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# The Continent

## Africa's petrol price crisis



Photo: Patrick Meinhardt/  
Bloomberg via Getty Images



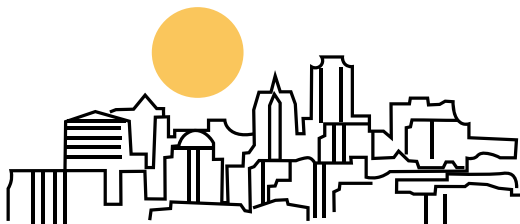
**COVER:** Petrol is 132% more expensive in Sudan this year than it was a year ago. The price has increased by 123% in Zimbabwe, 76% in Sierra Leone and 50% in Malawi. Driven by speculation, opaque markets, middlemen, Russia's war in Ukraine and poor local governance, the price increases are making life more expensive across Africa. *The Continent* reports on the ground from four countries where people are now working less, eating less and earning less (p11).

# Inside:

- **Anthrax:** A mysterious outbreak is making it even more difficult to buy food (p8)
- **Mozambique:** More attacks as Frelimo squabbles over who is to blame (p9)
- **Magnificent Mané:** From being banned by his dad, to the Champions League final (p18)
- **South Africa:** Deadly floods made worse by inaction (p21)
- **Monkeypox:** Photography choices show racism towards Africa still runs deep (p23)
- **Benin:** Journalists are now being arrested in the once-healthy democracy (p27)

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## AFRICAN UNION

## First-ever continental humanitarian summit

About 20 heads of state were expected in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, for the African Union's first ever extraordinary humanitarian summit, which kicked off on Friday. There is a lot on the agenda: AU boss Moussa Faki Mahamat said that there are 113-million Africans in need of urgent humanitarian assistance this year – that is nearly one in ten Africans. While they are there, leaders will also confront an issue that is much closer to their hearts, according to the official agenda: the growing threat of “unconstitutional



Photo: Twitter/AfricanUnion

changes” of government – and how to prevent it happening to them.

## RWANDA - DRC

## Exhuming the hatchet

Relations between the DRC and Rwanda, which broke in the mid 1990s after a Rwandan invasion, appeared to be thawing under president Felix Tshisekedi, who came to power in 2019. However, fresh fighting by the M23 rebel group has renewed the animus between the two neighbours. This week, two Congolese ministers accused Rwanda of supporting the group whose resurgent clashes with the national army in the past few weeks have already displaced more than 10,000 according to the UN. Rwanda claims the fighting is purely an internal Congolese conflict.

## GLOBAL ENERGY

## Europe courts West Africa

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Senegal, South Africa and Niger this week. Top on his agenda was discussing a gas project off the coast of Senegal, which is expected to start operations next year. As Europe seeks to wean itself off Russian gas, it is increasingly looking towards African suppliers. It will be particularly courting west African countries like Nigeria, Senegal and Angola, which have largely untapped potential for liquified natural gas, according to a draft EU document that Bloomberg News reported on earlier in the month.



## FOOD SECURITY

### Let them eat... cassava?

Togo's prime minister, Victoire Dogbé, this week advised citizens to turn to making confectionaries out of cassava and yam flour, since the war in Ukraine is starving them of wheat. President Yoweri Museveni also recently told Ugandans to eat cassava if bread has become too expensive. While such comments from rich politicians tend to spark social media memes comparing them to Marie Antoinette, some people are heeding the advice. In Cameroon, the use of cassava flour for baked goods is reportedly booming.

## EGYPT

### Rice to make up wheat shortfall

The General Authority for Supply Commodities in Egypt has bought 50,000 tonnes of rice from the international market, double the minimum the state grain buyer was seeking when it published calls for tenders in early May. Amid the Russian war in Ukraine, the north African country has struggled with procuring enough of its main staple, wheat, even resorting to fixing the price of bread in late March. The rice supplies should go some way in giving citizens some relief.

## SENEGAL

### Eleven babies die in hospital fire

At a hospital in the Senegalese town of Tivaouane, a short circuit caused a fire which killed 11 babies in its neonatal ward. President Macky Sall, who had travelled to Equatorial Guinea for the continent's first humanitarian summit, cut his visit short and has also sacked his health minister, Abdoulaye Diouf Sarr. The tragedy is the latest indicator that Senegal's maternal and child healthcare is ailing. Recently, a baby who was erroneously declared dead was found alive in a morgue. Last year, four babies were killed in a hospital fire in Linguere, a town in northern Senegal.

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## LESOTHO

**Dramatic political reforms proposed**

Lesotho's parliament is considering a bill that would make the Basotho king commander-in-chief of the army; and allow him to appoint security chiefs without consulting the prime minister. This is meant to depoliticise the Lesotho security sector, in response to a rise in vigilante groups linked to political parties. Currently, the prime minister can be impeached by a simple majority in parliament – but the draft bill also proposes raising the bar to a two-thirds majority.

## UNITED STATES

**Texas bans books instead of guns**

America's second largest state, Texas, has banned over 700 books from its public schools. The banned books mainly speak about discrimination based on race, sexual orientation and gender. The book-banning frenzy is spreading across large swaths of the country's south. In Florida, authorities rejected more than 50 maths textbooks, claiming they mention "prohibited topics". The country will however not be banning guns – despite frequent mass shootings. This week, 19 children and two adults were killed by a gunman at a Texas school.



Photo: BAL

## SPORT

**BAL wraps its second season**

The runners-up in the Basketball Africa League's inaugural season last year, Tunisia's US Monastir, have punched their ticket to this season's final after beating champions Zamalek in the semifinals. On Saturday they will face Angola's Petro de Luanda in Kigali, Rwanda. US Monastir beat Zamalek 88-81 in their revenge victory and Petro de Luanda beat Cameroon's Forces Armées et Police (FAP) 88-74 in their semifinal. Egypt's Zamalek and FAP battled in the third-place deciding game on Friday, with Zamalek emerging victorious.



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# Sierra Leone

## Oh great, now anthrax has entered the chat?

**The deadly pathogen is circulating in livestock, with some human cases reported, and is doing its best to make the cost of living crisis even worse**

**Abdul Brima in Freetown**

**A**uthorities in Sierra Leone have confirmed an anthrax outbreak in Port Loko district, in the north-west of the country. Details remain sketchy, but the government has reported that 91 head of cattle, 53 goats and 79 sheep have been killed by the disease.

Although no humans have died, at least three people showing symptoms have been tested and found to be positive, according to Hassan Bruce, a journalist in the area.

Anthrax can be deadly, especially when its spores are breathed in; but it is usually treatable with a course of antibiotics.

Humans usually only contract the disease through exposure to infected animals – or by eating contaminated meat.

The local government has suspended all meat sales in the affected region, while the national government is discouraging the selling and eating of meat from the region.

This is bad news for farmers, restaurant owners and retailers in the Port Loko district, which is among the country's largest cattle-rearing and meat-producing districts.

It is also bad news for consumers in Port Loko and neighbouring districts, who are already grappling with inflation in the prices of basic goods.

Now they are struggling to find any meat at all in the markets. Livestock are a crucial source of protein in local diets. Fish is not a viable alternative for most families, as it is trucked in from Freetown which makes it very expensive – especially given recent increases in the price of fuel.

Individuals and families who wish to buy cows, goats or sheep for big festivities are unable to do so.

Anthrax is a zoonotic disease, which means that it can be spread from animals to humans. Climate scientists anticipate a rise in outbreaks of such diseases as the earth warms, with pathogens able to take advantage of changing conditions. ■



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# Mozambique

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## Faltering insurgency still threatens lives – and gas projects

**Instability around crucial gas projects leaves them stalled, while the ruling party's inability to accept its leadership failures is preventing long-term solutions to the conflict**

### ANALYSIS

**Luis Nhachote in northern Mozambique**

**A**ttacks have resumed in Mozambique's north-east, after a lull in April. These include in the district of Palma – home to the liquefied natural gas projects which carry with them the hope of transforming Mozambique's economy (if they go ahead, and if the money is not stolen by elites).

Insurgents raided the village of Olumbe, 20km down the coast from the gas project site on the Afungi peninsula. But the raid, though backed by the threat

of violence, was not a murderous one. Instead, the terrorists – along with women and children hostages who accompanied them – had arrived to take food.

A source told *The Continent* that the unrest in Olumbe began in the late afternoon of 6 May, when militants “accompanied by women and children fired several shots into the air”, forcing the local population, which had recently returned to the village, to flee again. “The people who had returned and had started their lives over, were left with nothing again,” the anonymous source said.

The incident is not a positive sign for the insurgency: it seems to be struggling more than ever this year with the lean months that follow the rainy season. In addition to the raids to steal food, there are also increasing numbers of reports of hostages being released (fewer mouths to feed), and even of fighters surrendering en masse, unable to tolerate the privations of life in the bush.

But an attack in the district of Palma is a setback for any hopes that French oil major TotalEnergies will restart work on the Mozambique gas project this year – or that ExxonMobil will take a final investment decision on the even bigger project it plans to build next door. Any such decision will only come after Total returns, Exxon and its partners have made clear.

Speaking in France last month, TotalEnergies chief executive Patrick

Pouyanne reiterated that work will not restart until he himself can safely visit not only the project site but also the towns of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia.

Moreover, he said, “we don’t want to restart our activity surrounded by refugee camps.”

The raid on Olumbe notwithstanding, the key districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia have been broadly peaceful since the arrival of Rwandan troops in 2021.

But to achieve the “sustainable security” that Pouyanne wants, Cabo Delgado needs more than just regular patrols by the Rwanda Defence Force.

### Root causes

Attempts to ramp up security are also generating controversy, however.

The Centre for Public Integrity, a Mozambican think-tank, last week issued a report accusing the government’s Cabo Delgado Reconstruction Plan of favouring Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, the two districts vital to the gas projects, over the rest of the conflict-hit region.

The government, the centre says, is prioritising infrastructure destroyed in these two districts, and is forcing public officials to return to Mocímboa da Praia.

The criticism could be misplaced, however. “Palma and Mocimboa are key districts and economically important,” points out Tomás Queface, a Mozambican analyst on the Cabo Ligado project that monitors the conflict in northern Mozambique. “Mocímboa and Palma had more infrastructure destroyed than districts such as Nangade and Quissanga,” he says, pointing to Mocímboa’s port and

aerodromes in both Mocímboa and Palma as examples. Either way, the reconstruction plan is only a partial solution.

A more holistic response has been drawn up by the Mozambican government – or elements thereof – with the support of the UN, the EU, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank. But its plan hasn’t yet been approved by Mozambique’s Council of Ministers. Some, from the conservative wing of Mozambique’s ruling party, Frelimo, apparently find the plan’s conclusions on the causes of the insurgency unpalatable.

At issue is the idea that Frelimo, which has ruled the country since independence in 1975, shares the blame for discontentment which is fuelling the insurgency.

### **The conservative wing of Mozambique’s ruling party, Frelimo, apparently find the plan’s conclusions on the causes of the insurgency unpalatable.**

The strategy paper features a section on what it calls “the endogenous factors of the conflict”, which include “socioeconomic asymmetries, the frustration of social expectations related to the exploitation of natural resources”. It notes that “the youth, in particular, feels in a constant state of waiting,” and that they are excluded from decision-making.

That contradicts the official government narrative that the insurgency is a foreign import. ■

# Sudan

Photo: Ahmed Gouja Nyala/*The Continent*



## Inside Africa's worst fuel crisis

**Over the past year, the price of petrol in Sudan has risen by 132% – the steepest increase on the continent. Although economic factors play a role, the country's generals also have a lot to answer for.**

### Ahmed Gouja Nyala in Darfur

**T**his time a year ago, even amid widespread fuel shortages, one litre of petrol cost 290 Sudanese pounds. Today, that same litre is costing motorists 672 Sudanese pounds – an increase of 132%.

Nowhere else in Africa has experienced such a steep hike this year (although, with a rise of 123%, Zimbabwe comes close).

Adam Hassan, a taxi operator in El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, says that a year ago he could not find petrol for his vehicle. “I slept in the line

at the petrol station night after night.” Nowadays however, he says “the petrol is available but overpriced by 200%”.

The rest of the country finds itself in a similar situation, with petrol becoming unaffordably expensive for most.

### The economics of messy politics

What has changed between last year and now? Most obviously, the government. In October, the military took power in a coup – the latest chapter in a difficult and unpredictable political transition.

In 2019, longtime dictator Omar al-



**Stranded: Buses in Darfur can't afford to stay on the road**

Photo: Ahmed Gouja Nyala/*The Continent*

Bashir was ousted in a popular revolution. He was arrested, and remains behind bars. But the joint civilian-military transitional government, which initially succeeded him, had to deal with his toxic economic legacy. This included 25 years of economic sanctions and unsustainable subsidies for goods like fuel and bread.

The transitional government tried to implement policies to reduce the government's hand in the market – including gradually lifting fuel subsidies and liberalising foreign exchange – but this caused immediate economic shocks.

Then the generals intervened, seizing power from civilians and derailing the country's roadmap to democracy. This led to diplomatic isolation, and meant Sudan was cut off from international funds that could alleviate these economic shocks.

Mohamed Al-Sadiq Ali, the director of the Petroleum department in South Darfur, the second largest Sudanese state,

told *The Continent* that he thinks the transitional government's liberalisation was “an important and courageous step to address the accumulated crises of the Sudanese economy,” and coup leaders wrongly blamed civilian leaders for economic policies that were necessary.

Mahmoud Abdul-Aziz Adam, an economics lecturer, agrees. He points out that for the first time, under the civilian-military transitional government, the Central Bank began to accumulate a significant cash reserve of about \$1.6-billion dollars and, shortly before the civilians were ousted, the annual inflation rate had actually begun to decline.

Annual inflation is currently running at more than 250%, according to Reuters, which noted that the price of bread in the country is increasing even faster: in Khartoum, a small loaf of bread which cost two Sudanese pounds in 2020 is now being sold for 50 Sudanese pounds. ■



## On the cost of fuel, Africa is (almost) a country

If it's any solace, your country's wild increases in fuel prices are not unique. Nearly every African is paying a LOT more at the pump that they did this time last year.

## Josephine Chinele in Blantyre, Jeffrey Moyo in Harare and Mohammed Kabba in Freetown

**I**n 10 African countries the pump price for a litre of petrol has increased by at least 50% over the past year, with motorists in Sudan and Zimbabwe now forking out more than double what they did in mid-2021. The reasons are as varied as the continent's economies but ordinary citizens are feeling very similar pains: job and income losses.

In Zimbabwe, the price rose by 123%. Only in Sudan was the rise more dramatic (132%). Zimbabwe's energy minister, Zhemu Soda, blames the war in Ukraine saying it is "hampering production and worldwide movement of fuel which is really a situation beyond our control."

But the country's fuel woes pre-date Russia's invasion of Ukraine by decades, and are inseparable from the economic crisis that has gripped it for more than a decade – Zimbabwean motorists have seen price hikes like this before, most notably during the wild hyperinflation of the late 2000s.

Sierra Leone has seen the fourth sharpest rise in fuel prices after Sudan, Zimbabwe and Ghana. A litre of petrol now costs 76% more than it did in April last year. The Petroleum Regulatory Authority admits the country's sector is volatile. All 1.3-million litres of the fuel Sierra Leone needs per day is imported, but its storage facilities can only hold up to 40% of what is needed. This means the stock must be replenished frequently, which in turn makes the country

## Zimbabwe

*Pritchard Mwayera, a computer technician, stopped driving to work last year in December. Now, the only place he drives to is church on the weekends. "I can't starve my family by buying petrol just to drive to work," he explains.*

*But switching to public transport has not sheltered him from the incessantly rising cost of fuel. A government bus runs his route only once in the morning – at 6am. If he misses the bus, he has to take the private taxis that the government deems illegal, and pay \$1.50 to \$2 for his commute.*

*Percy Ndoro can't even afford that much in the capital Harare's Kuwadzana high density suburb. She now cycles the 25km to and from work. Meanwhile, Jemedza Mhere, a cobbler from Harare's Warren Park high density suburb, can't afford a \$2 commute nor a bicycle. He walks the 10km from his work to Harare's central business district where he works.*

vulnerable to any changes in global oil prices or shipping costs.

"We replenish stock every two weeks. People therefore tend to hoard or speculate against the availability of petroleum products," Sierra Leone's regulatory authority said in a statement last July, when it announced a 12% increase in the price of fuel, amid global lockdown-related difficulties in



**The truck stops here: In 2020, drivers in Sudan queued for fuel that never came. Now there is no shortage, but prices have more than doubled since last year.** Photo: AFP

importation. The following month, the authorities increased the price again by 5% but tried to hold it steady until March 2022, when dealer speculation

on the impact of the Ukraine war led to widespread fuel hoarding and created a black market. In just two weeks, the government increased the price by 50%.

In Malawi, the price of petrol has increased by 50% – in its case the hike is thanks to being a landlocked country that imports more than it exports. Malawian fuel deliveries are driven between 990km and 1,500km, depending on whether they are being picked from Nacala and Beira ports in Mozambique, or Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

“Fuel prices are dictated by landing costs and the performance of our exchange rate against the United States dollar,” said Fitina Khonje, the spokesperson for the Malawi Energy Regulatory Authority.

On average, across the continent’s 14 landlocked countries, prices have gone up by 37% compared to 29% in those with access to the world’s oceans. But

## Sierra Leone

*Abu Bakarr Timbo, a leader in the association of Sierra Leone truck drivers, says high pump prices have put drivers in a tough position. They have to increase the amount they charge businesses to move goods between the capital, Freetown and the inner provinces, but this then reduces the loads available to them, as some traders decide the fares are more than they can afford. His frustration is echoed by Mohamed Mansaray, who spoke to The Continent at Freetown’s*

*main lorry park. Both said they had seen trucks wait as long as three to five days in the queue for goods to transport to the provinces. The journey back from the provinces often makes even less economic sense, says commercial transport owner Solomon Kaindeh, explaining that truck drivers are complaining that more often than not the vehicle will have to return half empty. There are times, he says, when he uses almost all the money from the drive to maintain the vehicle, especially when he has to replace a tyre.*



**Road worrier:**  
Kenya is no stranger to fuel shortages, but motorists are now facing unusually steep increases at the pump. Photo: James Wakibia/Getty Images

proximity to the sea has not shielded everyone. Cape Verdeans are now paying 50% more than they did last April, with a litre of petrol now costing \$1.70.

Only in the Central African Republic does it cost more (\$2.40).

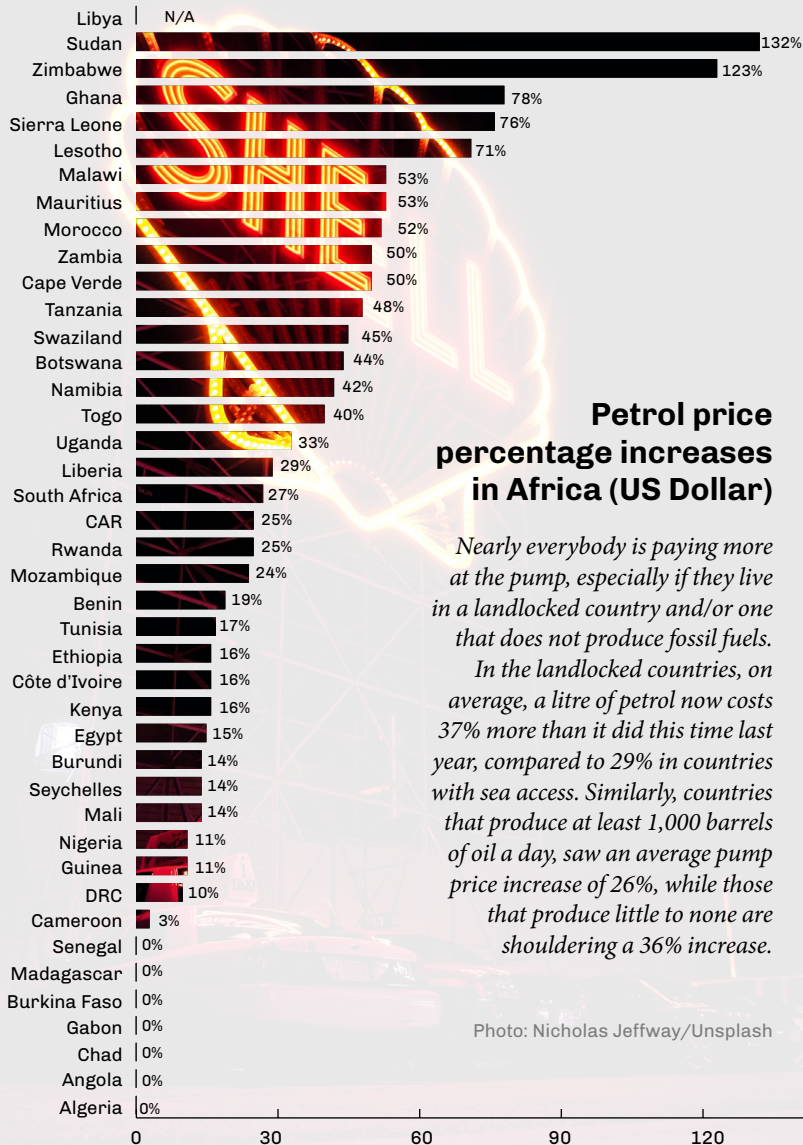
In seven countries, citizens are faring a little better than the rest of the continent. Their prices remain the same. Four of these produce substantially more oil than they consume domestically: Algeria, Angola, Chad and Gabon. Algeria consumes only a quarter of the oil it produces; Gabon's domestic use is only 10% of its production; and Angola and Chad consume even less, at 7% and 2% of their respective production volumes.

Prices also held steady in Burkina Faso, Madagascar and Senegal – although with prices of \$1.24 per litre of petrol already, Dakar is not exactly experiencing a fuel fiesta either. ■

## Malawi

*One by one the drivers leave the taxi rank in Blantyre in frustration, calling it a day at as early as 5pm. The drivers park their taxis at the rank at 6am, some earlier, to wait for customers who might hire them to drop them off at work or take their children to school. "Even regular customers feel we are too expensive," says Louis Mwambidzi. "We've been increasing them according to the fuel hikes." Customers are instead opting for public transport, walking, or using kabaza (motorbike taxis). Taxi drivers often don't own their vehicles, Mwambidzi says, and now their bosses are selling the cars because the taxi business is losing them money – leaving many drivers jobless.*





## Petrol price percentage increases in Africa (US Dollar)

*Nearly everybody is paying more at the pump, especially if they live in a landlocked country and/or one that does not produce fossil fuels.*

*In the landlocked countries, on average, a litre of petrol now costs 37% more than it did this time last year, compared to 29% in countries with sea access. Similarly, countries that produce at least 1,000 barrels of oil a day, saw an average pump price increase of 26%, while those that produce little to none are shouldering a 36% increase.*

Photo: Nicholas Jeffway/Unsplash

# The irrepressible Sadio Mané



Photo: Oli Scarff/AFP

**The Senegalese wasn't allowed to play football as a child. Now he is one of the greatest players of all time, playing in another Champions League Final.**

**Luke Feltham**

**S**adio Mané should not be playing in the Champions League final for Liverpool. Not if life made any sense.

As a boy his father, an imam, forbade him from playing football – not that he had anything more than a grapefruit to kick around anyway. After his father died, the broader family continued the veto, prompting a 15-year-old Mané to run away to the Senegalese capital Dakar from his village of Bambali.

Well after he had established himself as a promising professional, he would face rejection from current mentor

Jürgen Klopp. In the documentary *Made in Senegal* – in which we learned about his childhood – the German admits to passing up an opportunity to sign the forward at former club Borussia Dortmund because he supposedly wore his cap like a rapper.

Mané would respond with a script that could not be ignored.

Unleashed onto the grand stage by Southampton, the cryptic winger – capable of turning a languid trot into a dash at the drop of his discretion – captivated the Premier League. In 2015 he bagged the quickest hat-trick England's top flight has ever seen at two minutes 56 seconds, obliterating Liverpool legend



**Making the world go round: Sadio Mané after Senegal's triumph in the Africa Cup of Nations final.**  
Photo: Charly Triballeau/AFP

Robbie Fowler's 1994 record. Sealing another three strikes in four appearances against Liverpool — now with Klopp as manager — meant the Reds could no longer ignore him.

*Sadio Mané. Runnin' down the wing Mané, Anfield would soon sing in honour of their instant cult hero. Hear the Kopites sing Mané.*

Every so often – when the headline pool runs dry – he faces suggestions that his powers are waning. Each and every time he responds stronger than before.

In the years since joining Liverpool, Mané has formed an integral part of the sweeping red wave that has brought in a Champions League and eased the pain of a 30-year wait for a league title.

Should a sequel of European glory be secured in the improbable journey, Liverpool will be unignorable in any conversation about the greatest teams of the last two decades.

And Mané will be listed among the greatest individual protagonists.

Samuel Eto'o slicing into the box in Rome 2009 to fire up Pep Guardiola's seminal Barcelona era; Didier Drogba soaring in the Munich air to claw Chelsea to the 2012 title. It is in this echelon of African attackers in which Mané is destined to be placed. (He has already surpassed Drogba for most goals in the knockout stage).

But he is also a distinctly different player from those two legends – and even from Egyptian teammate Mohamed Salah. Whereas the latter does his best dance in the spotlight, the Senegalese thrives in his industry and intelligent, subtle movements.

He thus paradoxically teeters between universal acclaim and the risk of being overshadowed – either way, there is not a team in world football that would not improve with him in their lineup. ■

# Schemes and soap thicken beauty's plot

Wilfred Okiche

**I**n *Savage Beauty*, Netflix's latest South African series, a mysterious young woman with revenge on her mind is the guide to a deliciously murky world. Here, the bright lights of the beauty industry serve as decoy for a potentially criminal enterprise on the back end.

As the new public face of Bhengu Beauty, a family-owned business empire, Zinhle (Rosemary Zimu) is catapulted from a humdrum existence to one steeped in privilege. While she is contractually expected to help launder the floundering image of the company – and the powerful family at its helm – Zinhle arrives with her own hidden agenda. Expect lots of mind games, scheming and convenient coincidences.

Created by Lebogang Mogashoa – who has writing credits on M-Net's *Legacy*, another soap opera about a badly behaved wealthy family – *Savage Beauty* carries some of the hallmarks that make television shows like these compelling. Mixing a melodramatic core with a pulpy style that embraces sex, tasteful nudity and violence, *Savage Beauty* does not reinvent the wheel so much as it keeps it turning smartly.

The pilot episode sets up the action

briskly, teasing out plot beats across the furiously paced episodes that follow. For Zinhle, members of the Bhengu clan led by the formidable duo of Don (Dumisani Mbebe) and Grace (Nthathi Moshesh) are either friend or foe depending on how they fit into her machinations.

In keeping with Netflix-commissioned properties such as *Queen Sono* and *Blood & Water*, there is a socially conscious streak that is embedded within the plot, drawing out real-world parallels. In this case, the show has a thing or two to say about colourism as well as the complicity of the cosmetic industry in creating toxic standards of beauty. It goes about this neatly without losing narrative heft.

Add in some subtext about South Africa's larger structural and economic inequalities and the potential for high drama is overflowing. Little wonder then that in the finale, Mogashoa and team make sure to set up a potential sequel. ■



*Savage Beauty* is streaming on Netflix.



Forewarned is for nothing: Floods devastated areas around Durban – twice. Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

## Floods of death: An irresponsible state's disaster

Heavy rains have again overwhelmed a province in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal authorities were warned – but they failed to act, and hundreds died.

**Sipho Kings**

South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province starts in the west with the mountains of the Drakensberg – a jagged spine that runs north to south in that country – and finishes in the warm Indian Ocean to the east. Sitting just below the Tropic of Capricorn it is a tropical region, defined as much by its palm trees as its heavy rainfall.

It is a favourite holiday destination, thanks to its popular beaches. But it is also densely populated, with over 11-million

people, and communities are poorly planned. Floods are common. Ecosystems that should slow down these flood waters, such as wetlands, have been stripped away and not been replaced with alternatives like stormwater drains. Inequality and the country's embedded structural racism mean people are forced to live where they can find space. That can be on the side of a steep slope, or on a flood plain.

In late March, a year's worth of heavy rainfall ripped through the province in two days. Six weeks later, the same thing



**Washed up: There's ground zero and then there's ground zero's basement parking.** Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

happened again. At least 400 people died.

The rain was predicted. The cut-off low pressure system that drives it is a regular feature of South African weather, and is one of a few systems that bring rain to what is otherwise a semi-arid country. The national weather service turned on its disaster management alerts – a zero to ten grading system – and government disaster teams were explicitly warned that a level eight disaster was on the way. Few responded until after the rain started falling.

Without addressing its failures, KwaZulu-Natal's provincial leadership has since said it is building a new disaster warning system. This will take in warnings and feed them, via email and text, to municipalities and responders.

Climate change projections have shown, for several decades, that this part of South Africa would be getting wetter and that rain would be falling in shorter

and more violent bursts. Provincial plans have taken from this, saying new growth should be resilient to heavy weather events. This forewarning is thanks to the country's well-regarded scientific community, which contributes above its weight in things such as UN climate reports. Starved of resources, it has a vast area to cover, with a country and all its surrounding oceans, stretching from the frozen Antarctic up to sweltering desert.

Few other African countries have even this level of scientific capacity. Not enough weather stations mean little weather data, making climate projections for countries – particularly in Central Africa – hard to do. Earlier this year, the UN announced its goal of having every person on Earth covered by early warning systems within five years. This will help countries prepare for disaster if – and that's apparently a big if – their governments actually act on the information. ■

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**JUST IN: A Massachusetts resident has tested positive for monkeypox, the state department confirms.**

**'Everybody Should Be Concerned' About Monkeypox, Biden Warns**

Only one case of the virus has so far been identified in the U.S., but public health officials say the disease is likely to spread.

abcnews.go.com  
1st monkeypox case in US this year, Massachusetts

9:48 pm · 18 May 22 · SocialFlow

**قناة الجزيرة** @AJArabic

قروود.. اجتماع طارئ لمنظمة  
وكدون انتشاره بين المثلين

**BBC News (World)** @BBCWorld

Israel and Switzerland confirm monkeypox cases

Translate Tweet

المملكة تعقد اجتماعاً طارئاً  
معرض جدي الفريدي ووكالة الأمن  
تكشف ان انتشار المرض كان  
ان "المثليين ومزدوجي الجنس المول  
ان المملكة المتحدة وأوروبا

bbc.com  
Monkeypox: Israel and Switzerland confirm cases

11:41 · 2022/05/22 · SocialFlow

# Monkeypox is on the loose in Europe. So why are journalists using pictures of Africans?

(Because Western media treats Africans as nothing more than victims, villains or vectors of disease)

**Tomi Oladipo**

Where words fail, images are a powerful way to communicate. That's why they are an integral component of print and digital journalism. Their ability to elicit a visceral reaction is what informs the decisions about which images are – and are not – published or broadcast.

That is why there has been such a powerful backlash this week against Western media that used images of Africans in Africa to illustrate reports of a monkeypox outbreak in Europe – even

though it has no direct links with Africa, and the victims have been Westerners.

This is not even the first time the disease is breaking out in the West, so one would think that by now there should be a database of photographs of Western patients. At the bare minimum, public health institutions and the media owe it to their audiences to inform them of what monkeypox would look like on both lighter and darker-coloured skin.

One image that has fuelled backlash is of a child in Liberia. She was four years old at the time the photograph was taken

– back in 1971. That means that some of the world's foremost news organisations are using a nearly 40-year-old image to illustrate a disease that has had multiple outbreaks in multiple countries and continents for decades. That, on its own, raises a number of questions.

It is generally accepted that children cannot give informed consent to appear in photographs or video footage without the permission of a parent or guardian. This is standard practice, at least when the subjects are Western or in the West.

But all too often, the standards are different when it comes to Africans.

Consider the media images of Western voluntourism featuring African children, or images of African children in distress or at risk. Ask yourself: Did the journalists have permission to publish those images, and was there any concern over safeguarding the child's best interests? In many of these cases, standard journalistic practice is suddenly discarded.

That's not to say our colleagues are not capable of doing better. During the early, fearful days of the coronavirus pandemic, the mainstream media afforded dignity and respect to hospitalised Western patients, with faces often blurred out or only shown with permission. There have not been many images of Western grief during this pandemic — with a few exceptions where subjects have expressly consented.

Western media organisations understand how depictions shape perceptions. Notions of race, purity and cleanliness are inextricably linked to morality the world over. And the media reinforces racialised representations of

Africans in its sourcing of images. Does Africa matter if it is not deemed worthy of the most basic journalistic standards?

One reason that has been given for the perceived oversight in the selection of the monkeypox images, is that the disease is endemic in Africa and therefore the majority of images would be of Africans. That's a fair point. Why, then, do the people from and on the African continent who have studied and treated the disease not make up the majority of those quoted in news stories about monkeypox? As we saw with Covid, the victims are of one kind and the experts are of another, which is the status quo in Western media.

Once again, in the media, Africans fall into neat categorisations of either victims, villains or vectors of disease.

Given the breathlessly incredulous headlines about why more Africans did not die from Covid-19, it is safe to assume our colleagues, used to valuing the lives of those with less pigment in their skin over others, are playing into dehumanising tropes of “pandemic populism” as many marginalised communities have contended with in the past.

This time however, thanks to the power of social media, Africans are able to respond to what seem to be public expressions of private sentiments.

Ideas of race and racial purity have long been debunked but that does not mean their effects are not felt to this day. Africans are human. Our journalism has a responsibility to reflect that. ■

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*Tomi Oladipo is a freelance journalist based in Berlin, Germany.*

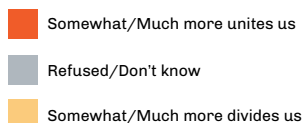


# United or divided?

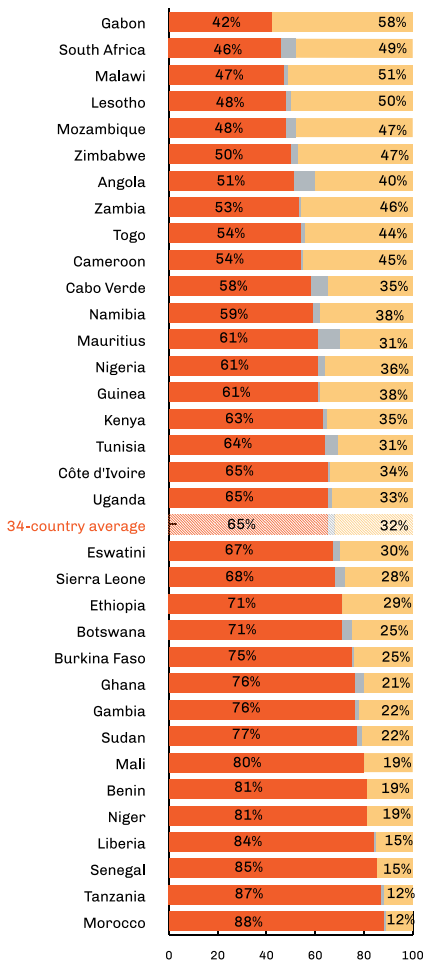
**A**frican countries are often portrayed as riven by conflict and cleavages of ethnicity, religion, politics, economic status. ... That's not what we hear from ordinary citizens.

Across 34 countries Afrobarometer surveyed in 2019/2021, Africans expressed a strong sense of national unity. Nearly two-thirds (65%) said there was more that united everyone in their country as one people than divided them. It was the majority view in 29 of the 34 countries, including nearly nine out of 10 Moroccans (88%) and Tanzanians (87%).

In a few countries, unity was fragile: “More that divides us” responses took the lead in Gabon, South Africa, Malawi, and Lesotho. Across the continent, people were about three times as likely to identify more strongly with their nation (39%) than with their ethnic group (14%). But the most common preference was to inhabit both identities equally: 46% of respondents across 32 countries said they felt equally attached to both.



## More that unites or more that divides? | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



**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 +/- two to three percentage points.

SPONSORED

# South Africa adds coding and robotics to school curriculum

**An ambitious new skills programme is being introduced – but schools will need serious upgrades to make it work**

**Zibusiso Radebe**

**S**outh Africa's department of basic education is forging ahead with its plans to introduce coding and robotics to the national school curriculum this year.

President Cyril Ramaphosa first alluded to the plan in his State of the Nation Address in 2019, saying that in preparing young people for the jobs of the future, the school curriculum would introduce subjects such as coding and data analytics at primary school level.

In his 2020 address, Ramaphosa said coding and robotics would be introduced that year at 200 schools, with plans to implement the subjects fully by this year.

While delivering her budget vote speech in Parliament this month, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga said

the robotics and coding curriculum was currently before the education assessor, for quality assurance and appraisal.

According to Seliki Tlhabane, the education department's chief director for maths, science and technology, the introduction of the two subjects is a deliberate move by the basic education sector to prepare learners with skills for the changing world.

"Coding and robotics will integrate diverse skills such as creativity, collaboration, and problem solving to groom learners for future careers," said Tlhabane.

The ambition of the plans will have to contend with a more down-to-earth reality however: When schools were disrupted for two years because of Covid-19, most learners in the country were left in limbo as they did not have access to online education. Bold though the move to introduce coding and robotics as subjects in schools may be, it will need to be accompanied by basic infrastructural improvements, too.

Many of the country's schools are struggling to provide adequate sanitation, and enough school furniture such as desks and chairs for learners – never mind the computers and internet connectivity required for coding and robotics. If the education department is serious about preparing learners for the future, it will also need to be serious about addressing their present-day challenges. ■

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*This reporting is supported by ABSA.  
The Continent retains full editorial control.*

# Detained and deported: Journalism has become a risky business in Benin

Benin, a former model democracy, is rapidly turning into an authoritarian state where press freedom and other civil liberties are in danger – as **Olivier van Beemen** and **Flore Nobime** discovered the hard way



Nominative  
determinism?  
President  
Patrice Talon  
made his  
name in the  
cotton game.

**N**ot so long ago, Benin was seen as a model democracy, where peaceful regime changes had been the norm since 1990, and civil liberties were highly respected.

But with the election of Patrice Talon, a wealthy businessman who made his fortune in the cotton trade, this has rapidly changed. He has muzzled the

press and banned political opponents, to such an extent, that the National Assembly doesn't contain a single opposition party member.

On the annual Global Press Freedom Index by Reporters sans Frontières, published this month, the country has fallen to 121st place.

In 2016, before Talon took office,



**Arrested: Journalists Olivier van Beemen and Flore Nobime.**

Benin was still in 78th place and 10 years earlier even in the top 25, one place behind Germany and a few places ahead of the United Kingdom.

Early in February, we – a Beninese and a Dutch journalist – experienced this decline the hard way.

We were doing research in the vicinity of Pendjari National Park in the north of the country, as part of a larger project on African Parks, a South Africa-based wildlife organisation which manages 19 nature reserves in 11 countries on the continent.

Long story short: We were arrested in the northern town of Tanguéta for not notifying local authorities of our presence near the park.

After being identified as journalists and cleared by a prosecutor, we were accused of espionage and transported from the north all the way to the capital city Cotonou in the south in approximately 70 different police vehicles, partly handcuffed.

We were treated like criminals and

spent four days and three nights in detention, sometimes behind locked doors, before the head of national police announced that the charges against us were dropped, after good work from the Dutch embassy in Benin.

Flore, from Benin, was free to go, while Olivier was deported on the first flight back to Europe.

African Parks, which chose not to cooperate in this research, says it was not involved in our arrest and had not even been aware of our visit.

The head of the Beninese police, Soumaïla Yaya, refused to answer our questions about the reasons and legal basis of our detention.

What happened to us illustrates how this former haven of freedom has quickly turned into a country where residents no longer dare to openly criticise power and where liberties are rapidly curtailed – a development that is also evident elsewhere in West Africa, for example in Mali, Guinea and Senegal.

Even the authorities are fearful. The main reason that we were only released after intervention at the very highest level is probably that commissioners at lower levels did not dare to take responsibility for letting us walk free. Had we been exposed as real spies in Cotonou, they may well have ended up in front of a judge themselves.

We have been hesitant about telling this story, especially because of the consequences it could have for Flore. But she insists we speak up. Previously in Benin, people had the right to say what they wanted and journalists were free to

do their work.

She is outraged that this is no longer the case and regrets (but understands) that most of her colleagues are silent out of fear.

**For journalists and ordinary citizens, it means they have to be careful with everything they publish online, including on social media. Even sharing a link can lead to prosecution**

The list of measures restricting press freedom and individual cases against journalists under Talon keeps growing. In 2017, the High Authority for Radio, Television and Communications banned a critical TV station from broadcasting, and a year later the same happened for a newspaper with ties to the opposition.

We also aren't the first journalists to fall foul of the authorities. Similar fates have befallen several others, like Casimir Kpedjo in 2019. His alleged crime? In his articles, he had criticised a euro bond issued by the country and made a bleak analysis of the economy – which the authorities deemed to be “fake news”.

His case was postponed many times and he is no longer in detention, but he is still waiting for a verdict. Four journalists who, like us, recently visited the north of the country are also waiting for a date to appear in court.

An ominous spectre for many journalists is Benin's so-called Digital Code, a set of laws and regulations

officially aimed at providing a secure environment for all kinds of digital activities.

However, journalists and ordinary citizens alike have to be careful with everything publish online, including on social media. Even sharing a link can lead to prosecution.

Investigative journalist Ignace Sossou knows all about it. He received a prison sentence of 18 months, of which he had to serve six, for three tweets.

One of them was simply a quote from a prosecutor. A telling quote, however, and one that would be refreshing for its honesty and frankness if it wasn't so ominous: “The Digital Code,” the prosecutor said, “is like a weapon pointed at the temple of... journalists.” ■

**AFRICAN PARKS: CALL OUT TO SOURCES**

*Olivier van Beemen, the author of Heineken in Africa: A Multinational Unleashed, is currently doing research on African Parks. He would like to get in touch with people who work or have worked for/with African Parks, even if it was a while ago, in Benin or anywhere else. He is interested in all sorts of stories - good or bad, serious analyses or anecdotes, successes or failures - and conducts his research without any prejudice. If desired, anonymity will be guaranteed. Would you like to share your story? Please contact Olivier at [oliviervanbeemen@protonmail.com](mailto:oliviervanbeemen@protonmail.com)*

# 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'm so clued up I knew the picture was linked to question 10"



Photo: Marco Longari/AFP

**1\_** What is the demonym for people from Côte d'Ivoire?

**2\_** Yamoussoukro is the capital city of which country?

**3\_** Samora Machel was the president of which country?

**4\_** In which country is Mount Kilimanjaro located?

**5\_** True or false: Ouagadougou is the capital city of Benin.

**6\_** Lions are native to India as well as which continent?

**7\_** Sadio Mané is a football player from Mali.

True or false?

**8\_** Which day is celebrated on 25 May across Africa? (Hint: It's not 'payday')

**9\_** The Organisation of African Unity was established on May 25 1963. What is that organisation called now?

**10\_** In which country is the Maloti Mountain range found?

## 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)

# There's no party like a ruling party



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

**H**ere at Continental Drift, we believe that every day is Africa Day. But, in their wisdom, our dear leaders have decreed otherwise, and have decided that a single day – May 25 – shall suffice to celebrate this great continent.

Nonetheless, all the talk this week of African unity and greatness has put us in the mood to party, so we have decided to throw one.

There will be food (don't worry, we will serve *all* the jollofs). There will be dancing, and music (we are still waiting to hear back from Burna's people). And there will be a dress code, of course: this year it's "presidential chic".

If you're lacking inspiration, just look to the heavily-medalled uniforms of the coup leaders in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso, who clearly understand how to use fashion to make a political statement.

If you want a more casual look, why not throw on a cowboy hat inspired by Presidents Yoweri Museveni and Salva Kiir? Or wear anything you want and tell us it's like Paul Biya from Cameroon – to be honest, we can't remember his outfits as we haven't seen him in a while.



**Dressed to suppress: Military chic in Conakry.** Photo: Guinea Presidency

Careful thought must go into the guest list, of course.

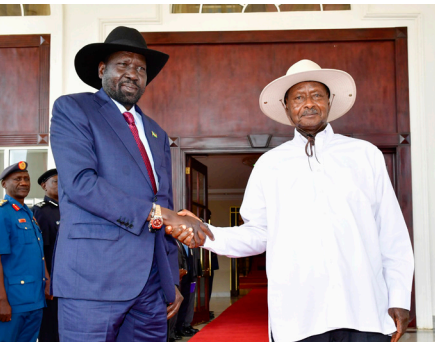
Not making the cut are those media organisations who continuously choose to use images of African people when reporting on an outbreak of monkeypox – even though the outbreak is taking place in Europe and North America.

Time and time again we've seen the racialisation of disease. And don't say that other images were not available, as other news organisations were able to find some or chose to use graphics.

When you *know* better, *do* better!

### Persona non grata

We had contemplated adding Guinea's deposed president Alpha Condé to our guest list as he's no longer under house arrest. However, the 84-year-old has left Conakry for "healthcare purposes". Earlier this year the junta permitted him



**Who wore it best? Presidents Salva Kiir and Yoweri Museveni with their big hats.** Photo: Uganda Presidency

to travel to the United Arab Emirates where he received medical treatment, and this time he's been allowed to visit Türkiye for the same reason, a decision the junta say they made out of "respect for his dignity" and on "humanitarian grounds". The kindness of coup leaders!

Also, two trips abroad in the space of less than six months? Condé should release a "life after presidency" brochure – it might even inspire a leader or two to finally let go.

While he relaxes in Istanbul (we recommend the baklava, it may ease the bitterness), Guinea's opposition coalition expressed concerns that Condé may be a "flight risk" – they are worried that he won't come home to face the criminal charges that have been laid against him.

We can tell you who else won't be invited to the party: the football teams of Kenya and Zimbabwe, who have been banned from next year's Africa Cup of Nations.

It's not the players' fault, though: Fifa

imposed the ban due to "government interference in the running of the game".

### **Serious matters**

While the idea of a party is wonderful, we cannot forget the more difficult moments on the continent this week.

On 16 April, eight miners were trapped in the Perkoa Zinc Mine in Burkina Faso. The mine, which is 90% owned by Canada-based company Trevali, was flooded following torrential rain. Rescue efforts have been ongoing for weeks with authorities stating that they had not been able to communicate with any of the miners and that they had not been found in the rescue chamber.

Thirty-nine days on, it was announced that four of their bodies have been discovered, and the search for the remaining four continues.

Further sad news comes to us from Senegal where 11 newborn babies were killed after a fire broke out at the Mame Abdou Aziz Sy Dabakh hospital in Tivaouane. According to the country's health minister, the fire was caused by a short circuit. This has led calls for an urgent investigation into the state of hospitals across the country.

So we end this week's drift with heavy hearts, while also wishing to acknowledge all those that make the African continent such a special place; artists, creatives, healthcare workers, farmers, defenders of justice, athletes, teachers, journalists, the strangers who smile at you on the street and of course you, dear readers, for supporting this column and this publication. ■



# This is why presidential running mates matter in the Kenya election

Scovian Lillian

**W**ith less than 100 days left until Kenya's general elections on 9 August, the campaigns have moved into top gear. The presidential candidates have stepped forward, after a lengthy period of fevered speculation. But how do they choose who to select as a potential deputy president, and does it matter for the election?

The main candidates certainly think so. Luo leader and Azimio la Umoja flag bearer Raila Odinga, and Kalenjin figurehead and Kenya Kwanza Alliance candidate William Ruto are engaged in a heated battle for the "Mt Kenya" region and the vote of the Kikuyu community – which, for the first time in decades, is not standing a presidential candidate. This explains why both sides selected a Kikuyu running mate: Odinga opting for Martha Karua, and Ruto for Rigathi Gachagua.

The ethnic background of these leaders may mean that their impact cancels out, but they are such different figures that it is possible they will shape how Kenyans

see the two presidential frontrunners and therefore the election result. Karua is an advocate of the high court and former justice minister known for resigning when she felt that correct procedures were not followed. She promises to make Odinga look like a more credible and independent candidate – and less like a puppet who was brought into government from the opposition to look after the interests of outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta.

For his part, Deputy President Ruto is hoping that Gachagua, the member of parliament for Mathira, will use his "prodigious persuasive ability" to be a "grassroots mobiliser".

However, while many believe that Gachagua's wealth will help to fund Kenya Kwanza's activities, he also comes with baggage, having already been "red-carded" by the National Integrity Alliance for alleged involvement in corruption.

On 17 May, for example, he failed to appear in court, where he is one of the accused in a KES 7.4-billion (\$63,410,453) graft case.

In an election that is expected to be close, Odinga appears to have gained a bigger bounce from the nominations, but only time will tell whether it will be sufficient to overcome Ruto's highly efficient and effective campaign. ■



*Scovian Lillian is a freelance journalist based in Nairobi. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*

# The Big Picture

Photo: Sia Kambou /AFP

Mostly moist: A man collects rainwater in the Attécoube district of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, this week. The Ivorian city's wet and rainy season is generally considered to stretch across more than half of the year. Next month however is typically when Abidjan experiences the most rainfall, on average, with rain showers expected to drench the region on as many as 22 days of the month.



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