

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent



## Party's over

The ANC: broke, corrupt and unable to act



**COVER:** The ANC, Africa's oldest liberation movement, took power in South Africa in 1994. It muscled out other liberation movements with the promise of building away from the racist and divided country that white minority rule had created. But today it can't pay the wages of its own employees. It failed to register candidates for local elections. Under its stewardship a trillion rands have been stolen in the past decade, and unemployment is at 44%. Its president seems unable to bring corrupt elements within the party to book. But with little in the way of effective opposition, the ANC is still the only option South Africa has. (p8)

## Inside:

- **It's been a week!** What did you miss? Our briefs have you covered (p4)
- **Robert Mugabe** used to decide who got to be buried at Heroes Acre. Now he's to be reburied there – against his family's wishes (p12)
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- **Our newsroom is at war.** We need your help to solve a crucial debate ... about pies (p17)
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- **In Lesotho**, the textile industry is booming, and polluting rivers blue (p19)
- **With some cheering** in the streets these last weeks, Solomon Dersso reminds us that even popular coups are a bad idea (p24)



## Write for us

We want more travel pages. Tell us about your city or favourite town on the continent. Ping an email to [thecontinent@mg.co.za](mailto:thecontinent@mg.co.za)

# The week in numbers



... the age of the ANC, Africa's oldest liberation party

**3** months ... the length of time some members of the ANC's staff have gone without salaries



**1-trillion**

South African rands lost to corruption in the country over the past decade



need work

WHERE ARE THE JOBS?

**44%**

... the rate of unemployment in South Africa



**27**

... the number of years the ANC has been in power

## SOUTH AFRICA

## Way more jobs lost than reported

South African pharmaceutical company Aspen Pharmacare was forced to destroy 30-million doses of Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Covid-19 vaccine earlier this year – not two million as originally reported. This was revealed by the chair of the African Vaccine Delivery Alliance, Dr Ayoade Olatunbosun-Alakija, this week. The South African firm had to bin doses of the J&J jab in June after US authorities discovered that batches of the vaccine produced at an Emergent BioSolutions factory in the US may have been contaminated before they were shipped to Aspen for finishing. Aspen referred *The Continent's* queries to J&J, which had not responded at the time of publication. Olatunbosun-Alakija said that the fact the true number of vaccines lost was not public knowledge was a testament to the pharmaceutical industry's ongoing lack of transparency about Covid-19 vaccine supply.

## BURUNDI

## 'In some ways, it's even worse'

The United Nations says the situation in Burundi is “deteriorating” as “grave human rights violations continue to occur” despite President Évariste Ndayishimiye's pledges to end repression.

## NIGERIA

## Twitter to return 'very, very soon'

Nigeria's minister of information, Lai Mohammed, has confirmed that the country's Twitter ban will come to an end soon. To reach an agreement both parties had to “dot the I's and cross the T's”. “It's just going to be very, very soon, just take my word for that,” he said. All the Nigerians already circumventing their country's ban will surely be relieved.



**Harvesting sorrow:** Drought has left nearly two million Kenyans at risk.

## KENYA

## Drought disaster

The National Drought Management Authority says Kenyans in 23 counties will be in need of “urgent” food aid thanks to a crippling drought. That's approximately 2.1-million people.



**Vexillophiles:** Naftali Bennett, Israel's PM, meets Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Photo: EyePress/AFP

## EGYPT

# Israel and Egypt elites wave flags

Israel, with its constant need to seek legitimacy to hide its acts in Palestine, seems to have found friendship in the militarised leadership of Egypt. Its newly-minted prime minister jetted in this week for the first official visit in a decade. There were lots of flags.

## GABON

# UN to withdraw peacekeepers

The United Nations announced this week that it will remove as many as 450 Gabonese peacekeepers from the Central African Republic over allegations of sexual abuse. An investigation has been opened by Gabon's government.

## ZIMBABWE

# If there's smoke...

After an investigation, this week the BBC's *Panorama* said it had evidence "that suggests one of Britain's biggest companies paid a bribe to the former Zimbabwean leader Robert Mugabe." That company is British American Tobacco. It told the BBC that it commits to the highest standards of corporate conduct. Which is not technically a denial: Given the tobacco industry's track record on health, the environment and governance, its "highest corporate standards" are arguably a fairly low bar.

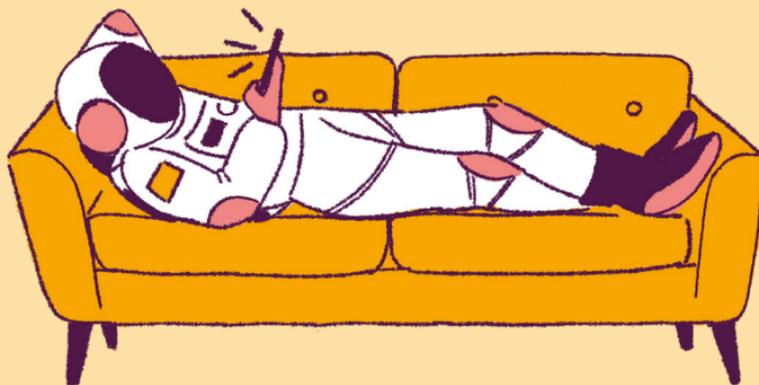
## MALI

# EU: You need help Mali: \*gets help\* EU: Not like that

Mali's military government is reportedly nearing a deal with Russian firm Wagner. This prompted France's defence minister, Florence Parly, to caution the country against the move at a parliamentary commission. "If the Malian authorities entered into a contract with Wagner, it would be extremely worrying and contradictory, incoherent with everything that we have done for years and we intend to do to support the countries of the Sahel region." Because of course you should only purchase violence-assistance from your colonisers.

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## TUNISIA

## Thieves, traitors and hidden regimes

President Kais Saied says Tunisia is run by “the mafia” and has vowed to take

on corrupt politicians. “[We have] an apparent regime, of institutions, and a real regime, of the mafia... Dealing with thieves or traitors is out of the question.” Media are speculating whether this means he’ll implement a provisional government and a constitutional revision.



No way, José: Supporters of Angolan opposition party Unita protested in Luanda this week against plans to reform electoral law. Photo: Osvaldo Silva / AFP

## ANGOLA

## José dos Santos returns home

Former Angolan president José Eduardo dos Santos has returned to his home country after living in Spain for the past

two years. The 79-year-old and his family stand accused of corruption, nepotism, looting state coffers and siphoning off the country’s oil revenues for personal benefit. Dos Santos himself enjoys presidential immunity from prosecution until next year. It is unclear how long he plans to stay in the country.

Photo: David  
Turnley/  
Corbis/VCG  
via Getty  
Images



## ANC: South Africa's troubled giant

**The oldest liberation party on the continent is unable to pay its bills, register for an election on time or clean up its own act. It doesn't bode well for the country.**

**Aanu Adeoye**

**T**he African National Congress, South Africa's ruling party, is broke.

It cannot afford to pay its staff on time. Some ANC workers downed tools last month to protest the late payment of salaries, saying that this has been going on for most of the year. And those being paid late are the lucky ones: there are employees who haven't been paid at all for three months.

Party spokesman Pule Mabe said the late payments are due to a lack of funding and the state of the economy caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. But disgruntled workers say the ANC's precarious financial situation predates the pandemic.

The party itself admits to not remitting the income taxes it has been deducting from employees' wages to the South African Revenue Service. That is the country's ruling party being delinquent in its responsibilities to the tax collector. It



**Same old: The ANC launched its political manifesto in Durban.** Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

hasn't made its payments to its provident fund either. If the ANC was a person, it would be in serious legal trouble.

And the organisation's headaches do not end there. With local elections scheduled for November, the ANC failed to register candidates for many municipalities across the country. It faced the prospect of a massive loss of power – once taken for granted – in key provinces. The party claimed that the system didn't work, even though other parties had managed to register their candidates. Luckily for the ANC, the ostensibly independent electoral commission extended voter registration and the party succeeded on the second time of trying.

The party of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Walter Sisulu and other great liberation activists of yesteryear does not have its house in order. A party that attracted support from across the continent is now in shambles, unable to pay its own staff despite being at the helm of Africa's most industrialised economy.

## An instrument of theft

The obvious place to start in diagnosing the ANC's ailment is the massive corruption that pervades it. Across all levels of governance, ANC leaders have siphoned funds meant for the public into their private coffers. Conservative estimates are that tens of billions of dollars have been stolen. Patronage is the order of the day as contracts to fix roads and build health centres go not to the company able to do them but the company willing to pay those giving out the tender.

Little is being done to change this culture. Instead, the ANC is at war with itself, with factions supporting those that gained the most under former president Jacob Zuma doing their utmost to break the institutions that may yet try to hold them to account, both inside the party and in government. And there are many other factions – all seeking their chance to control the levers of patronage.

Current president Cyril Ramaphosa ousted Zuma with promises of change. But the rot is deep, and Ramaphosa has shown himself to be half-hearted in his attempts at fixing things. In a recent cabinet reshuffle he merely moved incompetent and corrupt ministers around.

The party's secretary-general, Ace Magashule, is currently suspended and facing charges of graft relating to the awarding of housing contracts during his tenure as premier of the Free State province. This is the province where the ANC was founded over a century ago.

The nine-year reign of Zuma took the corruption allegations to the *n*th degree. An estimated \$35-billion was looted from

the state. Institutions like the state airline, railway and tax agencies were wrecked.

Not even the pandemic curbed the feeding frenzy. Funds were misappropriated and contracts given to those with the right Rolodex. Former health minister Zweli Mkhize resigned amid a furore over a tender given to a communications company run by former associates. Ramaphosa's spokeswoman Khusela Diko was disciplined for failing to disclose her interests in a company that won a bid to supply equipment.

### No opposition to write home about

The rot of the party started at the top. Yet, despite its deficiencies, 49.3% of South Africa's voting population is set to cast their ballot for the beleaguered party, if the latest Ipsos poll is to be believed.

The lack of any meaningful opposition might have something to do with this.

The official opposition, the Democratic Alliance, runs on a nonracial platform in a country where racism affects people's lives every single day. Once a contender in wards across the whole country, it has since retreated to running the Western Cape province and Cape Town city, as it lurches ever more to the right and pandering to wealthy white donors.

South Africa's third party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, is better known for fomenting trouble, and for the massive corruption that reportedly underpins the wealth of its leadership, though these claims have yet to be tested in court. And its one good policy – a pro-African stance repudiating xenophobia – may see it lose even more ground at the



**Former glory: In 1914, delegates from what would become the ANC travelled to England to oppose repressive laws: Thomas Mapikela, Rev Walter Rubusana, Rev John Dube, Saul Msane, and Sol Plaatje.** Photo: Mayibuye Archive

upcoming local government elections.

Meanwhile, unemployment figures show that nearly one in two South Africans is without a job. The nation's credit status is rated as junk. Its power utility is Africa's largest polluter – but is unable to keep the lights on. In July, widespread violence and theft, which required the country's entire army to be deployed, showed how angry and desperate people are. While some 28% of the adult population has been vaccinated against Covid-19, the vaccination drive (and the ensuing corruption) has put a giant hole in the national fiscus.

And the only party in any position to fix any of this can't even pay its own workers. ■

## Beneath South Africa's calm, questions simmer

The army is back in the barracks, and shoppers – not looters – fill the streets. But South Africans are still mourning their dead, and questions linger after the most intense unrest here since apartheid.

President Cyril Ramaphosa may have described July's violence in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal as an attack on democracy, but public opinion data suggest it was more symptom than cause: democracy has been under attack for years.

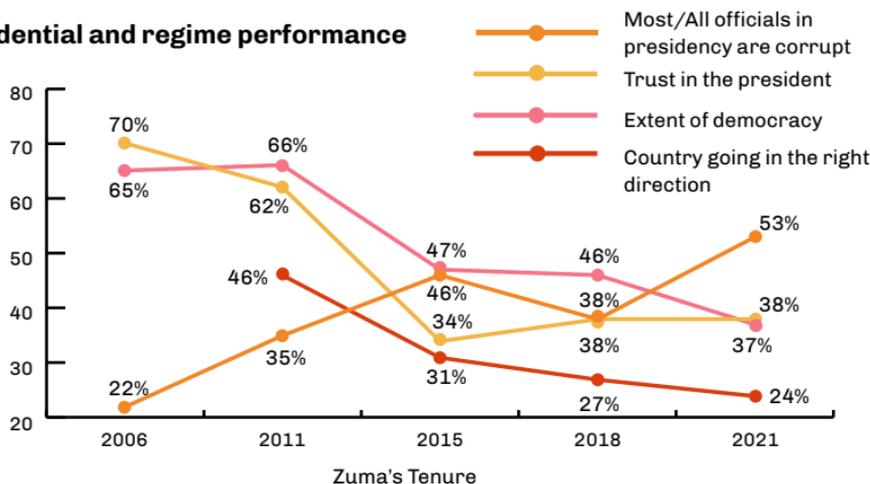
Jacob Zuma's controversial presidency didn't help. Afrobarometer surveys in 2011 and 2015 (early and late in Zuma's tenure) documented steep declines in public trust, approval ratings, and perceptions that the country was democratic and headed "in

the right direction," along with an increase in perceived corruption in the presidency.

A change in leadership hasn't been enough to turn things around. While Ramaphosa gets better approval ratings than Zuma did, public trust has not recovered, and perceptions of the country as democratic and on the right path have continued to weaken as perceived corruption has climbed to a new high.

Citizens' assessments suggest that it may take more substantive action – tackling rampant corruption, persistent unemployment, and growing inequality – if the government hopes to restore public confidence in democracy and the South African miracle.

### Presidential and regime performance



Source: Afrobarometer, 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 +/-2 to 3 percentage points.

# Zimbabwe

## Exhuming Bob: Disgrace or Grace diss?

**Zimbabwe's government wants to rebury Mugabe, against his family's wishes**

**Kudzai Mashininga**

**T**here is a plot reserved for Robert Mugabe at the National Heroes Acre, a hallowed mountain in Harare where leading liberation war fighters are buried.

But Mugabe's body is not in it. Instead, the former president, who died in 2019, is buried at his rural home in Zvimba.

Where to bury the bodies of major political figures has long been a source of tension in Zimbabwe. This is, ironically, a legacy of Mugabe himself. As president, Mugabe would unilaterally decide which comrades would be buried at Heroes Acre – regardless of the wishes of the family.

But when he was deposed in 2017 by his deputy, Emmerson Mnangagwa – who remains the president – Mugabe made it clear that he no longer wanted to be buried at the national shrine. This was perceived as a snub towards the new

regime, and his wife Grace Mugabe was blamed for the decision.

Since his death, there has been a messy legal battle over what to do with the late dictator's remains. The government wants to exhume the body and rebury it at Heroes Acre, next to the grave where his first wife, Sally Mugabe, is buried.

The local chief of Zvimba has got involved, saying that Mugabe was not properly buried and so should be dug up. He has even issued a fine of five cattle and a goat against Grace Mugabe. The courts have so far agreed with him. Mugabe's children are now appealing against the exhumation in the Harare High Court.

**The government wants to rebury the late former president at Heroes Acre, next to his first wife, Sally**

What makes the issue so sensitive is the symbolism and cultural significance attached to Mugabe's body.

“The burial of Mugabe in Zvimba and not the Heroes Acre renders the liberation narrative incomplete and incoherent. More so given that he was the founding President of Zimbabwe. The exhumation efforts are to correct that,” said Ricky Mukonza, a political analyst. ■



Photo: Joseph Okpako

# How Afrobeats conquered the world

**From Grammys to sold-out concerts and Billboard domination, the West African music phenomenon is finally going mainstream**

**Oluwamayowa Idowu**

**E**arlier this year, a video appeared online of British artist Adele singing to Tems' *Try Me* while the young singer blushed in apparent disbelief that Adele not only knew her but also knew her lyrics. Earlier this month, a series of billboards appeared in Lagos saying "Hey Nigeria, Tems is on CLB". *Certified Lover Boy* being the long-anticipated and oft-delayed 2021 project from Canadian rapper Drake.

To no one's surprise, the album has

already shot up the charts with the best opening week sales figures of 2021.

This moment comes at a time when Afrobeats – the generic term used to describe a fusion of genres like Fuji, Highlife, Hip Hop, House, and R&B with a predominantly West African flavour – is receiving increased attention and enthusiasm from the West.

This moment marks the culmination of a decades-long attempt to transition from a trendy exotic brand of music to a legitimate force on the world stage.



Burna Boy headlined a show at London's O2 Arena last month while tickets to Wizkid's shows at the same venue in November sold out in record time. These feats pale into insignificance with the success of Wizkid and Tems' collaboration *Essence* entering the Top 20 of Billboard's Hot 100 – the music industry standard record chart for songs in the US. The feat makes it the most successful song of the Afrobeats age.

That success Afrobeats has been the hard work of at least a decade, if not a century.

### A false dawn

In 2011, D'Banj, the definitive Nigerian pop star of his age, sought a conversation with rapper/producer Kanye West after being mistaken for him at an airport



**Way too big: Burna Boy has learned a valuable lesson from his Afrobeats predecessors: Never neglect the local market.** Photo: Amy Sussman/Getty

in Dubai. Intrigued by the quality of production he heard – the handiwork of D'Banj's producer and label partner, Don Jazzy – Kanye invited them to New York to explore further work opportunities.



Eventually, they would earn a record deal on his G.O.O.D. Music label and his *Oliver Twist* track was released to great success in the United Kingdom, tapping into the global demand for electronic leaning music as embodied by the success of Psy's *Gangnam Style*.

The record deal was a false dawn, though, as Don Jazzy sought an exit in order to focus on the local market. This exacerbated the strains in his relationship with his most prominent artist, resulting in their break-up.

### Lessons learned

The next generation of frontline artists (Wizkid, Davido, Burna Boy, Tiwa Savage, Olamide) took an important lesson. In the bid for world domination, an eye needs to be kept on the local market which had platformed them. Beyoncé famously tapped into this market for her 2019 compilation *Lion King: The*

*Gift* while international labels like Sony Music, Universal Music, Warner Music, and Empire have made their presence felt by investing in local outposts seeking new talent.

*Essence* – the Wizkid and Tems' collaboration smashing charts – did things differently in that its success started locally. It then went overseas and conquered the music world.

The recent enlistment of Justin Bieber for its official remix is a case in point. The move was designed to help further the reach of the song by exposing it to a larger audience. For Bieber, this role could be viewed as a reenactment of the role he played for the Reggaeton genre when featured on the remix of 2017's *Despacito*.

In this calendar year, the Canadian pop star has collaborated with the likes of Burna Boy, Omah Lay, Alpha P, and now, Wizkid and Tems encapsulating its burgeoning desirability.

For both Wizkid and Tems, at different forks in the road – one arguably the most beloved popstar of his generation, the other, one of the more talented newcomers of the next generation – it's a landmark achievement that speaks to the potency of a collaborative spirit.

### Where to now

However, as the song crosses over in the US – the largest music market in the world – there are obvious questions as to why the American market is so important to the future of Afrobeats.

To this, Chin Okeke, a music executive based in Lagos notes two points: sustainability and validation.

Sustainability in the sense that “the success in a market where there are real commercial numbers is very important for sustaining the industry and justifying investment as the current market is not big or viable enough to.” He posits that for the Afrobeats movement to fulfill its budding potential, it's imperative to widen its reach in internationally developed markets like America, South America, the UK, Europe, and India where more commercial value in the form of streams and paying customers can be leveraged.

In terms of validation, it's an acknowledgment of the work done by the players in the ecosystem from the artists to the producers and the executives and engineers who play a crucial role behind the scenes.

Okeke also argues that the genre fluidity of *Essence* should see more African artists competing “on a global platform with our peers rather than sitting in that



limiting box of Afrobeats”. The speed of travel suggests that a recalibration of expectations is imminent. Milestones like the Grammys, won by Burna Boy and Wizkid, selling out dates at landmark arenas and Hot 100 placements could become commonplace within the next couple of years.

While the success of *Essence* is undoubtedly a landmark moment in the advancement of the movement, its impact, and ultimate legacy will be defined by what comes next. Will the floodgates open for Afrobeats artists in a manner reminiscent of the impact Sean Paul made for Dancehall in the 2000s or could this just be a flash in the pan?

Tems released a new EP earlier this week. Should it spawn some chart-toppers, *Essence's* place as a stepping stone for Afrobeats will be guaranteed. ■

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*Oluwamayowa Idowu, a Nigerian writer, and journalist is Editor-in-Chief of Culture Custodian.*

*The Continent's* newsroom, hosted in Google hangout meetings, is the setting for many an argument about what we report and how we report. These tend to be resolved harmoniously. But last week we hit an issue so divisive that we had no choice but to turn to you, our dear readers, for help.

## Should adult Africans eat pies?

In one corner, our distribution editor Kiri Rupiah. In the other, production editor Refiloe Seiboko. Take a read and see who you agree with. Send an email to [letters@thecontinent.org](mailto:letters@thecontinent.org). If that email were to include pictures of delicious pies from your part of the world – or even recipes – all the better. Tastebuds sway arguments.

### Refiloe Seiboko

Look, I used to eat pies too. But then I grew up. It's called adulthood and knowing better. Welcome. Eating pies serves no purpose except to help those of us who respect ourselves to spot those of you who don't. I mean, the "shut your pie-hole" jokes write themselves.

What accomplishment do you feel after eating a pie? Has eating pies helped you write books? Win awards for said nonexistent books? I thought as much. And furthermore, do you think our great African liberators died for you to be an adult with hundreds of pastry flakes on your face? Is Thomas Sankara somewhere saying: "So glad I sacrificed myself so that [insert name] can enjoy a colonial Cornish pasty"? Please.

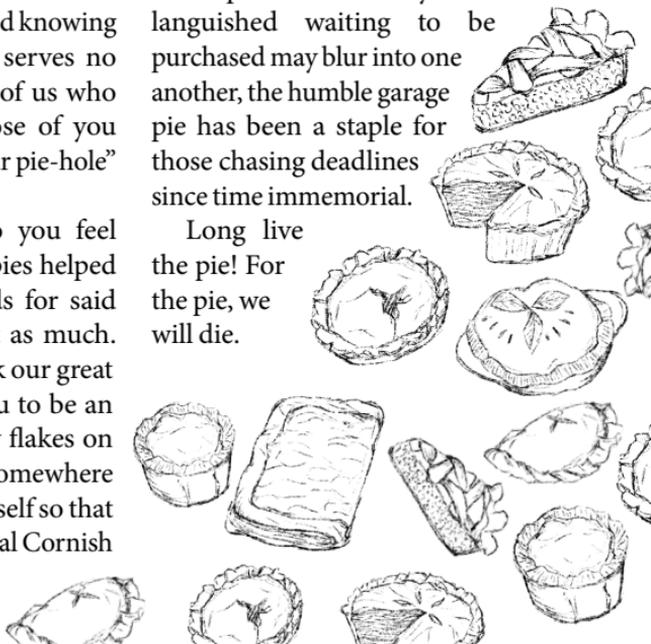
### Kiri Rupiah

P.I.E. Like its crust, the pastry of a pie is made of three letters and three components: butter, flour and water and its simplicity is as delicious as it is deceptive.

Beneath, it can be savoury or sweet, and much like the habits associated with the magpie that lent it its name, the pie is a collector of goodness and flavour. The history of the pie is in its own way the history of the world. The garage pie in particular has been the savoury saviour of the one group that documents history in real time: the journalist.

Though its provenance may be suspect and the days it has languished waiting to be purchased may blur into one another, the humble garage pie has been a staple for those chasing deadlines since time immemorial.

Long live the pie! For the pie, we will die.



# World

## Coal gets the cold shoulder

Sipho Kings

**I**n Paris in 2015 world governments agreed to do what they could to keep global heating to below 2 °C, and ideally to below 1.5 °C. Doing this would not prevent climate change – the effects will still be grievous – but it should keep it from becoming apocalyptic.

The biggest chunk of that work would be in changing how the world gets its energy. Right now coal-fired power plants do most of that work. They are also the worst single source of avoidable carbon emissions. But it's finally starting to look like they're on the way out.

Despite all the cheering in Paris, countries kept planning new coal-fired power plants. At that point over 1,500 gigawatts of capacity was planned, more than the capacity of the whole of China. For perspective, the world's biggest plants max out at 5,000 megawatts.

Research out this week found three-quarters of that planned capacity has since been scrapped. As a result, the world's coal power fleet is on course to be 56% smaller than was expected just six years ago.

Forty-four countries now have no plans to build plants. This is before countries start decommissioning old plants. And before companies shut down plants that can't make electricity cheaper than renewable alternatives. That research was published by three climate groups: E3G, Global Energy Monitor and Ember.

In the same week, Climate Action Tracker released its number crunching about the climate plans of nearly 60 countries, which are responsible for 80% of all carbon emissions. The Europe-based group is the gold standard in checking up what countries are doing. It does this by looking at the plans countries submit as part of the Paris Agreement, known as nationally determined contributions.

Only Gambia has a plan that, if everyone acted the same way, would see global heating kept to below 1.5 °C.

**Only Gambia has a plan that, if everyone acted the same way, would see global heating kept to below 1.5 °C**

All other countries are polluting at a level that would ensure dangerous climate change. Just six countries have plans listed by the group as “nearly sufficient”. ■



Dyeing out: The rivers and dams of Africa are paying a high price for our favourite jeans. Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

## Top American brands' suppliers linked to water contamination in Africa

Pascalinah Kabi in Maseru

**F**rom rivers that turn blue with dye pollution to dangerous working conditions, Lesotho is paying a heavy price for its large textile industry. The garments the factories produce are believed to end up on the shelves of top global fashion brands.

The pollution they produce does not travel quite as far: communities downriver lament the contamination of their fresh water supplies, while workers at the factories themselves are perhaps most affected: one man told *The Continent* of the “unbearable dusty conditions” and chemicals from denim dye that have left him with chronic breathing problems.

His health issues and the environmental contamination putting Lesotho’s rural communities at risk are part of a wider crisis growing across the continent. In July, advocacy group Water Witness International released a report that looked at the water cost of Africa’s booming textile industry. Titled “How fair is fashion’s water footprint?”, the report found pollution at factories in five countries: Lesotho, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius and Madagascar.

It quotes Sareen Malik, the executive secretary of the African Civil Society Network for Water and Sanitation, as saying that, “Untreated effluent from textile factories is killing our rivers – there is no life downstream.”



**Stitch-up: The textile industry is Lesotho's biggest employer. But the health and environmental toll it exacts is starting to outweigh its material benefits.**

Photo: Pieter Bauermeister/  
Bloomberg via  
Getty Images

This growth in the textile industry has a lot to do with the African Growth and Opportunity Act, commonly known by its acronym, Agoa. This 2000 trade act gave factory plants in Africa duty-free access to the American fashion market.

Water Witness says top American fashion brands have or continue to source apparel from factories linked to water contamination in these five countries.

In Lesotho, the report claims that clothing industries cause water pollution in the nearby towns of Maseru and Maputsoe and that poor solid waste management by the industry remains a major problem in the country's river systems.

In the report, a senior government official said the pollution was causing tension between industry and communities. "Communities complain about the smell of water and health issues for livestock and people living close by."

But the small country has few natural resources, besides water, and has bet on

the textile industry. It is now the second biggest employer, after the government, with 30,000 workers.

At Formosa Textiles, 39-year-old Rethabile Molise (not his real name – he requested anonymity for fear of losing his job) said he began experiencing chest-related problems in 2017, three years after he was employed. He blames the dusty conditions and chemicals used to dye denim for his chronic chest condition. The company's website says it employs 1,200 workers, and has machines responsible for "denim dyeing", among others.

### **Between a rock and a hard place**

Each day at 7am, Molise enters the factory and changes from his regular clothes into gear that is meant to protect him from the dust. But the pollution is often too much.

During a shift earlier this month, Molise said, the factory suddenly filled with the acrid smell of chemicals. This signalled the disposing of effluent from the firm's machinery to make way for

new chemicals used to dye thread for the production of jeans for top American clothing brands. “The toxic liquid waste from the machines goes straight into manholes adjacent to the machines and can even be found on the floor,” Molise said. “The smell is unbearably strong.”

He said the factory provided each worker with just four elastic masks a month. A black fabric mask is given out once a year, he said. “The dust and chemical waste are just too strong for me, and sometimes I wear all the four nosebags at the same time. I went to a doctor and he gave me a note for work explaining that I have chest related problems and that it is advisable for me to work in a much less dusty room,” Molise said. “But they just moved me to another dusty section.”

The factory’s manager and spokesperson, Ricky Chang, directed all questions to the Lesotho National Development Corporation. He did say that “we have a grievances system internally where people can refer their concern and get a response from management”.

The corporation did not respond to questions, nor did the national water and health ministries, despite *The Continent* holding the story for an extra week to give them time to do so.

### A blue river

Downriver from Formosa Textiles flows a stream villagers have named Mabolou – mother of blue, in Sesotho. Locals say the river used to be clean and colourless. Marethabile Lenkoane, who has lived in the area for all of her 56 years, remembers how things were before the factories



**Bucket list: Lesotho's rivers remain a primary water source for many of the landlocked nation's communities.**

Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

arrived, bringing their dyes with them. “I used to collect water from Mabolou to water my plants and wash our clothes,” she says. “But today, I can’t; the water is blue.”

Mabolou flows into the Caledon River and into South Africa, a critical water source for that country, with water from Lesotho bringing life to the dry interior of its Eastern Cape province.

But, despite the importance of clean water, the Water Witness report noted that “landlocked Lesotho is projected to become ‘water stressed’ by 2025”.

Like factory worker Molise, Lenkoane has chest problems she says are from breathing chemically contaminated air. “Coughing is just part of my life now. Unfortunately for me and my family, we don’t have money to move away from this dangerous place.” ■

# 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

"One day they will build a monument to my advanced intellect"



- 1\_ True or false:** Orangutans are native to sub-Saharan Africa.
- 2\_ Your flight lands at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.** Which city are you in?
- 3\_ The Monument des Martyrs (pictured) stands in the capital city of Ouagadougou.** In which country is that?
- 4\_ Kamerun was one of the German Empire's colonies.** What is the name of the modern-day country?
- 5\_ Who served as president of Angola from 1979 until 2017?**
- 6\_ True or false:** Spanish is the official language of Cabo Verde.
- 7\_ Mohamed Salah just became the second African to score 100 goals in the Premier League.** Who was the first? (Hint: He played for Chelsea FC.)
- 8\_ South Africa's ruling party is the ANC.** What does "ANC" stand for?
- 9\_ Is Windhoek beer *actually* a product of Namibia?**
- 10\_ After Ethiopia's Tekeze Dam, the Katse Dam is Africa's second-largest double-curvature arch dam.** In which country is it located in?

## HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at [TheContinent@mg.co.za](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za)

# Slick, invisible shadow states infest Africa's democracies

Idayat Hassan

**D**emocracy and development in Africa are under threat from powerful networks that join forces with government politicians to capture political institutions and use them to further their own interests, according to two reports published on World Democracy Day.

The reports from Democracy in Africa and Centre for Democracy and Development-Ghana feature case studies on nine African countries. Taken together, they document the existence of broad and well-structured – but often invisible – networks that connect judges, political leaders, businessmen, multinational companies, securocrats, ruling party leaders and their family members. Through their privileged access to the state, these individuals misappropriate government resources while using their control of the legislature and the courts to get away with it.

The extent to which democracy has been captured in this way varies across the continent, and is lower in countries that initially developed stronger democratic institutions and have a longer history of placing checks and balances on those

in power. But where these networks become so strong they come to represent a “shadow state” that holds more power than elected officials, the impact on justice and development is profound.

Take a look at Nigeria. According to a former Supreme Court justice, Kayode Eso, the country features many “billionaire judges”, who made their wealth by accepting bribes to exonerate defendants. This allows irresponsible politicians, corrupt businessmen and criminal gangs to go free, generating a culture of impunity.

It then becomes much more difficult to prevent the theft of state resources and deter human rights abuses. In turn, this demonstrates one of the biggest challenges generated by the rise of shadow states – their control over the security forces and judiciary enables these networks to overcome resistance to their activities.

Democracy capture is not an African phenomenon, of course – it happens everywhere self-interested elites meet weak institutions – but its impact is particularly devastating on a continent that already suffers from high levels of poverty and inequality. Unless shadow states are identified, exposed and challenged, countries such as Nigeria will never fulfil their developmental and democratic potential. ■

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*Idayat Hassan is the Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development – West Africa. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.*



# Coups are always a bad idea – even the popular ones

**Problems can't be solved by pointing a gun at them, however just your cause**

**Solomon Dersso**

**T**he coup d'état in Guinea earlier this month was just the latest manifestation of a worrying trend: an increase in the frequency of military coups in Africa. In 2019, there was one successful seizure of power (Sudan), and another one in 2020 (Mali).

So far in 2021 there have been three: Chad, Mali again, and Guinea. This has prompted the African Union's Peace and Security Council to identify the resurgence of "unconstitutional changes of government" as one of Africa's most pressing security threats.

On the streets of Conakry, there appears to be plenty of support for the coup. In Mali and in Sudan too, the ousting of the sitting president by the military was mostly greeted with celebrations by the public. But these celebrations are more about the end of the old regime than an expression of support for increased military intervention in politics. After

all, in almost all cases, the military and other security services are the primary means of enforcement of authoritarian and repressive regimes.

The celebrations in Guinea can be compared directly with the celebrations in Zambia last month. In both cases, an unpopular ruler was deposed; but in Zambia the change of power happened through the ballot box rather than at the business end of a semi-automatic rifle. Zambians were able to celebrate a political system that is doing what it was designed to do – and the incoming government of President Hakainde Hichilema has enjoyed widespread international support as a result. Guinea, on the other hand, has been suspended from regional and international organisations.

Why are coups happening more frequently? Each context is different, of course, but there are a few common trends, the most significant of which is the deepening democratic deficit across the many African countries (and a corresponding decline in effective enforcement of democratic norms by international organisations such as the African Union).

Civil space is narrowing, while activists, opposition groups and independent media face undue restrictions and attacks.

Another symptom of this deficit is the slew of attempts, often successful, of leaders to extend term limits to keep themselves in power. Over the past two decades there have been 26 instances in 20 African countries in which constitutional

changes led to the relaxation or removal of term limits. It is striking how often these attempts by leaders to remain in power spark further social and political unrest – and sometimes prompt a coup.

That's exactly what happened in Guinea, where Alpha Condé fiddled with the constitution to allow himself to run for a third term. This prompted widespread political unrest, and eventually the military stepped in.

But it should not be up to armies to determine who holds power in any particular country. What makes soldiers more qualified to make this call than any other institution in society? It is only their weapons that set them apart. Allowing political problems to be “solved” by the people with the biggest guns is a recipe for disaster.

**Why are coups happening more frequently? The most significant trend is the deepening democratic deficit across many African countries, and a corresponding decline in effective enforcement of democratic norms.**

The idea of a “good coup” is an oxymoron. The norms established by the African Union are right in rejecting coups in general as unconstitutional, and therefore not deserving of political and legal recognition.

But regional and international bodies



**One more time: Malian soldiers arrive in Bamako after rebel troops seized power in the fragile West African country.** Photo: AFP

can do more when it comes to enforcing these norms.

In the case of Guinea, international actors, including the African Union, should go further than just suspending the country until a transitional government is in place and new elections are convened. Experience shows that these measures do not guarantee that further coups will not occur. The international response needs to address the deeper issues of the democratic governance deficit. A good place to start would be to prevent term limit extensions; encourage less power to be held in the hands of the executive; and segregate the army and the security sector more broadly from politics.

Until these reforms are widespread, it can only be a matter of time before another coup. ■

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*Solomon Dersso is the Founding Director of Amani Africa, a Addis Ababa-based think tank.*

# Keep your eye on the ball



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

When Nicki Minaj gets serious, you'd best believe she'll be taken seriously. Even if she's just being taken seriously as a threat to science, truth, people's lives and the hitherto unsullied reputation of Caribbean testicles.

This week, she warned us all against getting vaccinated against Covid-19, sharing her first-hand experience of how she heard that after a friend of her cousin who lives in Trinidad got the jab, his testicles promptly swelled up to the size of a hippopotamus, leaving him impotent and forcing his fiancée to cancel their wedding.

Fortunately, authorities in Trinidad & Tobago were on the ball and immediately investigated Dr Minaj's revelation. Soon, the minister of health was able to defend both his nation's vaccine campaign and the reproductive health of its citizens. No such side effects had been reported, he insisted. "Unfortunately, we wasted so much time yesterday running down this false claim," he said.

The whole thing has put a bit of a damper on Minaj's new career as an expert in virology. They did take her seriously,



**No Frauds: Nicki Minaj's expert views on jab-related testicular embiggening have been brought into question.**

though, which is only as it should be. If she wants a new career, then who are we to shoot down her dreams?

Yes we know there are those among us whose idea of an alternative career path is simply going from two-term-president to president-for-life, but if Nicki Minaj has taught us anything, it's to believe in ourselves – even when our friends, family and several world leaders suggest that we really, really shouldn't.

### **New coup, who dis?**

And so our thoughts turn to our old friend Alpha Condé, who must surely be thinking about dusting off his CV by now. Except, nearly two weeks after being deposed, he's still in military custody. It appears he was given a bedroom, a bathroom, a lounge and a TV, with his personal chef on hand to prepare meals



**Alpha's Omega: Colonel Mamady Doumbouya could have a bright future as an event organiser ahead of him.**

for him – all this rent free!

Although it seems the TV has since been removed: every time Monsieur Condé saw coup leader Colonel Mamady Doumbouya on screen, he would lose his temper, prompting his new caregivers to fear for the poor fellow's health.

So a new career as television critic may not be on the cards. He might consider a turn on the stage, though, as he does have a flair for the dramatic, apparently telling an ECOWAS delegation that "I would rather be killed than sign my resignation".

Should Colonel Doumbouya ever consider switching jobs, meanwhile, he might do well as an event organiser. Not only did he organise a whole coup, but this week he has been managing a rather complicated schedule, holding back-to-back meetings with opposition parties, diplomats, unions, civil society groups and religious leaders as he called for all stakeholders to have an input in the transition process.

While it's not unthinkable that Colonel Doumbouya might be asked to organise *The Continent's* Christmas party, its unlikely that he'll be asked to do the same for the African Union, which has uninvited Guinea from any of its upcoming soirées.

### **Undeployment on the rise**

This week the UN said it had been alerted to allegations of sexual abuse of five girls in the Central African Republic involving Gabonese peacekeepers and so a decision had been made to repatriate the entire contingent: Yet another scandal in a long list involving the most vulnerable in our societies being exploited by those meant to protect them.

Amnesty International released a report this week on the security situation in Niger, stating that an increasing number of children are being killed or targeted for recruitment by armed groups in the region bordering Mali and Burkina Faso.

Amnesty says conflict involving the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin has left children traumatised after witnessing deadly attacks on their villages, and in some areas women and girls risk abduction or forced marriage to fighters.

According to the report, at least 544 people have been killed between January and August 2021, with 377 schools being forced to close, affecting 31,000 children.

So, really, a final alternative career move for our leaders should be to just doing the right thing and put the safety of people on the continent before anything else. ■

## THE BIG PICTURE

**Stairway to the afterlife: Sun-shaded visitors take in the step pyramid of Djoser, an ancient pharaoh who ruled in Egypt in the 27th century BC, at the Saqqara Necropolis south of Cairo this week. The pyramid is thought to be the earliest stone monument built in Egypt. Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP**



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