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Nigeria's kidnapping crisis

Photo: Kola Sulaimon/AFP



THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

'In Nigeria, a kidnapping happens every 15 hours,' is a statement that smells like bad journalism about Africa. Yet, sadly, it would not be far off base. Last year, the Armed Conflict Location and Events Database logged 578 incidents of abduction in the country – and the year was not an outlier. Judging by the escalation in both frequency and numbers of people abducted in recent weeks, this year will be even worse. (p11)

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SOUTH AFRICA

No deal on South African Airways sale

The nearly three-year negotiations to sell 51% of the state-owned South African Airways have ended without a deal, in part because the sale price has more than doubled, the public enterprises minister said on Wednesday. When the talks started, in July 2021, the airline was on the verge of liquidation. A recipient of repeated state bailouts, the national carrier has failed to solve the problems that led it into bankruptcy.

SOMALIA

Hotel siege ends in carnage and déjà vu

Using explosives, Al-Shabaab fighters blew through the fence of an otherwise secure hotel near the presidential palace in Mogadishu, and occupied the building for 12 hours on Friday. The attack was much like the 20-hour siege of Villa Rays hotel in 2022, in the same area. Security forces told the BBC that they killed all the five gunmen involved, Three government soldiers were killed, while dozens of civilians were injured.

Wish you were here: Agathon Rwasa keeps getting the boot in absentia.
Photo: AFP



BURUNDI

Out of sight, out of party

Burundian politician Agathon Rwasa was replaced as president of the party he founded, in a meeting that happened

while he was on a trip to Tanzania. Some leaders of the National Freedom Congress have been unhappy with him since 2023 when he nominated his wife for a seat in the East African Legislative Assembly. His first party, National Liberation Forces, also replaced him in absentia when he fled Burundi in 2010.



Flare enough: An Ousmane Sonko supporter celebrates the Senegalese opposition leader's release from prison. Photo: John Wessels/AFP

SENEGAL

Sonko freed 14 days before election

Opposition leaders Ousmane Sonko and his ally Bassirou Diomaye Faye were freed from prison on Thursday ahead of Senegal's presidential election on 24 March. Faye will run for president, instead (but with the blessing) of the much more popular Sonko, whose candidacy was disqualified because of a six-month suspended prison sentence he got after being convicted of defamation – one of many legal battles the government has ensnared him in. The release of the two was received with street celebrations in parts of Dakar.

CAMEROON

Football star will understand axing when he's older

Wilfried Nathan Douala (17?), who was touted as the youngest member of Cameroon's Africa Cup of Nations squad, is now among the 62 players suspended by the Cameroon Football Federation after it found irregularities with their registrations. The player may have lied about both his age and name. According to French newspaper *Le Monde*, the player known as Douala is in fact Alexandre Bardelli, and his real age is 23.

UNITED KINGDOM

Carrot unveiled in sticky Rwanda plan

In the latest episode of the world's number one migration farce, Britain plans to pay asylum seekers up to £3,000 (\$3,825) to voluntarily move to Rwanda when their British applications fail. This plan adds to the forceful removal one, in which the UK intends to send some people to Rwanda before even considering their asylum applications. The ruling Conservative Party pushed a Bill through the elected lower Parliament to get around a Supreme Court ruling against the forceful removal plan, but it still faces hurdles in the House of Lords.

UNITED STATES

Tentative steps for returning to Libya

The United States government's agency for diplomacy has requested for a budget of about \$13-million to increase travel by its diplomats into Tripoli and set up a secure compound for staff. The diplomats cited Russia's "rising influence" in Libya, which the American establishment deems to be "Nato's southern flank". The US shut its Tripoli embassy in 2014 after fighting broke out among militia groups. In 2012, the US ambassador to Libya and three other Americans were killed in an attack on a compound in Benghazi.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Filipo follows Freddy amid El Niño in Moz

Aid group Oxfam says hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans need additional humanitarian support in the wake of Tropical Storm Filipo, which made landfall on Tuesday. It came exactly a year after Cyclone Freddy devastated swathes of Mozambique and Malawi. Most people had yet to recover from Freddy's devastation, made worse by flash floods and drought caused by El Niño. Climate change has made extreme weather events frequent, trapping millions in a cycle of devastation and lukewarm recovery.

RWANDA

Past conviction bars Ingabire from office

A Rwandan court refused to exempt prominent opposition politician Victoire Ingabire from a requirement that bars anyone imprisoned for more than six months from electoral office. Ingabire, who hoped to run in the July 2024 elections, spent eight years in prison for what the state called genocide denial after she questioned why Rwanda officially memorialises the 1994 mass massacres as the Genocide Against the Tutsi, despite some Hutu deaths in it. In 2017, the East African Court found that the Rwandan state had violated Ingabire's rights to



Beyond bars: Opposition politician Victoire Ingabire in court in Kigali this week. Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP

free expression and adequate legal representation. In 2018, she was released "by presidential prerogative".



Ariel photography: The now-former prime minister of Haiti, Ariel Henry, in Nairobi – just days before stepping down. Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

HAITI

Prime time's over for trip-trapped Henry

Haiti's de facto leader Ariel Henry, resigned as prime minister this week. He has not been on the island since his late February visit to Kenya to request 1,000 police troops to help control armed gangs. In his absence, the violence escalated to include a prison break and airport siege, preventing him from landing on his attempted return. A presidential committee will be formed to appoint his successor and organise the presidential elections that he had postponed. Henry assumed power unelected after his boss, president Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in 2021.

ZIMBABWE

Prophet, pastor or plantation massa?

Zimbabwean police raided a farm owned by Ishmael Chokurongerwa, who it described as a self-styled prophet, and took 251 children away. In a Wednesday statement posted to the force's Twitter account, police say that the children were being kept out of formal education and instead "subjected to abuse as cheap labour" – doing manual work for the prophet in the name of being taught life skills. Chokurongerwa and seven of his associates have since been detained.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Dumsor, but for the continent's internet

On Thursday afternoon, large parts of West Africa and South Africa went offline. Major network providers, including MTN and Vodacom, said that several undersea cables suffered multiple failures. According to NetBlocks, which monitors internet outages, connectivity went down to 4% in Cote d'Ivoire, 14% in Benin, 17% in Liberia and 25% in Ghana, before providers switched to backup connections. Last year *The Continent* reported on the *Léon Thévenin*, which at the time was the only ship able to fix undersea cable failures in Africa.

United Kingdom

Britain sends scapegoats to the slaughter

Rights groups say the criminalising of asylum-seekers will further harm the victims of smugglers.

Kiri Rupiah

Ibrahima Bah, a young Senegalese man, was convicted last month by a British court for the manslaughter of four passengers who drowned in the English Channel in December 2022.

It's the first time a migrant has been held criminally liable for harm caused to other passengers. Bah, 17 at the time, was steering a homemade boat from France to the United Kingdom when it began taking on water and ripped apart. There were at least 43 people on board, and four bodies have been recovered.

The Crown Prosecution Service argued that Bah could be held responsible for the deaths as he was part of a "criminal agreement" to pilot the vessel. And that he had failed in his "duty of care" to keep others onboard safe. Everyone else on board, unlike Bah, had paid thousands of

euros for passage, prosecutors said.

Bah said he was forced, at gunpoint, to steer the boat, and was as much a victim of the people smugglers as those who were on the boat. During the trial, several survivors testified that if it wasn't for Bah, there would have been more deaths and his actions when the boat started taking on water saved their lives.

While Bah is the first person to be held criminally liable, he is not the first to be prosecuted for steering the boats they were passengers on. Seeking asylum is not a crime. But the UK government has passed laws making it a crime to seek asylum after making a perilous journey to the British Isles. The country has also joined its European peers in making it nearly impossible for people to claim asylum legally.

The UK government has passed laws making it a crime to seek asylum after making a perilous journey to the British Isles.

Despite being party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the government continues to stoke anti-migrant violence and rhetoric. Human Rights Watch says these crossings won't be ended by draconian laws. Instead, criminalisation, deterrence and expulsion lead to more deaths along far more dangerous and secret routes, and means of arrival. ■

Sport

Vested interests

Is there something you'd like to get off your chest?

Leading Burundi club Dynamo BBC only narrowly qualified for this year's Basketball Africa League. They have now been withdrawn from the tournament entirely – despite winning their first game over the Cape Town Tigers.

That is because of a furore over the team's kit, which – like all the league's kits – is prominently sponsored by "Visit Rwanda".

In their second match, that sponsor's logo had been carefully covered over – violating league rules and earning an immediate forfeit.

Off the court, Burundi and Rwanda are politically at odds, after President Évariste Ndayishimiye closed Burundi's borders to their "bad neighbour" in January.

The "Visit Rwanda" brand as well as RwandAir are two of the league's six commercial partners, and playoffs have taken place in Kigali in all four seasons.

It's unclear why Burundi's federation would allow the team to participate in a tournament that has always been heavily involved with Rwanda's government if it objected to their conduct.



Visitation rights: Dhieu Deing of Burundi basketball club Dynamo BBC, in a vest emblazoned with the Visit Rwanda logo.

"This is a very unfortunate situation for the players and fans, and we share the frustrations of everyone involved," said league president Amadou Gallo Fall. ■

Angola

‘This is not North Korea’

Proposed new law would turn citizens into ‘patriotic’ security state snitches.

Borrvalho Ndomba in Luanda

Government plans to introduce a new national security law have been roundly condemned by opposition parties and human rights activists alike, who warn that it will entrench authoritarianism.

The Bill, which was passed by the National Assembly in January, still requires assent from President João Lourenço. It gives sweeping new powers to security services to search homes and businesses without a warrant, surveil public places and shut down telecommunications. It also requires citizens to exercise their “patriotic and civic” duty to inform on anyone who poses a threat to national security – offering full immunity for doing so.

“Expunge from the law those aspects of denouncing anyone,” opposition leader Adalberto Costa Júnior told *The Continent*. “Remove from the law the control of the internet.”

Guilherme Neves, president of the Mãos Livres Association, a human rights



One-star review: Security forces would be permitted to infringe on rights with impunity. Photo: John Wessels/AFP

group, said that the proposed measures would turn Angola into a totalitarian state. “The people will not allow Angola to become North Korea.”

Francisco Furtado, the minister of state who introduced the controversial bill, says that the new law is necessary because Angola’s current national security law does not conform with the Constitution.

Angola has been ruled by the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola since independence in 1974. It was narrowly re-elected in 2022, in a result that was rejected by the opposition, which alleged widespread discrepancies. ■

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Nigeria

Stolen youth

After a spate of mass kidnappings this month, the government is struggling to respond.



Held to ransom: A classroom stands empty at a school in Kuriga, northern Nigeria, where over 250 pupils were kidnapped by gunmen. Photo: Haidar Umar/AFP

Justina Asishana

It happened at around 8.30am on Thursday 7 March. Pupils at the Local Education Authority primary school in Kuriga, in Nigeria's northern Kaduna State, were gathered on the assembly ground.

There were more students there than

usual: the nearby secondary school had been closed due to security concerns, so all the older children were being taught on these premises. They were all waiting to begin what should have been an ordinary school day.

Suddenly, armed men on motorcycles appeared, racing towards them.

Teachers were powerless to prevent

the attack. The kidnappers bundled some children onto the back of their bikes, while others were forced to walk at gunpoint. They shot at children who tried to flee.

By the time the chaos had subsided, and the headmaster was able to do a headcount, more than 300 children and several teachers had been abducted. It is believed that every family in the small, tight-knit community has at least one child among the abductees.

A few were able to escape as they were marched into the dense forests that surround Kuriga. One of the escapees, Mustapha Abubakar, later described how a long line of children was made to trek over great distances, and told to crawl when they got tired. The only time they were able to drink any water was when they crossed a river.

At one point, a plane hovered overhead, and the kidnappers ordered everyone to remove their clothes and lie down on the ground to avoid detection.

Abubakar seized the opportunity. “The bandits were exhausted, had no food. We saw them eating leaves and wild fruits but they gave us nothing to eat,” Abubakar told *BBC Hausa*. “While we were moving, I noticed a shrub that was brown in colour, like my trousers. I hid inside and crawled like a snake. I was there until it was completely silent before I came out and headed to the bush.”

It took Abubakar many hours of walking alone through the forest before he reached a village where he received help. He was one of the lucky few to escape. No one knows where the rest of the children are, or even who took them.



Bring them home: Families of abducted pupils gather to appeal for action from the government. Photo: AFPTV/AFP

The government has promised to do everything it can to bring the children back unharmed.

Soldiers are combing the forests, but so far the search has been fruitless. Meanwhile, the kidnappers have demanded a ransom of one billion naira (\$622,000), to be delivered by 27 March – or else all the students will be killed.

A national crisis

Nigeria has a mass kidnapping problem, and this has been an especially horrific month. On 6 March, 200 civilians – mostly women and children – were taken from a camp for internally displaced people in Borno State. On 7 March, 287 children were taken from Kuriga. On 8 March, 16 civilians were taken from a village in Benue. On 9 March, another school was targeted – this time 15 schoolchildren were taken from their rooms late at night, along with one woman in Sokoto State. And this week, on Tuesday, at least 61 people were taken from their homes in a

Nigeria school raids and pupil kidnappings

More than 500 civilians, mostly pupils, abducted by terrorist organizations or armed groups between March 6-9 in Nigeria

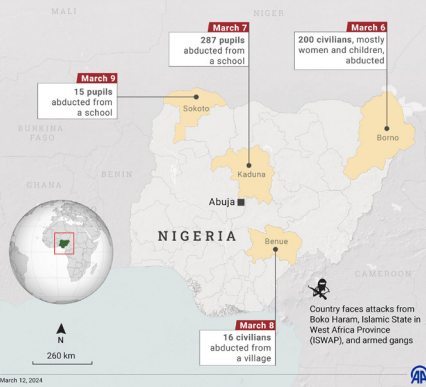


Photo: Omar Zaghoul/Anadolu via Getty Images

village in Kaduna State's Kajuru district.

The perpetrators of these kidnappings – not thought to be connected to each other – are usually described as “bandits”, a catch-all term in Nigeria that encompasses everything from armed criminal groups to terrorist organisations. Usually a ransom is demanded. That's why schoolchildren are a popular target: parents and schools can't afford large sums, but the headlines generated may force the government to pay up.

The template for this is, of course, the most notorious mass kidnapping of them all: the kidnapping of 276 young girls from Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014 by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram.

Some girls escaped in the immediate aftermath, but at least 219 were held in the Sambisa Forest, and some were forced

into sex with Boko Haram fighters.

It was only in 2017 that the Nigerian government agreed to pay a ransom. The amount has never been confirmed, but media reports suggest it was in the region of \$3-million in exchange for the release of 82 girls. It's believed that more than a hundred are still being held captive.

The fate of the Chibok girls, and the government's inability to protect them, sparked a worldwide solidarity movement known as #BringBackOurGirls, and heaped enormous pressure on then-president Goodluck Jonathan's administration, which played a significant role in his electoral defeat in 2015.

High stakes

For current President Bola Tinubu, the stakes may be just as high. He promised to tackle insecurity, and the country will be watching closely to see how he deals with this crisis. So far, he has emphasised the role of the security forces in locating kidnappers and releasing victims.

One thing he won't be doing – not officially, anyway – is paying any ransoms. In 2022, in an effort to deter further kidnappings, the government criminalised the payment of ransoms, with a minimum jail term of 15 years for anyone found guilty of doing so.

“The government is not paying anybody any dime and the government is optimistic that these children and other people ... will be brought back to their families in safety,” he said on Thursday.

Those families, who have called on the government to do more, do not appear to share the president's optimism. ■



The most powerful man in Sudan

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo – better known by his nickname Hemedti – has turned his obscure paramilitary group into one of the most dangerous and brutal fighting forces on the continent. Along the way, he has made himself and his family enormously wealthy. The people of Sudan are paying the price.

Photo: Ashraf Shazly/AFP

محمد حمدان دقلو

Tom Rhodes and Ayin Network

We don't know much about the early life of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, probably the most powerful – and dangerous – man in Sudan. We know that he was born in 1973, somewhere in Darfur, to a family of camel herders. We know that his uncle, Juma Dagalo, was the chief of the elite Awlad Mansour clan within the Mahariya Rizeigat, a Darfuri Arab tribe. And we know that he spent his early years herding camels across the wadis of northern Darfur and eastern Chad, leaving formal education in the third grade.

And then, suddenly, his life changed. According to sources within the northern Rizeigat tribal confederation, the formative moment in the young boy's life came when his caravan was attacked by armed gunmen. Details of the incident cannot be independently confirmed, but some reports suggest that up to 60 of his family and kinsmen were killed that day, and their camels looted. This was Dagalo's first, brutal introduction to the war in Darfur, in which pastoralist, tribal communities such as his were locked into a conflict over land and resources with sedentary farmers.

Dagalo has been at war ever since.

As a teenager, Dagalo saw the former dictator Omar al-Bashir rise to power and develop an expansive array of ethnically-organised militias to quell rebellions and maintain power.

The most significant of these was the Janjaweed – a militia group drawn from Arab tribes of Darfur and eastern Chad,

including the Mahariya Rizeigat. Bashir used the Janjaweed to halt the advance of rebel groups in Darfur, and they were devastatingly effective – playing a leading role in perpetrating the Darfur Genocide. Dagalo was an enthusiastic and ruthless participant, rising quickly to become a Janjaweed commander.

From the very beginning of his military career, he was reported to have a pronounced proclivity for brutality.

Some of this is documented.

On 23 November 2004, Hemedti led an attack against Adwa village in South Darfur State, in which 126 people were killed. His Janjaweed fighters worked with the state, using a deadly formula that would be repeated all over Darfur. Army warplanes would bomb indiscriminately from above while the Janjaweed would kill and loot from the ground.

“Men were immediately shot, while women were kept in detention for two days,” wrote award-winning journalist Al-Haj Warrag, describing the attack. “Young girls were raped by the attackers in the presence of their mothers.”

A deal with the devil

It was atrocities such as these that brought Dagalo to the attention of President Bashir, who was himself no stranger to war crimes. In 2013, the two men made a deal. Bashir created a new, extremely powerful paramilitary group – the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF – under the auspices of his notorious intelligence service. He appointed Dagalo to lead it.

Over the next few years, the RSF quelled resistance from Darfur's

numerous rebel groups. Dagaló's force was so successful that Bashir started to refer to him as "Hamayti" which means "my protector". This morphed into Hemedti, the nickname by which Dagaló is generally known today.

"Bashir created and developed the RSF to proof his regime against coups," said Suliman Baldo, the founding director of the Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker. "When they proved more effective than the army as a counterinsurgency force, both Bashir and the army leadership were happy to have a proxy force doing their work for them."

Bashir's creation of the RSF was also a way to protect him from former allies, according to Sudan researcher Joshua Craze. Hemedti and the RSF were used to guard Bashir against increasingly

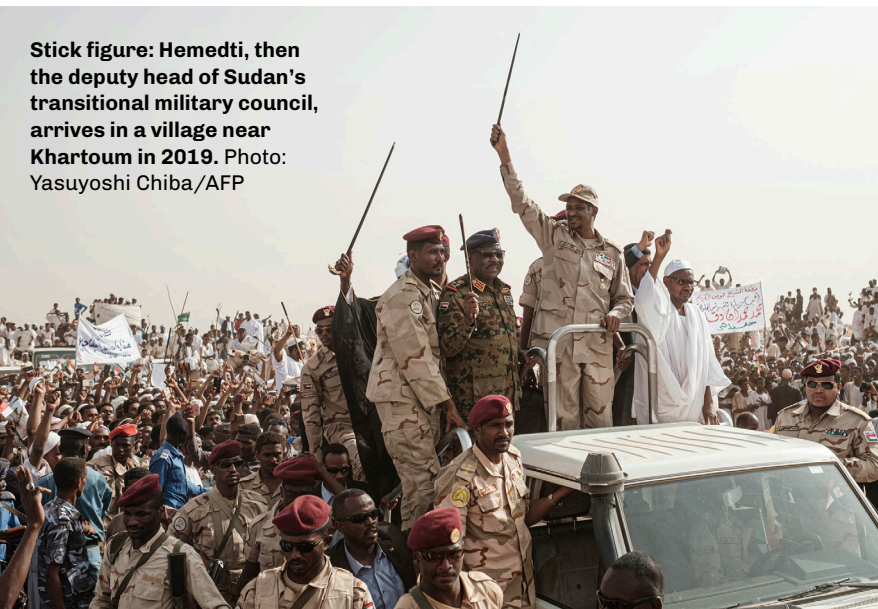
disgruntled Janjaweed leaders in the periphery such as Musa Hilal, and the ambitions of his former security chief Salah Abdalla "Gosh" in central command.

It worked, for a time. But ultimately, the person that Bashir most needed protection from was Hemedti himself.

Paying the price

To pay for the new paramilitary force, Bashir gave Hemedti control of lucrative gold mining concessions along with trade opportunities in livestock and grains. There was no state oversight, and the heavily-armed RSF used its muscle to guarantee enormous profits. Leaked documents show that the RSF enjoyed financial autonomy from the state, with bank accounts in its own name.

Stick figure: Hemedti, then the deputy head of Sudan's transitional military council, arrives in a village near Khartoum in 2019. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP



Hemedti and his family became enormously wealthy in this period, setting up the Al-Junaid Multi Activities Company to profit from the RSF's effective monopoly on gold trading. This company was placed under economic sanctions last year by the United States.

The RSF also took on some significant international security contracts. These were a source of foreign exchange – and, later, would help account for Hemedti's diplomatic influence.

From 2015 Hemedti sent his forces to fight Iran-aligned Houthi rebels in Yemen, allying with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. A year later, the European Union supported an RSF-led migration control programme – allowing Hemedti to ply his soldiers with combat experience, training, and payment, all courtesy of European taxpayers. More RSF forces were dispatched to Libya to fight alongside General Khalifa Haftar, currying further favour from the UAE and, at the time, Egypt.

In 2017, the Rapid Support Forces Act was passed, allowing the RSF to operate as a “semi-autonomous force” whose leadership was directly appointed and managed by the president of the republic. Now the RSF could collect salary from government payroll while remaining somewhat independent from any state discipline, including economic ventures.

According to long-time Sudan researcher Alex de Waal, writing for the BBC in 2019, the RSF's strength by this time “had grown tenfold”. With 70,000 men and over 10,000 armed pick-up trucks, “the RSF became Sudan's de-

facto infantry”. Despite this growth, the command structure remained much the same: mostly Arab tribesmen from Darfur under the control of the Dagalo family.

“The Rapid Support Forces have turned into a private transnational mercenary company, a gold extraction and trading company, and an armed cultivator for Hemedti's commercial empire,” researcher Abu Dhar Ali told *Ayin*. “But all of this was not done based on the genius of Hemedti, but rather by whoever wants to employ him.”

No end in sight

In late 2018, demonstrations against Bashir's autocratic rule broke out across Sudan. Despite violence and intimidation, they grew in strength and breadth, until a million people were marching on the army headquarters in Khartoum. Bashir's allies realised he had to go. Hemedti turned on his one-time benefactor.

The European Union supported an RSF-led migration control programme – allowing Hemedti to ply his soldiers with combat experience, training, and payment, all courtesy of European taxpayers.

Bashir was deposed in April, and replaced by an interim government: an uneasy, ineffective coalition of civilian leaders, army leaders and Hemedti's RSF. This lasted just two years before the army and the RSF conspired to remove the civilians from power in an October 2021 coup. And then, in April 2023, they



Million-strong: In 2019 civilians staged mass protests against the ‘temporary’ military rule. Hemedti’s only response was to tighten his grip. Photo: Ozan Kose/AFP

started fighting among themselves.

The RSF and the Sudanese army engaged in battles across Sudan, beginning a devastating civil war that is nowhere near being resolved. The conflict has led to the displacement of roughly eight million people – that’s 15% of the country’s population – and has left nearly 18-million people facing severe food shortages. The indiscriminate bombings, mass looting and assaults on civilians from both warring parties have led many to believe the conflict is not so much between two armed factions but a war against the Sudanese people.

Meanwhile, Hemedti has sought to reinvent himself as a statesman – touring African and Gulf capitals on diplomatic charm offensives, even as the forces under his command commit atrocity after atrocity. His links with the UAE have proved especially significant: the Emirates have been implicated in smuggling arms

to the RSF, helping it to achieve a measure of military ascendancy over the Sudanese Armed Forces (the UAE denies these allegations).

“He [Hemedti] is seeking legitimacy abroad that the RSF cannot earn domestically because of the conduct of its soldiers,” said analyst Baldo. This strategy is working, judging by the warm reception Hemedti received recently in Pretoria, Kampala, Nairobi and Addis Ababa.

Meanwhile, the war goes on. Neither side appears strong enough to win, at least not any time soon. All we know for sure is that the Sudanese people keep losing – and Hemedti, “my protector”, is a large part of the reason why. ■

Ayin Network is a network of journalists in Sudan, working – often at great risk – to produce news and analysis from one of the most dangerous environments for journalism in the world.

PHOTO ESSAY

Ramadan kareem!

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, began on Sunday evening with the sighting of the crescent moon in Saudi Arabia. The holy month is observed by Muslims all over the world, and is a time of fasting, prayer and festivities.



Light the way: Palestinians raise Ramadan lanterns in Rafah on the border with Egypt, where over a million people displaced by Israel's war in Gaza have been corralled amid the Israeli Defence Force's escalating attacks on the city and the region. Photo: Belal Khaled/Anadolu via Getty Images



Top: A young man prays inside the Lagos Central Mosque in Nigeria.

Photo: Benson Ibeabuchi/AFP

Bottom: A Senegalese man cleans the floor at the Massalikoul Djinane Mosque in Dakar, in preparation for Ramadan. Photo: John Wessels/AFP



Sacred hues: Devotees offer night prayers at Istiqlal mosque in Jakarta.
Photo: Adek Berry/AFP



Srinigar salah: Devotees offer prayers outside a mosque in the India-administered territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Photo: Tauseef Mustafa/AFP



Out of the ashes: A Palestinian family break their fast amid the rubble of their house, destroyed by Israeli strikes on Deir al-Balah in Gaza, on the first Iftar of Ramadan. Photo: Ali Jadallah/Anadolu via Getty Images

Lunar vista: Muslims gather at Cape Town's Sea Point as the crescent moon heralds the arrival of Ramadan. Photo: Usame Yildiz/Anadolu via Getty Images

How to build public trust in the police

Last month, we reported that only 46% of Africans trust the police and just 32% say their police usually operate in a professional manner and respect people's rights. Is there a connection?

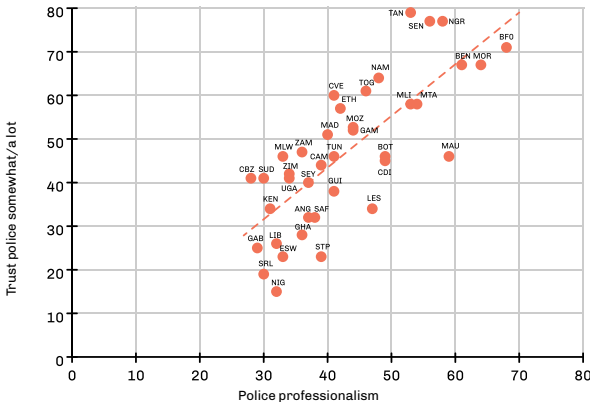
It's probably no surprise that when we do a correlation analysis we find people are more likely to trust police if they appear to act in a professional manner and make it easy to obtain assistance.

The scatter plot below illustrates this relationship. Each country is placed where its scores on police professionalism and public trust in the police intersect. Countries in the lower left record low perceptions of both professionalism and trust. For example, Nigeria (NIG) scores 32% on professionalism and 15% on trust.

As countries' professionalism scores rise, so do their trust scores. In the upper right are countries with high scores on both professionalism and trust, such as Burkina Faso (BFO) with 68% and 71% respectively. There are no countries in the upper left because low professionalism never goes with high public trust. Same for the lower right – no country combines high professionalism and low trust.

A correlation analysis like this shows that the two factors – professionalism and trust – are associated, not which one causes the other. But it seems plausible that professional conduct by the police contributes to public trust, rather than the other way around – and that seems worth a try on Africa's streets. ■

Police professionalism and public trust: A correlation | 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.





Photos: Iwájú

The House of Mouse builds a new future in Lagos

Animated though it may be, a new Disney series captures the magic and the grittiness of the city.

Wilfred Okiche

The billion-dollar global success of Marvel's *Black Panther* incentivised Disney, its parent studio, to double down on investments in Afrofuturistic world-building. The latest entry comes in the form of the six-episode coming-of-age series *Iwájú*. This is a high-powered collaboration between Disney's storied animation studio and Kugali Media, a collective fronted by a trio of youngish

creators from Nigeria and Uganda.

Set in a futuristic Lagos, *Iwájú* (Yoruba for futuristic or forward-facing) is a visually stunning take on the city's notorious economic disparity, typified by the divide between the dense metropolis on the mainland and the more affluent communities that make up the island.

The Lagos that *Iwájú* imagines is both familiar and fictional, one in which speculative technology – flying cars, robot assistants – coexist alongside established



traditions, including frustrating traffic jams and power outages – the series might be set in the future, but in Lagos some things die hard.

A loving but emotionally unavailable father, Tunde (voiced by Dayo Okeniyi)

gifts his privileged pre-teen daughter Tola (Simisola Gbadamosi) a pet lizard, Otin (Weruche Opia). What looks like an innocent present is actually a beta test for a game-changing AI-enabled technology that helps protect kids in danger.

Co-written and directed by Olufikayo Adeola, *Iwájú* leans into traditional Disney Animation beats complete with cute animal sidekicks.

But its exploration of the gulf between the haves and the have-nots is quite bracing, if not altogether progressive.

Trusting that it is never too early to introduce kids to the darkness of the world – this is, after all, the same studio that killed off Bambi's mom – *Iwájú* adopts world class animation techniques, a stellar voice cast and plenty of local flavour to tell a delightful tale of crime and punishment. ■



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 make absolutely sure to leave no Stone Town unturned."



Photo: Oleksandr Rupeta/NurPhoto via Getty Images

- 1_** Stone Town (pictured), also known as Mji Mkongwe, is located in which country?
- 2_** Who served as Namibia's first prime minister (1990-2002)?
- 3_** Who served as Namibia's prime minister from 2012-2015? (Hint: They became president in 2015.)
- 4_** What is the demonym for people from Zanzibar?
- 5_** Name the country that was named "Serra Lyoa" by a Portuguese explorer.
- 6_** Kenya's Diani Beach is on the coast of which ocean?
- 7_** What is RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo's nickname?
- 8_** Which country's currency is called the dobra?
- 9_** French football player Paul Pogba was born to parents from which country?
- 10_** Évariste Ndayishimiye is which country's president?

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

Nollywood and Bollywood are much more our jam (fellow over-dramatic people will understand why), but when Oscar raises his head we can't help but pay a *bit* of attention to Tinseltown – if only for the glitz and glam of the red carpet.

As you know, dear reader, when it comes to fashion we are much more than armchair experts here at *Drift* HQ. We monopolise a full sofa! In mismatched pyjamas, no less, with hair fetchingly unbrushed, eating our fifth *mandaazi* while judging the stars' outfits.

But, as is wont to happen whenever we take in the lights, cameras and actions of Hollywood's razzliest, dazziest elites, we found our thoughts drifting to leading lights closer to home, and the awards our own dear leaders might be nominated for.

Keeping Up With The Coupdashians would of course receive too many awards to count. It leads in so many categories – drama, intrigue, romance (or rather bromance, seeing as how some of the coup club members have bonded).

A number of electoral commission officials could win Best Director for their role in organising elections. (In some

cases, even the results themselves!)

We would not envy the people who would have the job of deciding the winner of the Best Actor Award, as all of our leaders would be strong contenders. We imagine there would be a lot of late-night phone calls from nominees reminding judges of the purely hypothetical consequences of not choosing them.

The Oscars are famed for their gift bags, but we could probably do better than their assortment of fancy soaps and gold-plated iPhones.

Why, a gift bag in the presidential awards would surely have a full-blown gold *mine*. Or a diamond-studded voucher the lucky recipient might exchange for a government ministry – or a free trip abroad on a

private jet, accompanied by their favourite despot. (Except why does it say “one way” on the ticket? That's a bit weird.)

As for who actually *deserves* the Best Actor Award? That's a tough call. There are those who should get it for their starring role in *No Country For Old Men*, for their ability to still call themselves president despite only rarely being seen in public. Others, for their performance in *The Lyin'*

If Hollywood, why wouldn't we?



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani



Oppenborder: Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu has reignited relations with Niger. Photo: Sean Gallup/Getty Images

King, after funding their shopping trips with money they swore they were going to use to improve service delivery.

Our frequent-flier presidents who starred in *Lord of The Wings* would also be nominated, as would the cast of *The African Patient*, for their constant trips abroad for undisclosed medical reasons.

Success in cinema is not always about the prizes – sometimes it's just about bums in seats, which might explain why Ecowas appear to be taking a leaf out of the ever-popular MCU playbook and teaming up with old frenemies in *Deadpoll & Coup-verine*: After much pearl-clutching following last year's coup in Niger, the regional bloc recently said it would be lifting most of the sanctions it imposed upon the country.

Then, this week, Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu issued a directive to re-open land and air borders with Niger, and to lift other sanctions including travel bans on Nigerien government officials and

their family members; the suspension of commercial and financial transactions between Niger and Nigeria; and the freezing of Niger's assets in Ecowas Central Banks.

Also being welcomed back in from the cold is Gabon. Six months after the coup that saw Ali Bongo removed from office, the Economic Community of Central African States announced that it was lifting the country's suspension from the organisation following "significant advances in the process of returning to constitutional order". Not a bad week for the Coupdashians, all told.

If there was an award for dumbest moment of the week then it would surely go to South Africa's main opposition party – The Democratic Alliance. Ahead of elections in May, its leaders wrote to US secretary of state Antony Blinken, to ask for "help to safeguard against any attempts to disrupt the democratic process". America? Whose latest hits include *January 6 – The Trumpening*, *Voter Suppression* and *Funding a Genocide*?

While some of our leaders may have potential to win an Oscar or two, there are many who are losing when it comes to doing their jobs. A worrying report from Save The Children says nearly 230,000 children and new mothers in Sudan are likely to die from hunger in coming months amid the conflict there.

Together with the devastating news of the latest spate of kidnapping in Nigeria, it's headlines like these that make us think that none of our leaders should be winning any awards at all. ■

Dithering while Haiti burns

Richer and nearer countries are unwilling to intervene directly – preferring to make it Kenya's problem.

Jorge Heine

The prime minister of one of the larger Caribbean countries travels to East Africa to secure a police deployment to help address gang violence back home, where a recent attack on the national penitentiary freed 4,000 prisoners.

Failing in his endeavour, he flies back across the Atlantic, but is unable to land because the gangs have seized the airport.

After a neighbouring country denies him landing rights, he ends up in a third country, while the notoriously bloodthirsty chief of one of the leading gangs demands his resignation.

Foreign powers voice their concerns, but the hapless prime minister is left twisting in the wind. Fears of widespread famine grow, as the breakdown of the state and deepening civil disorder hamper even the most basic activities.

Eventually, the stranded prime minister agrees to resign once a transition council has been established; but gang leaders are now demanding a continued role in any new government.

Though this may sound like the unlikely plot of a cheap telenovela, it is exactly what is happening in Haiti.

Haitian authorities did make a serious

effort to establish a professional police force some years ago. But the Haitian National Police, decimated in battles with the gangs and demoralised by a lack of government support, has become a shadow of its former self.

The armed forces – better known for their propensity for overthrowing governments than for their military prowess – have long since been dissolved.

The government has desperately been seeking assistance from the international community for over a year, to no avail.

The United Nations estimates that 4,000 people were killed in gang-related violence in 2023 alone, while another 3,000 were kidnapped.

And yet no country in the Western Hemisphere has been willing to become directly involved. The United States, for its part, offered to cover the costs of a 1,000-strong Kenyan police force deployment, a proposal green-lit by the UN Security Council. The idea that it should fall to an East African country to intervene in the Caribbean stretches credulity, but such is the absurdity of Haiti's plight.

While Haiti burns, reporters and pundits have been holding forth on all the reasons why the international community



Wheels have come off: A Haitian man burns tyres during a protest calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry in Port-au-Prince on 7 February. Photo: Richard Pierrin/AFP

should not intervene. Such arguments draw on memories of the US occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934, and on the more recent crisis of the 1990s, when the US stepped in to remove a military junta led by General Raoul Cédras.

As Joe Biden, then a US senator, said at the time, “If Haiti – a God-awful thing to say – just quietly sunk into the Caribbean, or rose up 300 feet, it wouldn’t matter a whole lot in terms of our interests.”

Other commentators emphasise the perceived failures of Minustah, the UN mission that was sent to stabilise Haiti from 2004 to 2017.

But much of this bad press is unjustified. From 2004 to 2010 – when a devastating earthquake hit Haiti – Minustah had stabilised the country and helped it to regain a sense of purpose following the somewhat traumatic transition to democracy after the fall of the Duvalier dynasty in 1986.

The US and Canada aren’t the only ones refusing to do what is needed in Haiti. The same goes for the Latin American countries that previously played a central role in Minustah: Brazil, Chile, Argentina,

and Uruguay.

In fact, Minustah was the first-ever UN operation in which Latin American troops comprised a majority. At a time when the region is becoming less relevant on the international stage, it has much to gain by stepping in to address the most urgent crisis in its own neighbourhood. Who better to rescue millions of innocent Haitians from another downward spiral into violence, dysfunction and famine?

If the moral case for helping the hemisphere’s poorest, most crisis-ridden country does not carry much weight in today’s international political climate, perhaps sheer self-interest will. Letting Haitians “stew in their own juices” (my paraphrase) is not only cynical and morally indefensible; it is simply foolish. Failed states have a way of becoming centres of international organised crime, terrorism, and drug trafficking. ■

Jorge Heine, a research professor at the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University, is the editor of Fixing Haiti: Minustah and Beyond (United Nations University Press, 2011). © Project Syndicate

Civil society is playing its part – and the opposition's, too

In Gambia's new democratic dispensation, civil society is outperforming opposition parties.

Andrew Mendy

Gambia's 2016 elections, which saw long-time president Yahya Jammeh defeated by an opposition coalition led by Adama Barrow, represented a major turning point in the country's political history. Barrow then won elections again in 2021, but his decision to form an alliance with the former ruling party – albeit not with Jammeh himself – raised serious questions about how much things had really changed.

So has Gambia moved towards being a stable democratic state, and what role have opposition parties played in this process?

There are a number of opposition parties operating in Gambia. The potential strength of opposition coalitions to hold government to account was demonstrated in 2016, but at present there is a tendency for these parties to work in silos, in part due to ethnic polarisation. Moreover, because they are over-reliant on their leaders, the parties risk collapsing when their figurehead retires or defects to another organisation, and have relatively weak structures for engaging and sustaining the interest of young citizens.

Given the challenges facing opposition parties, it is often left to civil society to hold the government accountable, for example by filing strategic litigation against undemocratic and unconstitutional practices of the government. An effort led by Gambia Participates and the Center for Research and Policy Development to hold lawmakers accountable by ensuring that they report on their financial interests was ultimately successful at the Supreme Court, creating a degree of transparency that did not exist previously.

The media are also playing an important role, with programmes to strengthen investigative journalism by organisations such as Malagen.

It is therefore the ability of civic groups to put pressure on the government, rather than the role of opposition parties, that demonstrates that Gambia's new democratic dispensation has created the necessary openings for a wider process of political transformation. ■



Andrew Mendy is a graduate assistant in the political science department at the University of The Gambia. This analysis was produced with Democracy in Africa.

THE BIG PICTURE

Meading place: Patrons of a tej house in Addis Ababa drink a honey wine called tej in Amharic and myes in Tigrinya. It is made of honey and gesho, a shrub found in eastern and southern Africa.

Photo: Michele Spatari/AFP



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