A little bit of positive news comes to us from DR Congo this week where journalist Stanis Bujakera has finally been released after more than six months in in prison. Detained in September 2023, he was charged with forgery and spreading false information. Earlier this week he was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison, but as he had already spent that time in detention, he was finally released.

While he may be free, there are many journalists behind bars or facing brutal harassment from authorities.

Allowing the media to do its job? Now that will never go out of style. ■

# Upheaval looms as foes tighten screws on Matekane

Tšoloane Mohlomi

**K**ing Letsie III is Lesotho's ceremonial head of state: the government is led by a prime minister who runs the country. But this model has rarely been stable, due to the fractious nature of the coalitions needed to form a parliamentary majority.

Because recent prime ministers rarely last more than five years, the incumbent Sam Matekane knows his biggest challenge is survival. Things initially looked positive, as Matekane came to power on a wave of optimism, forming his Revolution for Prosperity party just six months before the 2022 general elections.

Yet after 16 months in office, he is struggling to deliver on the promises that enabled him to mobilise broad support. Opposition parties and civil society groups have grown frustrated at the slow pace of change.

It was therefore unsurprising when opposition legislators tabled a no-confidence motion, as they have done with previous prime ministers.

In the end, Matekane survived by bringing in a new coalition partner to buttress his alliance. But for a time this was uncertain, leading to fears of a coup.

Controversially, Matekane attempted to keep open the option of circumventing the no-confidence vote by approaching

the king and advising the dissolution of Parliament, which would have triggered fresh elections.

Opposition members from the Basotho National Party, backed by the Democratic Congress, had supported the introduction of a law to prevent prime ministers from using this manoeuvre. But in February the Constitutional Court nullified this legislation, strengthening Matekane's hand. In response, the opposition has taken the issue to the Court of Appeals.

**After just 16 months in office, he is struggling to deliver on the promises that enabled him to mobilise broad support.**

Whatever happens, Lesotho looks set for more instability. If the law is reinstated, Matekane will struggle to manage the votes of no confidence that will follow. If it is upheld, efforts by prime ministers to evade legislative scrutiny will once again trigger snap elections, undermining any continuity in government. ■



*Tšoloane Mohlomi is a freelance journalist in Lesotho. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*

# THE BIG PICTURE

Blurring the edges: Athletes zoom by in the men's 10,000m final at the 13th African Games in Accra on Tuesday. The gold medal went to Ethiopia's Bogale Nibret Melak, with a time of 29:45.37s.

Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan/AFP



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