

The Continent

Mali's junta
is running out
of gas



Main2014



COVER When Mali's military seized power from a civilian government in 2021, they promised better security and better living conditions. Now insurgents are tightening their grip on roads around Bamako, attacking petrol tankers bringing fuel to the capital. Petrol stations have nothing left and life is grinding to a slow halt. As the situation has worsened, so has a broader crackdown on journalism and civil society. This story was difficult to report. The photographer – whose identity we are protecting, took the photos in the story with a phone to avoid the censorial attention of Malian authorities (p13).

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THE WEEK IN BRIEF

HEALTH

Red alert as Africa gets hot under the cholera

Africa is facing the worst outbreak of cholera in 25 years as conflict and fragile water systems make the disease more prevalent, *Reuters* reports. The Africa CDC said it had recorded about 300,000 confirmed and suspected cases – more than 30% more than last year – and 7,000 people have died. Angola and Burundi have seen cases spike in recent weeks. Still, there is some good news – cases are declining in the Republic of the Congo and the situation has also improved in South Sudan and Somalia.

TUNISIA

Prison hunger strike prompts torture claim

Tunisian opposition leader Jawhar Ben Mbarek has been on a hunger strike for two weeks. His lawyers say prison authorities assaulted him in an effort to force an end to his protest. Ben Mbarek's lawyer said he saw evidence of torture, including fractures and bruises all over his body. He began serving an 18-year sentence in 2023 for conspiring to overthrow President Kais Saied. Ben Mbarek says the charges were politically motivated and has vowed to continue with the protest.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Rebel finally on trial for millennial war crimes

The trial of former Congolese rebel leader Roger Lumbala opened in Paris on Wednesday, *RFI* reports, more than two decades after atrocities committed during the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Second Congo War. Lumbala faces charges of complicity in crimes against humanity for his role in the 1998-2003 conflict, which drew in multiple African countries and left millions of people dead. He was arrested in France in 2020 under



PHOTO: BENOTTI PERRUCCI / AFP

Test of complicity: Former Congolese rebel leader Roger Lumbala during his trial in Paris.

universal jurisdiction and has been held in a Paris prison since.



PHOTO: PATRICK MEINHARDT/AFP

***Ticket to Splitsville:** Senegal's Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko and President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, in happier times.*

SENEGAL

Faye-Sonko bromance hits the skids

A public rift has emerged between Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, exposing deep fractures within the ruling coalition. The crisis began after Faye dismissed Aïssatou Mbodj, a key Sonko ally, as head of the coalition that secured his 2024 victory. Faye then appointed his own campaign co-ordinator instead. Sonko's Pastef party rejected the move, saying the president had no authority to alter coalition leadership. Analysts told *Africanews* the showdown raised doubts about Faye's ability to govern without Sonko's backing or grassroots support.

ZIMBABWE

Big-buck Dangote says Crocodile's gone GOAT

Nigerian industrialist Aliko Dangote says he will invest more than \$1-billion in Zimbabwe, citing a better business climate and transparency, *NewZimbabwe* reports. This contrasts with Dangote's failed 2015 venture during Robert Mugabe's tenure, when disputes over tariffs and currency rules derailed plans to develop coal fields and a power plant. Zimbabwe now allows private producers to set tariffs and repatriate profits. Dangote said it was as if Emmerson Mnangagwa had passed an exam. "People have to give him a good mark."

SOUTH SUDAN

Kiir sacks powerful vice-president

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has dismissed Vice-President Benjamin Bol Mel, once seen as his successor, in a sweeping shake-up of top officials. Bol Mel was also removed as deputy leader of the ruling SPLM movement and demoted from general to private in the National Security Service. No reason was given for his ousting, but Kiir also fired his key allies. A recent United Nations report accused Bol Mel of misusing \$1.7-billion in road construction funds. He has been under United States sanctions since 2017 for alleged corruption.

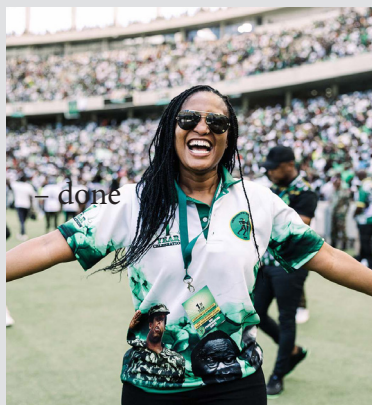


PHOTO: RAJESH JANTILAL / AFP

Papa can you hear me? Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla faces terror-related charges.

SOUTH AFRICA

Zuma's #2 daughter pleads not-a-terrorist in 2021-riots trial

Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, the second-eldest daughter of former South African president Jacob Zuma, has pleaded not guilty to terrorism-related charges. She is accused of using social media to incite the deadly 2021 unrest that followed her father's arrest for contempt of court. The riots left over 300 people dead and caused nearly \$3-billion in damage. Zuma-Sambudla has called the charges politically motivated, the *BBC* reports. Her father and supporters of his MK Party attended her trial's opening in Durban.

GHANA

Military hopefuls die before they even enlist

At least six people died during a crowd crush at a military recruitment event in a stadium in Ghana on Wednesday. The crush appeared to have been caused by an "an unexpected surge of applicants who breached security protocols and rushed into the gates", according to Ghana's armed forces. Thousands of hopefuls had turned up to El-Wak Stadium in the capital, Accra, with the intention of beginning a career in the military, the *BBC* reports. Ghana has a youth unemployment rate of about 13%.

NIGERIA

Bronze museum iced till brass iron out brouhaha

Protesters have forced the postponement of the Museum of West African Art's opening in Benin City, Nigeria, after storming the site and demanding it be renamed the Benin Royal Museum. The crowd accused organisers of sidelining the Oba, the area's traditional ruler, *Artforum* reports. The \$25-million museum, designed by British-Ghanaian architect David Adjaye, was partly envisioned as a future home for the Benin Bronzes. However, ownership disputes have kept them from being repatriated. No new opening date has been announced yet.

MALI

Insurgents murder influencer mid-stream

TikToker Mariam Cissé was kidnapped and executed by militants in northern Mali after posting videos supporting the country's army. Her family told *AFP* she was taken from a market while live-streaming and shot in Tonka's Independence Square. The ongoing insurgency in the country has triggered a crippling fuel blockade in the capital Bamako, school closures, and severe humanitarian disruption. Authorities and the African Union have condemned the attack and pledged support amid Mali's escalating crisis.

GABON

Bongo's wife and son sentenced in absentia

A court in Gabon has sentenced former first lady Sylvia Bongo and her son Nouredin Bongo to 20 years in prison for embezzlement and money-laundering. They were convicted in absentia after a two-day trial. The pair, who deny wrongdoing, were arrested after the 2023 coup that ended President Ali Bongo's 14-year rule, bringing an end to the family's half-century in power. They were later moved to Angola "for humanitarian reasons" and now live in the United Kingdom. Their lawyers have called the case a "show trial", *Reuters* reports.

LIBYA

Hannibal's Lebanon-leaving plan comes together

The son of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has been released from detention in Lebanon after posting \$900,000 bail, the *AP* reports. Hannibal Gaddafi had been held in the country since 2015. He was accused of withholding information about the 1978 disappearance of Lebanese cleric Moussa al-Sadr. His lawyers called the charge baseless, noting the younger Gaddafi was a toddler at the time. His release follows a Libyan delegation's visit to Beirut and a court decision lifting



PHOTO: HANDOUT/AFP

Wait, how much? All Muammar Gaddafi's son had to do was post a bit of bail. Easy peasy.

his travel ban. Gaddafi is now free to leave Lebanon.

NEWS

ZIMBABWE

Job Sikhala arrested, then freed on bail in South Africa

The detention abroad sparks fears that activists are being deliberately targeted across borders.

JEFFREY MOYO IN HARARE

ZIMBABWEAN opposition politician Job Sikhala has been released on bail in Pretoria, South Africa a week after his arrest for allegedly travelling in a vehicle carrying explosives.

His arrest, together with co-accused Alexander Thema, has sparked concern among human-rights defenders about the targeting of government critics – even beyond Zimbabwe's borders.

Sikhala's arrest came just days after the bombing of the Sapes Trust building in Harare by unknown assailants. He and other opposition leaders gathered at the building after the explosion to denounce President Emmerson Mnangagwa's bid to extend his term to 2030.

The press conference was violently dispersed by police.

Wurayayi Zembe, head of political affairs at the National Democratic Working Group – a movement founded by Sikhala – accused the ruling Zanu-PF of orchestrating his arrest.

"Certainly, the Zanu-PF party and the regime have developed a political

vendetta and personal hatred against advocate Job Sikhala," Zembe told *The Continent*. The group's spokesperson, Silenkosi Moyo, asserted Sikhala's innocence, saying: "We categorically maintain that the explosives found do not belong to him."

Human rights campaigner Vivid Gwede told *The Continent* Sikhala's detention "heightened concerns about cross-border harassment of activists", calling it "a new threat to human rights and democracy in Zimbabwe."

Sikhala's arrest follows years of persecution. He was released from Chikurubi Maximum Prison in January 2024 after serving more than 18 months for allegedly inciting public violence after the 2022 killing of opposition activist Moreblessing Ali. He had spent more than 600 days behind bars in pre-trial detention, in a case his supporters said was politically motivated.

Observers say the renewed pressure on Sikhala reflects rising state repression ahead of Zimbabwe's next election cycle, and a widening reach of its tactics across borders. ■

ZAMBIA

Rocks, rage rain on Hichilema's surprise parade

Sympathy visit goes sideways as Chingola flips HH's script.

OLGA MANDA IN LUSAKA

ZAMBIAN president Hakainde Hichilema came under attack on Saturday when angry residents of Chingola pelted his podium with stones. The president was in the mining town in the Copperbelt Province for what was meant to be a surprise solidarity visit. He had travelled to the area to offer sympathies to local traders whose market had been destroyed by fire.

The crowd accused Hichilema of failing to deliver on campaign promises to tackle youth unemployment and expand economic opportunities. As the president's convoy sped away, protesters burned a police vehicle, carpets, and a tent meant for his address.

Home Affairs Minister Jack Mwiimbu condemned the attack as "a heinous act and threat to the president's life", confirming the arrest of 13 people.

Hichilema, speaking later in Kitwe, called the assault "an act of lawlessness".

He also warned Chingola residents "not to push their luck", saying the area benefited from government projects.

Opposition leaders said the unrest reflected deeper discontent. National Renewal Movement leader John Sangwa said the riots exposed a deeper national crisis marked by the erosion of public trust, the collapse of civic order, and weakened state institutions.

Socialist Party head Fred M'membe told *The Continent*: "Those young people have lost hope. They have been promised many things by their leaders – these same leaders they were stoning. Nothing is being fulfilled, frustration sets in."

Zambia heads to elections next year amid fading optimism about Hichilema's leadership. Once seen as a reformist, he now faces criticism for authoritarian practices. These include what UN rapporteurs have described as "arbitrary arrests and detentions" of opposition leaders, activists, and journalists. ■



Duck and cover: Hakainde Hichilema is escorted to safety amid a proper political pebble pelting.

EGYPT

Sisi gambles his game of thrones on loaded dice

The one-sided parliamentary elections are likely to cement the president's grip on power.

AHMED DAHABY IN CAIRO

EGYPTIANS concluded the first phase of voting for parliamentary representation this week, with voters casting ballots to begin choosing 568 members of the house of representatives. But analysts warn the stage is being set to extend President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's term, which is supposed to end in 2030.

Half of the parliamentary seats went unopposed to pro-government candidates, without a single vote cast. Only 2,645 candidates are running this year compared to nearly 4,000 five years ago. In Giza, for example, the number of candidates for the same 25 seats dropped from 371 to 170. Egyptian journalist Mohamed Bassal noted a steep decline in electoral competition, saying it was a "manifestation of the political monopoly".

Meanwhile, dozens of opposition figures who have been jailed for political reasons are still barred from voting or running, despite court rulings restoring their rights. Human rights lawyer Mamdouh Gamal, imprisoned in 2013



PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI / AFP

Plop it in: First round results are due on Tuesday.

for protesting against military trials for civilians, received judicial rehabilitation in 2023 but remains off the voters' roll. And former MP Haitham El-Hariri and socialist politician Mohamed Abdel Halim were denied candidacy outright.

Experts say this orchestrated outcome mirrors 2019, when parliament approved amendments doubling Sisi's rule to 16 years from eight. Former political prisoner and MP Zyad el-Elaimy believes that the next parliament could "launch a constitutional attempt to reset presidential term limits". He told *The Continent*: "This is a legislature designed not to legislate but to legitimise."

Results from the first round of voting are expected on Tuesday. ■

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NEWS ANALYSIS

The five stages of climate grief

With the pollution coming from elsewhere, Africa is left somewhere between bargaining and acceptance.



At COP27 in 2022, Africa's climate challenges appeared insurmountable. Things are even worse now.

CHRISTINE MUNGAI

DELEGATES from 190 countries are meeting in Belém, Brazil, for the 30th climate negotiations, or COP. A decade ago, in Paris, they agreed to take global heating seriously. But the world in which they are gathering today looks nothing like the one envisioned back then.

Over the past two years, global temperatures have averaged 1.5°C above

pre-industrial levels. That's the ceiling African countries fought to enshrine in 2015. In polluting countries, sticking to that goal would mean emissions reaching their peak between now and 2030, then dropping by more than half by 2035.

The technology is available to make that possible. But a mix of weak states and powerful lobbies means achieving the goal is unlikely. The biggest polluter

in history, the United States, has quit the Paris Agreement and embraced the oil and gas industry, which funded the winning president's campaign. The European Union has softened its targets.

Carbon emissions reached record levels this year.

Scientists say the world is on track for closer to 3°C of warming. This is a catastrophic threshold for Africa, which is heating faster than the global average and is already facing more frequent droughts, floods, and food shortages. The World Meteorological Association estimates African countries are already losing between 2% and 5% of their GDPs in a hotter world. That climbs to 16% at 3°C of heating.

With global co-operation fraying, expectations at COP30 are modest. United Nations climate chief Simon Stiell told delegates that the world must strive to bring temperatures “back down” to 1.5°C “after any temporary overshoot”, tacitly admitting that the Paris Agreement had effectively collapsed.

China, in contrast to other countries, has bet on renewables. Its economy is now focused on exporting renewables and controlling the rare earth minerals that power the switch to cleaner energy.

Its own emissions have likely already peaked, which has given the country tremendous influence in spaces such as COP.

“Emerging countries are appearing in this COP with a different role. China is coming with solutions for everyone,” COP30 president André Corrêa do Lago told *Reuters*.

Those solutions are already transforming Africa. The continent's imports of Chinese solar panels rose 60% in the year to June 2025, according to energy think tank Ember, driven by China's overproduction and record-low prices.

This is a catastrophic threshold for Africa, which is heating faster than the global average and is already facing more frequent droughts, floods, and food shortages.

But the boom comes with limits. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation states although 55% of Africa's own energy consumption already stems from renewables, clean energy investments in the continent account for only 2% of the world's total.

Weak governance and poor grid infrastructure mean these technologies often light up homes but fail to power industries – improving some livelihoods but not changing the equation. Africa's largest off-grid company, Sun King, plans to manufacture solar equipment in Kenya and Nigeria, with each country expected to save \$150 million in imports over five years. But the absence of a co-ordinated grid means the continent may have access only to piecemeal fixes.

For Africa, COP30 is taking place in a world that has already crossed the red line. What's left is a scramble to adapt – and to profit where possible. ■

Christine Mungai is the news editor of The Continent

REPORT

Bamako is grinding towards a halt

As the country's fuel crisis continues, the military government is facing pressures of its own.



KATARINA HÖIJE IN BAMAKO

THE FUEL lines stretch for kilometres across Bamako. Over the past weeks, long queues have formed outside petrol stations, with many pumps running dry as fuel deliveries slow to a trickle. Residents describe a capital in slow collapse, with militants repeatedly attacking fuel convoys from Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.

Mama Djibo, a fashion designer and mother of two, was forced to shut her studio so she could hunt for fuel. She spent hours standing in the baking sun outside one of the few fuel stations still operating, watching the restless line creep forward. "Fuel has become a luxury – something people risk their lives for," she said.

Many people sleep overnight in their cars outside petrol stations, in the hope a fuel tanker might arrive. Even people lucky enough to own generators say they are now useless, because there's no fuel left to run them.

The blockade by rebel fighters has exposed the ruling junta's weaknesses. The military promised stability after seizing power in a 2021 coup d'état. Instead, the country is grinding to a halt, analysts say. "If the government can't keep Bamako running, its legitimacy could unravel fast," said Oumar Berte, a political analyst at the University of Rouen Normandy.

A wake-up call

Last week Mali's interim leader Assimi Goïta spoke publicly about the crisis for



the first time in two months, saying the government had taken steps to secure essential supplies. The militants, he warned, "are intent on destabilising the country and blocking its progress".

The military promised stability after seizing power in a 2021 coup d'état. Instead, the country is grinding to a halt.

Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), the group now encircling Bamako and tightening its hold on key supply routes, was formed in 2017 from the merger of several Islamist factions. It was these factions that overran northern Mali in 2012, alongside Tuareg separatists, and imposed a strict interpretation of Sharia, a body of religious law.

That crisis prompted a French military intervention, which pushed back the militants and kept the fragile



Fumes: Until recently, the capital and Mali's southern regions had been spared the brunt of the instability.

central government afloat for nearly a decade. But at the same time violence spread into Mali's more populous central regions.

JNIM is partly funded by control of smuggling and trade routes, kidnapping foreigners for ransom, and hefty taxes imposed on occupied communities, according to *Al Jazeera*.

Until recently, the capital and the country's more prosperous southern regions had largely been spared. Now, with militants launching an economic blockade on Bamako, this has raised fears of a potential new occupation, this time targeting the city and its four million residents.

Diplomatic missions including the United States, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and France have urged their citizens to leave Mali and some have begun

evacuating staff. Several others have advised against travel.

Diallo, an accountant who gave only his last name for fear of reprisal, was pushing his motorbike along a dusty tarred road, looking for fuel. "Some in Bamako say, 'Now we're tasting what the north has endured for a decade,'" he said. "It's a wake-up call."

Increasingly isolated

The crisis comes as Mali faces growing isolation from international partners. After seizing power in 2021, the country's leadership cut military ties with several Western allies and forged closer links with Russia. This included bringing mercenaries from the Wagner Group to the country later that year. Then, in January this year, Mali withdrew from the Economic Community of West

African States. Traders say fuel imports have been disrupted for weeks and the cash-strapped junta is struggling to secure alternative fuel sources.

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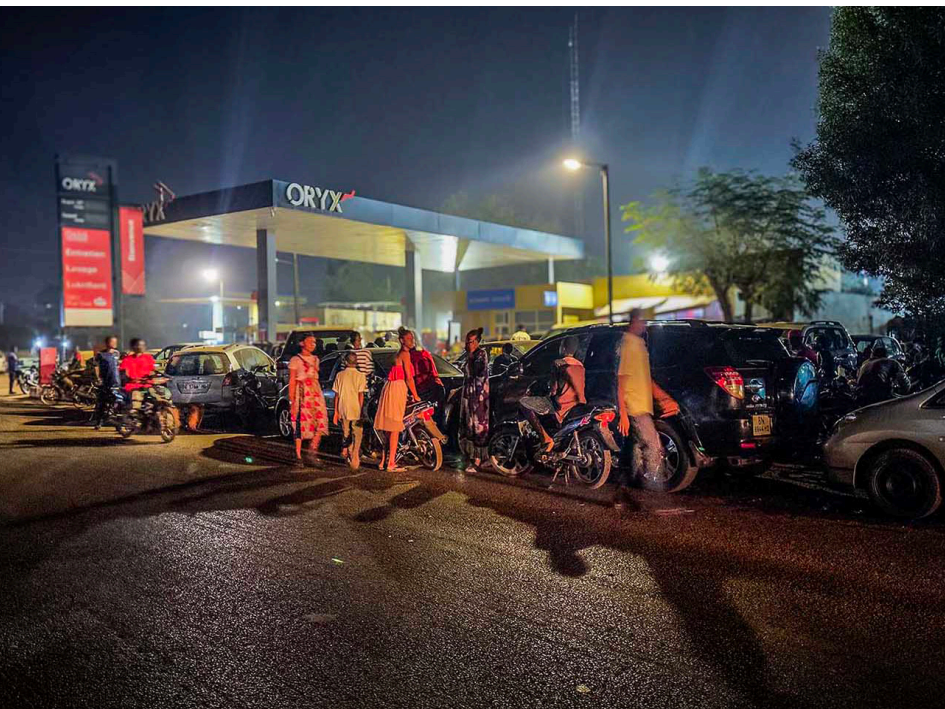
Last week, people in Bamako cheered as a convoy of a couple of hundred fuel tankers arrived in the capital. The tankers were escorted by the Africa Corps, a mercenary outfit that has

replaced the infamous Wagner Group and has direct links to the Russian government. Russia has also announced it would deliver up to 200,000 tonnes of fuel and agricultural products, although it did not specify when or even how the products would arrive.

The latest arrival of fuel brought welcome, if temporary, relief to the capital, and to people like Moussa Diarra – a bus driver who had spent days crisscrossing the city from station to station with passengers on board. “We still have faith in the military,” he said. “Now that there’s fuel, things will be okay. If they can keep it coming every week, life will soon return to normal.”



Isolated: Disputes with multinationals have further isolated Mali.



Living in limbo: It's not just the economy at a standstill: schools and universities are closed, too.

The capital isn't yet spiralling into chaos, and the militants are not quite at the gates, but the fuel crisis has cracked the image of control the junta has worked hard to project, said Nina Wilén, director of the Africa programme at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations. "One small ignition could start unrest, though I can't predict exactly when that might happen," she said.

For ordinary Malians, that pressure is felt in daily life. The price of transport has soared. A litre of fuel now sells for 5,000 CFA on the black market, compared

with 775 CFA at the pump. Last month, the government closed schools and universities, because neither teachers nor students could reliably attend. Still, classes were set to resume this week.

The city's population has been patient, but after weeks without real solutions, hope is beginning to fade, Berté said. "Demonstrations are likely to follow if this situation continues, and certain factions within the army may push for change. If unrest spreads, the result could be total chaos, with a humanitarian crisis unfolding alongside economic collapse." ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Passage to Agadez



Dates with destiny: A farmer climbs a palm tree to harvest dates at the oasis of Azel – an almost surreal stretch of green in the otherwise arid landscape leading us to Agadez, just 12km away. The date palm has long been the lifeline of Niger's oases – a source of food, shade, and income.

WORDS: HANNANE FERDJANI**PHOTOS: SHOLA LAWAL**

AGADEZ in Niger sits at the crossroads of the Sahel and the Sahara, the gateway to a desert where dunes fold into one another under an unforgiving sun and where the air cools just enough at dusk to offer some respite. For many people, Agadez is known as a place of passage – a waypoint for hundreds of thousands of African travellers on a hopeful journey across the Mediterranean. But for me, it has always been more than that.

My late grandfather often spoke of Agadez, of his childhood in the heart of the Aïr Mountains, of a vibrant city that once welcomed nomads, artisans, and dreamers. When I arrived for the first time, decades later, Agadez felt both familiar and distant — a place transformed by time and hardship. The photos that follow were taken on the sidelines of filming our documentary *Changing Faces*. They capture fragments of life in a city often reduced to headlines: its stillness and resilience, its contradictions and continuities. ■



True grit: The view from the minaret of Agadez's old mosque reveals a skyline that speaks of endurance – rows of earthen houses and shops aligned with striking precision, shaped by centuries of Sahelian architecture. The historic city, dating back to the Sultanate of Aïr in the 15th and 16th centuries, remains defined by its ochre tones – a palette that mirrors the desert stretching beyond its walls.



Big fan: Three Bianou performers stand in formation, synchronising the sharp tilt of their heads so that their crests open and close in rhythm – in a centuries-old dance of strength and pride. Each year, Agadez marks the Bianou festival with parades of warriors, riders, and musicians, celebrating heritage and faith.



What goes around: Traffic circles the Rond-Point de la République at dusk – yellow three-wheel taxis rushing to wrap up the day. In Niger, as in much of West Africa, roundabouts are never just traffic hubs – they're statements of power and identity, a way for those in charge to project order.



Green and growing: A farmer moves between tall moringa stems in one of Agadez's crop gardens, harvesting onions, garlic, lettuce, and herbs. Despite advancing desertification, these green patches continue to feed the city – a testament to resilience and adaptation in one of Niger's driest regions.



On the land, not of it: Two shepherds guide their camels through Agadez's old town, against a backdrop of plastic-strewn pathways. Scenes like this have become almost ordinary – trees whose branches are draped in black plastic bags, blending into the landscape as if they belonged there.



Chip off the old block: An artisan sharpens a wood block at the crafts centre, where members of the local union work side by side in open workshops. Craftsmanship runs deep in Agadez – especially among Tuareg artisans, renowned for their mastery of leather and silver.



Like it is: A couple rides past Auberge Tellit, a guesthouse that has become a landmark in Agadez's old town. Founded in the 1970s by an Italian man who married a Tuareg woman, it's now run by their son – who also manages Le Pilier, a restaurant in Niamey with a warmth that makes everyone feel at home.



Put the world to rights: At dusk, Addou – a former migrant transporter turned smuggler, then transporter again after Niger’s junta overturned the law criminalising the practice – sits with friends, smoking a cigarette and sipping atai, the strong and sweet green tea beloved across the Sahel.



Hustle home: Agadez feels both quiet and loud at once. At the bus station – much like in many West African towns – the bustle is constant: food vendors, transporters, and stalls selling everyday essentials.

COMMENT

From Mama Samia to the mad king

Six cartoons that explain the presidency of Tanzania's Samia Suluhu Hassan

SAMIA Suluhu Hassan's rise to Tanzania's highest office was improbable. Since independence, the country's political system has rested on a carefully balanced, politically negotiated balance of power between the mainland (formerly Tanganyika) and the semi-autonomous islands of Zanzibar to maintain national cohesion, despite deeply entrenched historical, religious, and regional divides.

Suluhu was a Zanzibari technocrat in a party dominated by mainland strongmen. For more than a decade, she quietly built credibility across the Union through steady public service both in her homeland of Zanzibar and in the mainland.

When John Magufuli chose her as running mate in 2015 – the first woman ever on a Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) ticket – it was read as a strategic, consensus pick in a crowded, factional year. She was seen as steady, loyal, and non-polarising.

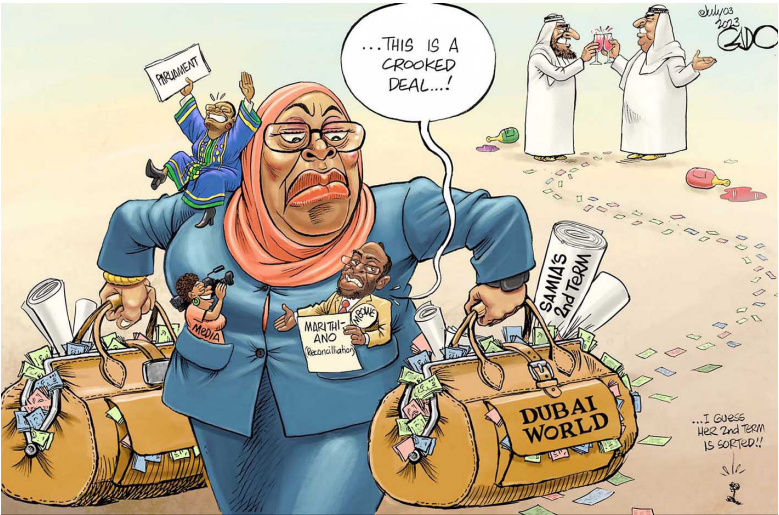
After Magufuli's sudden death in 2021, Suluhu's calm, conciliatory image helped to steady the nation and she was hailed as a soft-spoken consensus-builder. But she then moved swiftly to

consolidate power: taking over as CCM chair, purging rivals, and centralising control of key institutions. Early gestures of openness, like lifting bans on opposition rallies, shifted sharply to hardline dominance as Suluhu sought to secure her own mandate.

Opposition parties estimate that more than 1,000 people were killed over several days.

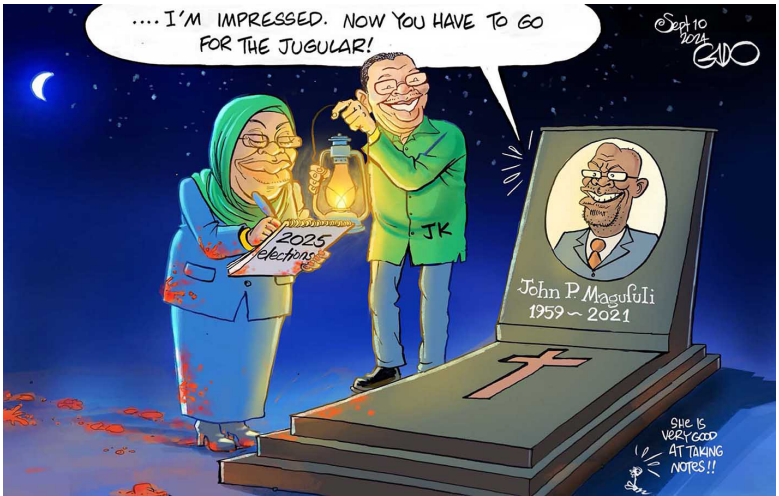
This culminated in a presidential election at the end of last month – the first time Suluhu tested her popularity with the electorate. On election day itself, protests around the country were met with a brutal response from state security forces. So brutal, in fact, that opposition parties estimate that more than 1,000 people were killed over several days of unrest. Last week, *The Continent's* own reporting corroborated accounts of widespread violence and fatalities – marking the most serious civil unrest since the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964.

Our resident cartoonist, Gado, has been commenting on Suluhu's journey since it all began.



1 JULY 2023

Suluhi's government negotiated a 30-year concession for a United Arab Emirates-based logistics firm to manage Dar es Salaam's port, amid whispers of the UAE funding Suluhi's election campaign.



10 SEPTEMBER 2024

Jakaya Kikwete (JK) was president of Tanzania from 2005 to 2015 – John Magufuli's predecessor. JK is seen as Suluhi's political godfather, guiding her decisions and positioning her for power. She was taking notes all the way, extending Magufuli's authoritarian streak further than anyone expected.

The Presidential debate in Tanzania

2025/05/26 GAO



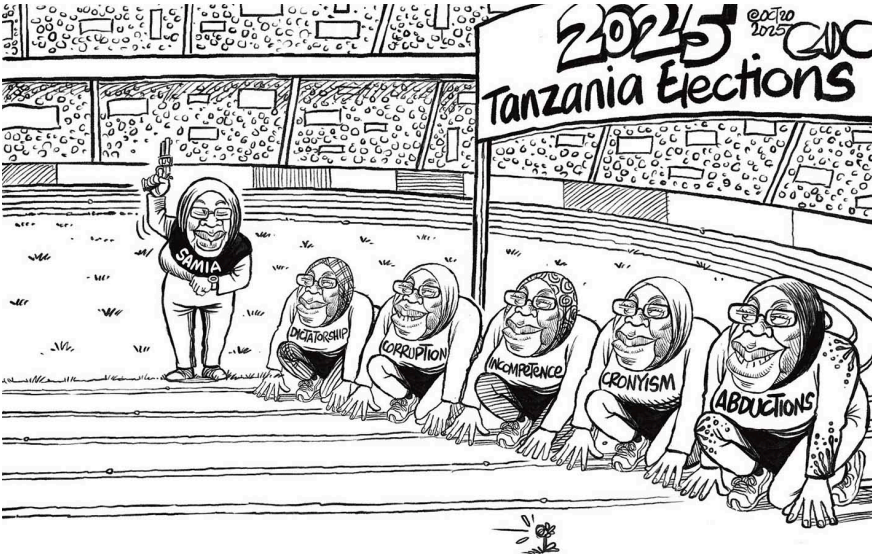
26 MAY 2025

Suluhu's main political challenger, Tundu Lissu of the opposition party Chadema, was jailed and charged with treason in April this year. Amnesty International reported nearly 100 disappearances of opposition party members during the campaign period.



7 JUNE 2025

Two activists – Kenyan Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan Agather Atuhaire – suffered horrendous torture, including sexual violence, during their detention and interrogation in Tanzania. Suluhu justified this by saying the activists intended to export “bad manners” and interfere with her country's politics.



20 OCTOBER 2025

As the elections drew closer, it was clear the vote had been carefully stage-managed to ensure Suluhu would win in a landslide, with her political rivals detained or disqualified from contesting.



1 NOVEMBER 2025

Suluhi was sworn in after the electoral commission said she had won 98% of the vote. Observers said the poll was neither fair nor credible. Protests and indiscriminate killings were reported around the country. The true death toll may never be known, but is estimated to be in the hundreds – or even thousands.

DATA

Party with the neighbours

WE SEEM to be living in an age of increasing political polarisation. Ahead of International Day for Tolerance (16 November), let’s look at political tolerance across Africa.

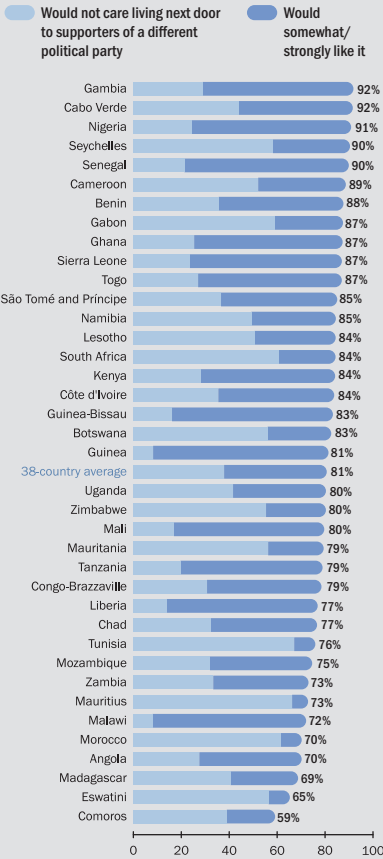
Encouragingly, majorities in all 38 countries we surveyed in the past two years say they “would not care” or would “somewhat” or “strongly” like living next door to supporters of a different political party. On average, 81% express tolerance toward party-political differences.

Political tolerance is especially high in West Africa (86%). At least nine in 10 citizens would welcome neighbours from a different party in Gambia (92%), Cabo Verde (92%), Nigeria (91%), Seychelles (90%), and Senegal (90%).

Some are especially keen on politically plural neighbourhoods: At least two thirds say they would actively enjoy living among political opponents in Guinea (73%), Senegal (69%), and Guinea-Bissau (67%). Meanwhile, similar shares are indifferent in Tunisia (67%) and Mauritius (66%).

Surprisingly, those who report feeling close to a political party are even more likely than non-partisans to be tolerant (83% vs 80%), showing that Africa is hardly fracturing along party lines. ■

Political tolerance | 38 African countries | 2024/2025



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.



FILM REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



Hear her voice

An expertly told,
heartbreaking tale
that shakes us out of
indifference.

ON 29 January 2024, Red Crescent volunteers received an emergency call from Hind Rajab, a five-year-old child trapped in a car in Gaza.

Israeli forces had shelled the car carrying a family fleeing their home. Six of her family members died in the attack and, at the end of the ordeal, so did she. Media investigations concluded an Israeli tank had likely fired 335 rounds into the car.

After hearing some of the heart-rending audio of the girl's pleas for help, Tunisian filmmaker Kaouther Ben Hania

was moved to dramatise Hind Rajab's harrowing final moments.

At this year's Venice Film Festival, *The Voice of Hind Rajab* won a Silver Lion award and received a record 23-minute standing ovation. The film is Ben Hania's unequivocal repudiation of a humanitarian crisis.

In films such as *Four Daughters* and *The Man Who Sold His Skin*, Ben Hania has previously been drawn to hot-button issues like immigration and terrorism.

Her work often blends reality and fiction in ways that can be ethically fraught. Ben Hania obtained permission to use the actual recording of the phone call. She then inserted these audio recordings of Hind Rajab's voice into a gripping procedural that re-enacts the efforts of the Red Crescent first responders.

Nothing about *The Voice of Hind Rajab* feels trivial. The actors are committed; the camerawork creates a suffocating unease. The violence is off screen but never less than devastating.

Discussions about cinema being able to change the world can be redundant, but *The Voice of Hind Rajab* is proof that when presented skilfully, passionately, and urgently, cinema can push back against collective indifference.

And because of that, a voice can speak even from beyond the grave. ■

The Quiz

- 1 In which country is Agadez?
- 2 Ali Bongo is the former leader of which nation?
- 3 In which country is Tofo Beach (pictured)?
- 4 Which Southern African state marked 50 years of independence on 11 November?
- 5 The Amazigh ethnic group is from which region?
- 6 Who was Samia Suluhu Hassan's predecessor?
- 7 What is the capital of Mali?
- 8 In which country is Benin City?
- 9 Which Burkinabé military leader was killed in 1987?
- 10 Premier League clubs are desperate to sign footballer Antoine Semenyo. What country does he play for?



HOW DID I DO?

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

0-3

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

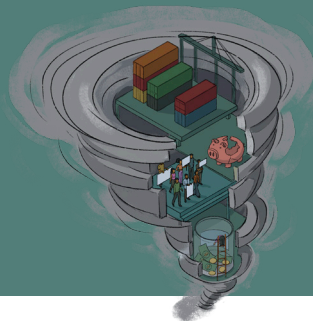
"If it's true that life's a beach then we might as well coast to victory."

PHOTO: TOFO BEACH HOUSE

COMMENT

Unserious men for serious times

Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between foreign policy and sycophancy.



L. MUTHONI WANYEKI

IN JULY this year, five African heads of state travelled to Washington DC in the United States for a “summit” that can only be described as bizarre.

There was little logic behind the grouping of the five African countries.

At one end was Guinea-Bissau, an arguably illegitimate government. At the other were Senegal and Gabon, two governments once hailed for achieving political transition against all odds. And in the middle, Liberia, with its historical ties to the United States, and Mauritania, which we will talk about later.

In short, a motley crew.

What made us bow our heads in collective shame was the naked sycophancy. The meeting was fast on the heels of the US-brokered, so-called Washington Accord between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. And host President Donald Trump was lavished with praise by the five presidents for his supposed conflict-resolution skills.

Mauritania, a country that has no diplomatic relationship with Israel, even endorsed the Israeli offensive against

Iran in June. There were calls for Trump's nomination for the Nobel peace prize. And the Senegalese president gushed about Trump's golf skills, inviting him to build a golf course in Senegal.

It was nothing short of embarrassing – particularly when compared with how South African President Cyril Ramaphosa held his ground against Trump in the Oval Office weeks earlier. In a quiet salvo against the absurd claims that South Africa's white Afrikaner population was at risk, Ramaphosa led a multiracial team into the White House.

This time, each government seemed intent on selling its country – and the continent – down the river.

No mention was made of the fate of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which – however flawed – was at least one of the few continent-wide trade frameworks with the US. Nor was there any reference to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, our supposed collective leverage with global trading powers.

Back to Washington DC. At the time of the summit, Israel's offensive against Gaza had killed 62,000 Palestinians – that has now risen to more than 69,000.

The African Union renews its standing resolution in support of Palestine at every AU summit, yet none of the five governments referred to any of this.

The Nobel peace prize? Our sides would split with laughter if we were not daily reduced to tears.

Tears too for the eastern DRC. The US brokered the “Washington Accord” between the DRC and Rwanda – in parallel with the Qatari-brokered peace process with the March 23 Movement (M23) rebels. Both deals were initially hailed for taking a “dual” approach that avoided framing M23 as a Rwandan proxy or just another local militia.

Yet both the accord and the peace process collapsed swiftly. Washington responded with token sanctions on the Congolese army and M23 for ceasefire violations – finger wagging and slaps on the wrists that achieved nothing.

Tears also for Sudan. The “Quad” of external interested parties in the war in Sudan – the US, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – had planned to meet at the time the five African leaders were in the White House.

That meeting was quietly dropped. Egypt continues to give material support to the Sudanese Armed Forces and the UAE does the same for the Rapid Support Forces.

The United Nations arms embargo means nothing to them. Nor do the 150,000 Sudanese dead or the 12-million people displaced, to say nothing of the rape and sexual slavery that feature with such regularity in reports. Again, the five African governments meeting the



PHOTO: JIM WATSON/AFP

Chump change: Donald Trump speaks with the leaders of Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Gabon and Liberia at the White House in July.

US presidency had nothing to say about any of this.

To be honest, why should the US take us seriously when we don’t take ourselves seriously? All we have are tears for Palestine. Tears for eastern Congo. Tears for Sudan. Meanwhile, our heads of state smile when being patronised (like when Trump praises Africans for their “good English”) and offer our land up for golf courses. Jokes. Except that it is anything but funny.

How fortunate for us that the Quad has since met and agreed on a way forward for Sudan, prompting the phrase, “Arab solutions for African problems”. ■

Dr L. Muthoni Wanyeki is a Kenyan political scientist

Big Pic

I see you baby: A man from Douar Amziri, in Morocco's Beni Mellal-Khenifra region, hails a far-off friend in the intricate whistled language used by Amazigh communities to converse across vast distances in the Atlas Mountains.

PHOTO: ABDEL MAJID BZIOUAT/AFP



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