

# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

## Ethiopia at war

Peace Prize-  
winner  
sends in the  
troops



(Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP)

# Inside:

- **COVER STORY:** Ethiopia is on the brink of civil war. We explain what exactly is going on (p5) and how the country's Nobel Peace Prize-winning prime minister let it come to this (p26)
- **A day in the life** of an African opposition leader (p8)
- **Joe Biden** is the likely president-elect. What does that mean for us? (p12)
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# The Week in Numbers

## 10

The number of species at risk of being eliminated in or along the Mara River, which runs between Kenya and Tanzania, according to a biodiversity report. Hippos, shoebills, grey-crowned cranes, Victoria tilapia, Madagascar pond-herons and various killifish and crab species are under threat from pollution, poor land use and overfishing.

## 59

The number of Egyptians sentenced to 15 years in prison by a court in Cairo. They were found guilty of organising and participating in a protest against the military government in 2013. The protest was violently dispersed by security forces, who killed hundreds of protesters. The men who pulled the trigger have not been charged.

## 94.3%

The share of the vote won by President Alassane Ouattara in Côte d'Ivoire's election last Saturday. The vote was boycotted by opposition parties, who say it is unconstitutional for a president to serve three terms in office.

## 1,540,801

The number of people in Africa who have recovered from Covid-19, according to the World Health Organisation. Some 44,244 people have died and a total of 1,843,581 cases have been recorded.

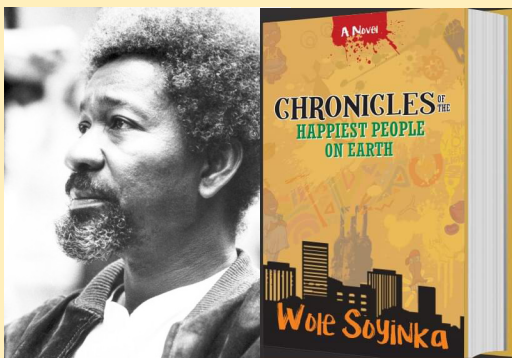


Photo: Nobel Prize Archives

## 48 years

The time that has passed since Wole Soyinka (pictured here in 1986) last published a novel. The celebrated playwright and author has announced that his new novel, *Chronicles of the Happiest People on Earth*, will be published in Nigeria before the end of the year.

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# Ethiopia

## **Abiy Ahmed won a Nobel peace prize. Now Ethiopia is on the brink of civil war**

**Ethiopia's central government has launched a major military operation – including airstrikes – against one of its own regional states**

**Zecharias Zelalem**

**A**t about 2am on Wednesday morning, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took to his Facebook page to make a grave announcement.

“The Ethiopian Defense Forces, run by a command post, have been tasked with saving the country,” he said.

The regional government of Tigray, a northern province, was guilty of “crossing a red line”, he said, and Ethiopian troops had been ordered to commence a

“military confrontation”.

“I call on Ethiopians to remain calm, be on high alert and back the military effort,” Abiy wrote. Several commentators described this as tantamount to a declaration of war against one of Ethiopia's own regional states.

About an hour later – still in the early hours of the morning – Abiy appeared on state television. He said the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – the party that governs the Tigray region – was guilty of “treason”. According to Abiy, Tigray regional security forces had assaulted Ethiopian military bases in the towns of Mekelle and Dansha, killing and injuring soldiers based there.

The Ethiopian army's Northern Command, one of four regional commands, is based in Mekelle, the Tigrayan regional capital which is more than 700km north of the country's capital, Addis Ababa.

Tigray's regional government has announced the closure of its airspace, and claimed that the Northern Command will “stand with the Tigray people and the regional government”.

Tigray is home to about six million of Ethiopia's population of 110-million people, and is located in the north-east of the country, along the border with Eritrea.

On Friday, Abiy told reporters that airstrikes had been launched against



targets in and around Mekelle in what he described as “the first round of operations”. He said the airstrikes destroyed rockets and other heavy weapons. There was no mention of casualties.

## A dramatic escalation

Tensions between the federal government in Addis Ababa and Tigray’s regional government have been running high for some time, and relations had soured considerably in recent months. Although this escalation remains shocking, analysts have warned for months that conflict was looming.

Efforts by the *Mail & Guardian* to contact residents in Tigray were fruitless, because internet and phone lines were not functioning. Internet tracking organisation Netblocks revealed that there was a considerable drop in Ethiopia’s internet usage that began about an hour before the prime minister’s announcement. As such, Abiy’s claims remain difficult to authenticate, and the region is virtually cut off from the outside world.

BBC journalist Desta Gebremedhin, from the BBC’s Tigrigna language desk, was able to make contact with a relative in Mekelle on Wednesday. “My cousin in Mekelle could hear the raging gun battles,” he said. This indicates that the fighting is within the vicinity of a major urban centre.

Despite the prime minister’s claims that his soldiers were ambushed and pushed into the war, preparations for the eventual escalation were made days in advance. Large-scale movements of Ethiopian



## The ‘peacemaker’: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has ordered military strikes against the Tigray region.

(Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP)

troops heading northwards were reported in the days before. Meanwhile, last Sunday, Tigray regional president Debretsion Gebremichael announced that his forces were prepared for conflict, stating that “if war is imminent, we are prepared not just to resist but to win”.

A year ago, few could have predicted these developments when the prime minister of Ethiopia posed for cameras in Oslo at the award ceremony after receiving the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Hailed for bringing two decades of military hostility with neighbouring Eritrea to an end, the peace deal in 2018 sparked wild celebrations in both countries and was a rare feel-good story from the often conflict-ridden region.

Yet already the seeds of conflict with Tigray were being sown, as Abiy moved to consolidate his authority – in the process alienating the TPLF, which had dominated political life in Ethiopia for decades. ■

*Abiy Ahmed’s declaration of war against Tigray is a gamble on the future of Ethiopia itself. Find out why on page 26.*

# Côte d'Ivoire

## Prosecutor accuses opposition of 'terrorism'

Leanne de Bassompierre in Abidjan

**C**ôte d'Ivoire's public prosecutor on Friday accused opposition leaders of acts of terrorism and murder. The accusations came after the opposition launched a civil disobedience campaign and announced the formation of their own National Transitional Council, following last Saturday's presidential election which they had boycotted.

These actions were intended to "undermine the authority of the state in order to achieve the overthrow of the Republic", prosecutor Richard Adou told reporters.

At least 10 people have died in election-related violence since Saturday, according to government estimates.

On Tuesday, 21 people were arrested at the home of President Alassane Ouattara's main rival, Henri Konan Bédié. Nine have subsequently been released. Two other leaders of smaller parties, Pascal Affi N'Guessan and Abdallah Albert Toikeusse Mabri, are being sought, said Adou. They

face a minimum of 10 years and as long as life imprisonment if found guilty. According to the prosecutor, Bédié does not face arrest or house arrest.

The National Transitional Council was formed by several opposition groups and is led by Bédié, a former president, with the objective of forming a transitional government and organizing fresh elections. Shortly after the announcement, the government warned that it was illegal and that the public prosecutor would be investigating.

### At least 10 people have died in election-related violence

Former rebel leader Guillaume Soro, who is living in exile in France, urged the Ivorian military to back the so-called National Transitional Council proposed by the opposition. "You must act to restore our constitution to its former glory," he said in a statement on his Facebook page on Wednesday. "Put an end to the spectre of civil war that threatens our country."

The court action is likely to enflame tensions in the West African nation after last week's vote, which was won by Ouattara with nearly 95% of the vote. Both Bédié and N'Guessan asked their supporters to not to vote in protest against Ouattara seeking a third term they deem illegal. ■

# A day in the life of an opposition leader

*The election in the United States was the only story on anyone's news agenda on Tuesday. But that does not mean that nothing else was happening. At least four governments on the African continent took advantage of the distraction to take action against opponents and critics. But if they hoped their actions would go unnoticed, they were wrong.*



Bobi Wine en route to his official nomination on Tuesday, shortly before he was arrested. (Photo: Sumy Sadurni/AFP)

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Andrew Arinaitwe in Kampala, Kudzai Mashininga in Harare and Simon Allison**

**O**n Tuesday morning in **Kampala**, Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert – aka Bobi Wine – made his way to the electoral commission tent in Kyambogo, Kampala. He was there to formally file his nomination to run for president of Uganda in the next election, scheduled for early next year. A huge crowd of supporters had gathered to watch

this historic moment. As soon as the paperwork was confirmed, he turned to face the audience and punched his fist in the air.

“We are not planning to cry today, we have cried for long, but we have opened a new chapter,” he said, brimming with confidence. “We have not witnessed a peaceful transfer of power from one leader to another since our country became independent in 1962.”

But his good spirits did not last long. As the crowds grew larger, in anticipation of a speech that Bobi Wine was due to



deliver at his National Unity Platform headquarters, the police presence grew larger too: campaign rallies and demonstrations have been outlawed due to Covid-19 restrictions. At some point, a threshold was crossed, or a decision came down from above, and the crowds were sprayed first with water, and then with tear gas.

Similar scenes were repeated in Kiseka Market, and in the town of Masaka, where former presidential candidate Abed Bwanika suffered head injuries after being accosted by policemen.

The police came for Bobi Wine too. His vehicle, a white Land Cruiser, was surrounded by policemen outside the nomination venue. One of them smashed the window with a tyre iron and dragged him from the vehicle. He was accused of organising an illegal protest.

Wine has been arrested several times before, and tortured in custody. Following this arrest, Lieutenant General Muhoozi Kainerugaba – President Yoweri Museveni's son – tweeted: "I told you my young brother that you can NEVER intimidate us. We are much stronger than you can ever imagine to be. If you want to fight we will simply defeat you. We want peace! But if you attempt to fight us then bring it on!"

At around the same time, Zitto Kabwe was making his way to his local police station in **Dar es Salaam**. He is the head of ACT-Wazalendo, an opposition party in Tanzania. Kabwe lost his parliamentary seat in last week's election, which was won in a landslide by President John

Magufuli's ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi. But the vote was marred by claims of vote-rigging and irregularities, and several opposition leaders have since been arrested, including Tundu Lissu, presidential candidate for the main opposition party, Chadema.

Kabwe had received word that the police were looking for him, too. He decided to make it easy for them. "I've been arrested 16 times since 2016. It was not something new. I just went to the police myself and asked for my colleagues who have been arrested, and they told me, by the way you are under arrest yourself," he told *The Continent*.

Kabwe was charged with organising illegal demonstrations, and released on bail. He disputes the charge. He also points out that Tanzania's Constitution, which prevents elections from being challenged in court – no matter how irregular – leaves opposition parties no choice but to organise protests.

"The only court that can challenge the results of the election is the court of the public opinion. So challenging presidential results means going to the people, telling them to challenge, because there is no court that will receive any petition," he said.

A little later that same evening, journalist Hopewell Chin'ono was at his home in **Harare** when suddenly the police were at his door. He was arrested earlier this year after being accused of inciting Zimbabweans to protest, in contravention of Covid-19 restrictions.

The arrests came after Chin'ono

published a series of investigations into corruption that implicated senior government officials.

After spending six weeks in atrocious conditions in Chikurubi Maximum, he was released on bail in September. But now he is back in jail, accused of violating his bail conditions. Government prosecutors have said that he used his influential Twitter account (@daddyhope) to post messages that “impaired the dignity, reputation and authority of the court whilst clearly intending to do so”.

Coincidentally – or not – his re-arrest comes shortly after he revealed details of a high-profile gold-smuggling syndicate that implicated government officials.

As Tuesday drew to a close, on the other side of the continent, heavily-armed police vehicles in **Abidjan** pulled up outside the home of Henri Konan Bédié, the former president who ran against incumbent president Alassane Ouattara in last week’s election in Côte d’Ivoire. Tear gas was used to disperse a small crowd of supporters who had gathered outside. Although Bédié himself was not arrested, 21 of his party officials and supporters were.

Just days before the vote, Bédié told his supporters not to participate, because he believed that Ouattara’s bid for a third term in office was unconstitutional.

Consequently, Ouattara won in a landslide, with nearly 95% of the vote. But Bédié and other opposition leaders have refused to accept the result and formed a National Transitional Council, which Bédié heads.



**Short-lived freedom: Journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, left, poses for a selfie with lawyer Doug Coltart after his release on bail in September.**

(Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP)

Even though all these arrests occurred in different countries, in different parts of the continent, Tanzanian opposition leader Kabwe sees a common thread.

He said: “There is an increasing authoritarianism across the continent. The civic space has been narrowed and democracy is under attack. It could be a global phenomenon, we are seeing it in the US, but many African leaders are resorting to autocratic rule.

“That’s what we see in Uganda, in Zimbabwe. Now Ethiopia, which was a rising star, is sliding back into civil war. Ivory Coast just recently saw a 95% result. A third term [for President Alpha Condé] in Guinea. Zambia, with the struggles of [opposition leader] Hakainde Hichilema and colleagues.

“Authoritarianism is the new fashion for governing. And the attacks are on journalists, on civic space and, mostly, on the opposition.” ■

# Uganda

## \$136,000: the cost of running for office in Uganda

Emmanuel Kitamirike  
and Peter Kisaakye

**W**ith elections scheduled for early 2021, the growing cost of running for election in Uganda is important to consider.

New research, which draws on data from over 250 aspirants who ran with varying degrees of success for office in 2016, shows the average spending of a parliamentary candidate during the 2016 primary and general elections was \$136,000.

The overall costs were higher in western and central regions and consistently below the average in eastern and northern parts – a pattern that broadly reflects the distribution of poverty.

The outlay continues in office, with MPs spending about \$9,000 on average each month to meet constituent demands and obligations – more than their official

monthly salary of about \$8,000.

In every region, candidates who won spent more on average than those who did not, meaning many Ugandans – particularly women and young people – are increasingly excluded from running for office because they cannot afford it.

In 2021 the cost of politics could rise further. When asked, more than three-quarters of survey respondents said they would spend more when running again for office.

Several factors contribute to this: weak local government places service delivery burdens on MPs; high and rising privileges for MPs; no effective oversight of campaign expenditure; low levels of voter education; and the way elections offer a chance to rise in the ruling party.

Promoting local accountability, tackling patriarchal politics and strengthening the Electoral Commission's ability to enforce regulations are steps that could remedy the country's situation.

But they will require sustained political will to enable Uganda to build a policy-driven electoral system, instead of a monetary one. ■

*Emmanuel Kitamirike and Peter Kisaakye work for the Public Policy Institute in Kampala, Uganda. The research was funded by Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy*

# America's democracy is broken. What does that mean for us?

**Many African countries modelled their political system on the United States. But given the flaws in the model, it may be time to reconsider**

**Sithembile Mbete**

**I**f there is one thing that we've learned from the United States' elections this week, it's that democracy is hard work. As the first country to become a democracy, the US has long been held up as a model for other countries to follow to achieve accountable and representative government. Free and fair elections, rule of law and liberty were the American way – and we would all achieve the American Dream if we adopted them.

This was especially the case for newly democratising African countries in the 1990s, which modelled their constitutional systems on the US. American democracy institutes made

a roaring trade advising African governments on how to hold free and fair elections.

Yet many of the markers of free and fair elections – a universal voters' roll, centralised election management, uniform rules and regulations – are absent in the American system. Much of what we Africans have been trained to recognise as good electoral conduct has never existed in the US. It turns out that the world's model democracy is not that democratic after all.

*New York Times* columnist Jamelle Bouie wrote last month that Donald Trump is not an aberration, he is a continuation of the racism, indifference and corruption that has defined many US presidencies. Bouie called on citizens to “take the opportunity to look with clear eyes and assess this country as it is and as it has been or again seek the comfort of myth”.

Africans should do the same. Can we take this opportunity to assess our American-modelled democracies with clear eyes and examine whether they benefit us?

While the world was preoccupied with the US election this week, Africa witnessed a number of significant democratic reversals in Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, among others. There is a pervasive sense throughout the continent that democracy yields suboptimal socioeconomic outcomes and leaves people feeling more

**House of cards:**  
If this election is anything to go by, American democracy is about as sturdy as this cardboard cutout of Joe Biden. (Photo: Drew Angerer/Getty/AFP)



alienated from those who govern them. Elections seem to fuel conflict rather than resolve it.

In a prescient article published in 1993, Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake argued that democracy in Africa would have to be designed to fit the cultural context and would emerge from “practical experience and improvisation in the course of a hard struggle”. He cautioned against an approach of adopting Western liberalism because this would “achieve only the democracy of alienation”.

A cursory examination of the continent’s democracies indicates that Ake has been proven right.

So where to now? As my colleague Shuvai Busuman tweeted on election day: “Why then as Africans are we holding on to this system that is clearly not working for us?” Academics, democracy practitioners, civil society activists and ordinary citizens must ask hard questions about why democratic politics in Africa

do not improve the quality of people’s lives.

If we want accountable, responsive and representative governments, what kind of systems do we need? Can we identify existing models in our own societies to build on?

With Joe Biden looking set to become the 46th president of the United States, we must guard against the temptation to breathe a sigh of relief and pretend that things will return to the pre-2016 normal.

The hard work of defining democracy and good governance decoupled from the model of the US is just beginning. Africans must now take responsibility for developing our own systems of accountable and responsive government that will work for us. ■

*Dr Sithembile Mbete is a senior lecturer in the department of political sciences at the University of Pretoria where she lectures international relations and South African politics.*



# The Cameroonian schoolchildren caught in the crossfire

## Sending your child to class can be a life or death decision

**Daniel Ekonde**

**I**n 2017, Pastor Boniface Tamangoua chose not to send his eight-year-old son Victory Camibon to school. It was too dangerous, he thought. The family lived in Kumba, in southwest Cameroon, and that year fighting broke out in the region between the government and rebels demanding independence for English-speaking Cameroon.

The next year, Tamangoua took the difficult decision of sending Victory to a school in Littoral, the French-speaking province where the economic hub Douala is located. His son would be far away, but at least he would be getting an education — and he would be safe.

In 2019, there was a lull in the fighting. It looked like tensions were easing. Pastor Tamangoua brought his son home, where he completed primary school.

This year, Victory — now 11 — started at a new school: the Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba. On October 24, at least nine armed men arrived at the school's

campus. They broke into a second-floor classroom and opened fire on the students. Children screamed and ran for their lives. By the time the gunmen were finished, seven children were dead and 13 were injured. Victory Camibon did not come home that day.

“It was our neighbour’s son who attends the same school with my son who came rolling on the floor and crying that Victory is dead,” Tamangoua told the *Mail & Guardian*. “I was helping my wife wash clothes because she is recovering from surgery. When she heard about her son’s death, she collapsed. This was his first year in secondary school; he had just been three weeks in school and was very excited.”

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks; the separatists and the government are blaming each other.

“This massacre is a grim reminder of the horrific toll that the crisis in Cameroon’s English-speaking regions has had on children and their education,” said Ida Sawyer, deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

President Paul Biya reacted to the incident two days later, in a tweet.

“I have also instructed that appropriate measures be taken diligently to ensure that the perpetrators of these despicable acts are apprehended by our defence and security forces and brought to justice,” he said.

Children have been targeted repeatedly during the conflict. In February this year, 14 children were among the 22 people killed in a massacre in the village of Ngarbuh, allegedly carried out by state security forces.

Separatists have called for English-speaking parents not to send their children to school, as a protest against the institutional inequalities they believe are baked into the national curriculum. Cameroon’s national government is dominated by French-speakers.

Over the past three years, dozens of schools have been damaged in attacks. Last year, the United Nations Children’s Agency Unicef said that 80% of schools in the affected areas were shut, and more than half a million children had no access to education.

And although some separatist leaders have now called for students to resume their education, the attacks have continued.

This week alone, 11 teachers were taken hostage by an armed group in Kumbo, a town in the Anglophone northwest region, and have yet to be released; and students in a school in Limbe in the southwest were stripped naked by gunmen who threatened to burn them alive if they ever came to



**A life cut short: Victory Camibon was just 11 years old when he was slain**

school again.

As the news of the Limbe attack spread across other schools in the area, students began to flee school premises and teachers shut down campuses.

In Kumbo, parents are once again having to assess whether it is safe to send their children to school at all.

Cameroon’s interior minister, Paul Atanga Nji, has visited the city in the wake of the attack, promising to provide a military guard for the school. But few parents are convinced.

Grace, who asked to be identified by her first name only, is a mother of two schoolgoing children. She has made the decision to withdraw them from the school in Kumbo.

“I thought school was returning to this place [Kumbo] for good since more than three years now. But I’m not convinced. I will only send my children to Douala again,” she said. ■

# Wizkid's testimony of hustle, betrayal and blessings

## REVIEW

Timileyin Omilana

‘**S**howered in blessings, now my cup’s runnin’ over,” Wizkid sings on the opening track of his new album *Made In Lagos*. Leading with smooth bass and commanding saxophone, *Reckless* sets the tone for the rest of the album.

The track spotlights Wizkid’s troubles, noting that despite those who “pray for his downfall”, he is “still a winner”. The theme of triumph is carried right to the end of the album, where he emphatically sings about running his own race on *Grace*.

*Made in Lagos* resonates beautifully with sounds more consistent with traditional Afrobeats, indicating a return to his home – Lagos – after his previous album *Sounds From The Other Side*, which showcased WizKid in the context of the international stage with varying genres. This album clearly exhibits a maturity and growth in the sought-after superstar.

The 14-track effort has pleasant additions from international heavyweights such as Damian Marley, Skepta, H.E.R.,

Ella Mai as well as fellow countrymen Tems and the self-proclaimed “African Giant” himself – Burna Boy. The two come together on *Ginger*, half a decade after their last collaboration. The club-ready track swings between Afrobeats and dancehall, and features a captivating pitch-change in the 30-second outro.

Both *Piece of Me* and *Gyrate* – which pays homage to “brothers wey dey hustle and bussle” – can be ticked for both dancefloors and bedrooms.

*Smile, No Stress* and *True Love*, on the other hand, are made for sunnier, slower outdoor grooves.

Although the long-awaited *Made In Lagos* bears clear influences from the United Kingdom and the Caribbean, it is also unmistakably African: sonically smooth, melodically enjoyable and cohesively put together.

Wizkid’s run of form continues. ■



**Root loops: *Made in Lagos* brings in global voices, but feels distinctly African.** (Photo: Kwaku Alston)

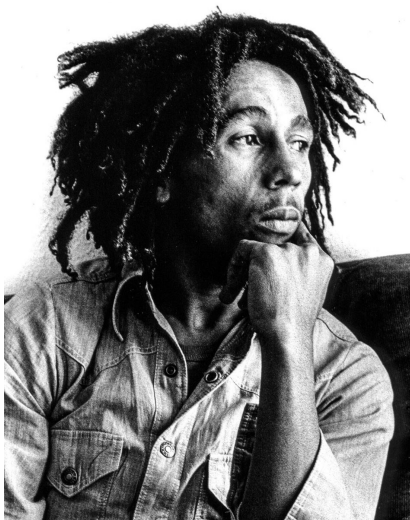
# 'What's it like to be a black man in England?'

In this excerpt from a longer essay published in the *Mail & Guardian*, the writer **Percy Zvomuya** speaks to **Dennis Morris** – the iconic British photographer – about what it was like to photograph Bob Marley

**S**ometime in 1973, Dennis Morris, then a teenager in his last year of high school, read in a magazine that The Wailers were coming to tour Britain. Instead of going to school, Morris took his camera and waited at the entrance of Speakeasy, a club in London, where The Wailers were to hold a gig.

"I was very much into music, and very much into his music, so I decided I wanted to take a picture of him and didn't go to school that day," Morris told me on Zoom from his base in Los Angeles.

The ground-breaking album *Catch A Fire* had just come out, and Bob Marley's producer, Chris Blackwell, was trying to promote it to an audience beyond reggae's traditional listeners. Speakeasy, on 48 Margaret Road, once host to Pink Floyd,



**Them Belly Full: Bob Marley at a house on the King's Road, Chelsea, 1978.** (Photo: Dennis Morris)

Elton John, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and The Beatles, was a suitable venue.

"When he eventually turned up I asked could I take his picture, and he said, 'Yeah man, come in.' So I went in and he was asking me how it was like to be a black man in England. I was asking him what Jamaica was like and he really took to me — and he told me about the tour and asked me if I would like to come along. I said yes. So the next morning I didn't go to school and I packed my bag and went to the hotel and jumped into the van and there is a famous picture of him looking back. He said, 'Are you ready, Dennis?' and I said, 'Yes.' And so the adventure began."

The opportunities that Morris, part



**Nine miles ahead: Bob Marley in The Wailers' tour van in 1973 (above), and at the Hammersmith Odeon, 1979. (Photos: Dennis Morris)**

of the Windrush generation [the half a million people who emigrated from the Caribbean to Britain between 1948 and 1970] later found wouldn't have come easily had it not been for the encounter with Marley outside the Speakeasy club.

In the film *When Bob Marley Came to Britain* – released in August this year – Morris recalls the reggae musician telling him, “Dennis, you have to remember that you are an exotic tropical plant that has been uprooted and replanted in a concrete soil. So you have to be strong to push through.” ■







# SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how well you really know our continent

1. Who was the victor in Tanzania's recent election?
2. Who was the victor in Côte d'Ivoire's recent election?
3. This week marked the 90th anniversary of the coronation of which monarch of Ethiopia?
4. *Vaya*, a South African film, was directed by which Nigerian director and son of writer Kole Omotoso?
5. Which Kenyan social media star recently reached one million followers on Instagram after having several videos go viral during Covid-19 lockdowns?
6. Monrovia (pictured) is the capital of which country?
7. Who wrote the book-length essay *'We Should All Be Feminists'*, published in 2014?
8. Is Didier Drogba or Didier Zokora the most capped Ivorian football player?
9. True or false: Seretse Khama is the son of Ian Khama.
10. Which legendary reggae musician performed in Harare for Zimbabwe's independence celebrations?
11. Samora Machel died in office in 1986. True or false?
12. Which Somali-American retained her seat in the United States Congress this week?

## How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

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

5-8

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

9-12

"Here, let me decolonise that for you."

# On your marks, get set, oppress!

Samira Sawlani

All right, everyone, settle down. Elections aren't a competition. Or rather, they are, but they're not a race between the presidents of different countries.

Yet there they are, constantly trying to outdo each other. The only incumbent focused on his *own* race is Donald Trump over in the United States – but let's not worry about the amateur leagues: the African premiership is where it's at.

Competition at this level is understandable, of course: it takes a certain kind of person to run for president in the first place, after all. You need a strong sense of civic duty, a compulsion to serve your fellow human beings, an unwavering commitment to equality, justice and... oh wait, no, sorry, wrong notes, that's for if you want to be a tuckshop assistant.

Let's see, psych profile for presidential candidate... had it written down here somewhere... ah yes, here we go! What you need is: an ego the size of a planet; a not inconsiderable amount of moral flexibility; and an unwavering commitment to coming out on top, no matter what.

You know the type. The guy who knocks over the board game after being

beaten by his younger cousin. The wedding guest determined to outshine the bride. That friend of your mother who, after learning someone else made school prefect, goes on about how their precious Binky and Dudu are so busy with ballet, archery and rocket science they couldn't possibly take on extra duties. (Until they drop a bar into the school kitty and suddenly the delightful duo are head boy and girl.)

But even Binky and Dudu would struggle against Tanzania's President John Magufuli, who won his recent election by a staggering 84% of the vote, which gives him a high score to boast about, you would think. But not in this game!

Enter Alassane Ouattara, who floated over his own finish line into a third term as Côte d'Ivoire's president with a whopping 94% of votes cast. His strategy of running unopposed – after the opposition boycotted the vote – really seems to have paid off. Although it's strange he didn't quite make it to 100%. I guess that's democracy for you.

The Great Game isn't just a duel between Ouattara and Magufuli, there are others who need the spotlight if they're to stay in play. Which brings us to Uganda:



**Race to the bottom: John Magufuli was inaugurated as president of Tanzania for a second time on Thursday.**

in January, President Yoweri Museveni will be lining up a *sixth* term in his race against musician-turned-MP, Bobi Wine.

Earlier this week Wine formally registered as a presidential candidate, whereupon authorities celebrated by arresting him in violent fashion, firing tear gas at his supporters, and then helpfully dropping him off at home. It was almost like a wild bachelor party, except where the best man has a crush on the bride and also he gets VERY cross if you compare him to Idi Amin.

Meanwhile, President Emmerson Mnangagwa must be feeling left out. Zimbabwe won't go to the polls again until 2023, but that doesn't mean he can't play. So what *is* his play? Nothing fancy, just arresting journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and suppressing freedom of speech again – go with what you know, right?

But the top of the table this week must surely belong to Ethiopia's Prime Minister

Abiy Ahmed. You'll remember his big win last year when he bagged no less a trophy than the Nobel Peace Prize.

That was last season, but peace is still important to him, and he's flexing his armies to prove it. Accusing the Tigray People's Liberation Front of attacking an army base, Ahmed mobilised the military and announced a state of emergency. He is testing the theory that the only way to defuse conflict is to escalate it until peace breaks out.

Perfectly reasonable, by 2020 standards. But is it enough to give him the edge in our continental game of thrones?

Or will he remember that this isn't a game at all. No matter whether you're setting high scores, or settling old scores.

Because once they've all finished winning at "peace", it's the rest of us who are left to pick up the pieces.

If we're still here. Lucky us.

So. Meet you at the tuckshop? ■



**The swarm: Locusts engulf farmers' fields near Jijiga in Ethiopia** (Photo: Minasse Wondimu Hailu/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)



# The locusts are coming back for more

Sheree Bega

**A**t first, to a farmer, it looks like a promise on the horizon: a dark rain cloud, sometimes so big it can block out part of the sun.

Then the penny drops.

Keith Cressman, senior locust forecasting officer at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations says it's a moment of pure horror when the farmers realise what

those clouds really are.

"You see it's not a rain cloud but a cloud of insects and realise this is a desert locust swarm. They will eat absolutely everything. By midday, you've lost your entire crop for the year and maybe for the next year. It's devastating."

This year, destructive, desert locusts have swarmed in gigantic numbers in countries including Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda and Eritrea, gobbling valuable cropland and decimating livelihoods. A separate infestation has struck farms in southern Namibia and north-western South Africa.

In January, the swarms that invaded northern Kenya were as big as the country of Luxembourg.

But while aerial and ground



operations have exterminated an estimated 500-billion locusts in the past 10 months, there are worrying signs of resurgence.

## **Destructive desert locusts have swarmed in gigantic numbers in countries including Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda and Eritrea, decimating livelihoods**



Early, ongoing rains have led to a new cycle of breeding with fresh swarms forming in Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen, warns the FAO.

In good conditions, desert locusts reproduce like wildfire – their numbers surging by a factor of 20 with each three-month reproductive cycle.

The new wave wasn't unexpected, says Cressman, who describes desert locusts as "professional survivalists. When there's really good rain, the locusts respond."

Winds over the northern portion of the Horn of Africa now starting to blow southwards again could trigger a re-invasion in Kenya later this year.

But with almost a year of locust-fighting experience under their belts, affected countries are in a far stronger position to manage and contain the infestations, says Cressman.

"Last year this time, countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya weren't

very well prepared. Now, they're well-equipped to manage and respond to this type of breeding and any kind of invasion that might occur by the end of the year."

Somalia, he adds, has not used one drop of chemical pesticides, wiping out its locusts with biopesticides made from a natural fungus that only attacks locusts and grasshoppers.

More than 860 000 hectares of land in 10 countries have been surveyed and treated for locust infestation since January to counter the desert locust outbreak. Control operations have prevented the loss of 1.7-million tons of cereal – enough to feed more than 10-million people a year – in countries already hard hit by acute food insecurity and poverty.

Kenya has contained the locust to just two northern counties. West Africa is no longer at risk of invasion. ■





# Nigeria's queer community finds its voice

Dika Ofoma

**O**n October 10, a video surfaced online of Matthew Blaise, a Nigerian LGBTQ+ rights activist, chanting at the top of his voice that queer lives matter. He was at one of the #EndSARS protests in Lagos.

Just a few days after the country's 60th independence anniversary on 1 October, young Nigerians had taken to the streets to demand an end to police brutality. A unit of the Nigerian police force, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), had become notorious for brutalising and harassing young Nigerians whom they profiled as criminals or fraudsters because of their hairstyles, their grooming, or the electronic gadgets they carry.

The protest, which started in Lagos, spread to other cities and towns, uniting Nigerians against a common enemy. The country is torn not just by ethnic and religious differences but also along ideological lines; coming together in unity of purpose is no easy feat.

Just like Blaise, other queer people across the country joined in the protest.



**Stand up for your rights: Activist Matthew Blaise at a protest in Lagos.** (Photo: yagazieemezi/Instagram)

Victor Emmanuel, an openly gay man in Nigeria and a YouTube vlogger, protested in Enugu, a city in southeastern Nigeria, and credits Blaise for inspiring him.

“His actions and the video inspired me as well as many others to write #QueerLivesMatter on our placards alongside #EndSars,” Emmanuel says.

While Blaise had only been gaped and stared at in Lagos, Emmanuel experienced open hostility in Enugu. He and other queer people at the protests were verbally

attacked and told to put down their placards. On another occasion, a man tauntingly mimicked his effeminate friend: it was an attempt to goad them into a physical confrontation. Emmanuel and his friend bore the humiliation and resisted reacting for fear that other homophobic protesters would gang up against them.

Emmanuel's experience wasn't an isolated incident. There were reports across social media of similar attacks on LGBTQ+ people at protests organised in other towns and cities. Demonstrators apparently felt the queer community was trying to hijack the protest.

But LGBTQ+ Nigerians have long been a particular target of SARS brutality. Although Emmanuel has not been harassed before, he said his friends with a preference for androgynous dressing or who are ostensibly effeminate have been harassed and dehumanised by the rogue police unit.

After more than a week of continuous peaceful protests across the country, the demonstrations turned violent. Protest leaders say that the violence was caused by state-sponsored thugs who infiltrated the protests, attacking participants and destroying cars. In response, state governments imposed curfews.

In Lekki, Lagos, on the night the curfew was imposed, armed military men shot at protesters who were waving flags and singing the national anthem. At least 15 people were killed. There are reports of a similar occurrence in Alausa, Lagos.

The government denies these attacks

took place, despite Instagram Live video evidence showing otherwise. There have been also been multiple reports of looting and the burning of properties, including malls and supermarkets.

But the spirit of the Nigerian youth has not been dampened. The call for an end to police brutality has grown to include calls for better governance; protests have continued in some cities; and online the hashtag #EndSARS is still trending, and a consensus is building around those using the hashtag that it is time for youth to re-strategise if they are to reclaim their country from menacing leadership.

This conversation includes queer Nigerians, who are finding their voice as they stand up to the country's homophobic laws. In 2014, Nigeria's former president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, signed into law the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition bill, which did not only ban same-sex marriage, but it also criminalised sex between humans of the same gender, as well as organisations that advocate for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. These "crimes" are punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

Emmanuel and Blaise, along with two others, are creators of the hashtag #EndHomophobiaInNigeria. Emmanuel plans to take this activism to the streets of Nigeria to demand that the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act be repealed.

He is confident that the resilience shown by other queer protesters during the protests – despite the homophobia they experienced – proves that Nigeria's queer community is ready to demand their rights. ■

# Ethiopia crosses the red line

**Yohannes Woldemariam**

**O**n 3 November, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared war on the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), launching a military offensive in response to a series of attacks and incidents that he claims reveal his former allies to be "traitors". This dramatic escalation of tensions between the Tigray region and the federal government represents a major gamble on Abiy's part that could result in the collapse of Ethiopia itself. If the country's slide towards civil war is not halted immediately, the consequences for Ethiopian people and the wider region will be disastrous.

But how did we get here?

Historically, both the TPLF and Abiy were part of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government. However, since Abiy came to power in 2018, the relationship with the TPLF has deteriorated, with Tigrayan leaders increasingly relegated to play a backseat role in a "coalition" that they had previously dominated. The relationship finally broke down when Abiy announced plans to dissolve the EPRDF and replace it with his own Prosperity Party, a new

political vehicle that the TPLF refused to support.

Ever since, Abiy has sought to contain the influence of the TPLF to the Tigray region, while TPLF leaders have questioned his authority to rule over them, leading to a series of spats and mutual accusations and recriminations. These tensions had been simmering for some time, but reached boiling point following Abiy's decision to postpone scheduled general elections on the basis of the coronavirus pandemic. Determined to embarrass the prime minister and simultaneously assert their own authority, TPLF leaders went ahead with their own election in Tigray, directly flouting Abiy's objections.

**Tensions had been simmering for some time, but reached boiling point following Abiy's decision to postpone scheduled general elections on the basis of the coronavirus epidemic**

The growing conflict between the prime minister and the TPLF is particularly explosive for three main reasons. First, Ethiopia is plagued by intractable ethnic politics, and Abiy already faces an uphill battle to retain political stability amid growing political



**Uncertain future: An Ethiopian Orthodox priest casts his ballot at a polling station during Tigray's controversial regional elections, in the city of Mekelle in September.** (Photo: Eduardo Soteras/ AFP)

violence. Second, the government lacks the capacity to win a decisive victory, as the TPLF has considerable military capacity and is used to protracted armed struggles – having come of age fighting against the Derg government as a guerilla group in the late 1980s. Third, Ethiopia's constitution recognises the right of ethnic communities to campaign for political autonomy, and secession is a constant topic of conversation in areas such as Tigray, the Southern and Somali regions and Oromia.

Against this backdrop there is a real chance that conflict between the federal government and the TPLF will be long and drawn out, and will suck in other

regions and movements – quickly becoming a situation over which Abiy has little control. Already, reports suggest that an attempt to capture TPLF leaders in Mekelle via a commando operation have proved unsuccessful.

This is certainly the prediction of Seyoum Mesfin, a veteran TPLF member and Ethiopia's foreign minister from 1991 to 2010, who says that if civil war comes Ethiopia will be like Syria, Yemen or Libya – a failed state in which foreign players sponsor proxy armies to further their own interests. The potential foreign influence currently being debated by Ethiopians on social media is that of Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea and possibly Egypt over the Grand

Ethiopian Renaissance Dam dispute.

But what Seyoum is alluding to is a far more extensive intervention involving actors from the Gulf States as well as non-state actors.

**Against this backdrop there is a real chance that conflict between the federal government and the TPLF will be long and drawn out**

In particular, the close relationship between Abiy and Eritrean dictator Isaias Afwerki has triggered numerous rumors, the truth of which is hard to pin down.

It does seem, however, that both Isaias and Abiy feel that they have scores to settle with the TPLF. While Abiy sees the group as his main barrier to asserting control over Ethiopia, Isaias blames the TPLF for past conflicts, standing in the way of his regional ambitions and refusing to demarcate the Eritrean border.

The TPLF itself is certainly concerned about the close relationship between the two men, accusing Abiy of treason for his “conspiracy” with Isaias, and such suspicions are fanning the flames of conflict.

So how will we know if things are starting to fall apart?

Conflict between the TPLF and the federal government is likely to be prolonged under any circumstances, but is most likely to descend into a fully-fledged civil war if the military fragments.

Much therefore depends on whether Abiy retains full control over the Ethiopian Defense Forces, which includes Tigreans within its ranks. The growing political polarisation suggests that maintaining a cohesive national army will be particularly challenging.

Abiy has appointed a new general to take control of the Northern Command – historically one of the four military divisions in Ethiopia with responsibility for Tigray and the Eritrean border – but the TPLF has blocked his path. Whether the military remains united under these circumstances will heavily shape the course of the conflict.

The fragmentation of the army, or defection of troops to Tigray, would dramatically weaken Abiy. In turn, this would encourage other groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to step up their efforts, accelerating the country’s disintegration.

Such a development would push Ethiopia into a full civil war that could destabilise the entire region, creating millions of refugees and undermining economic trade and growth. Preventing this is imperative – but if this is to be done concerted international and domestic action needs to be taken now, before there are further clashes and before the state comes apart at the seams. ■

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# This is not the Tanzania envisioned by Julius Nyerere

Aikande C. Kwayu

**F**ollowing independence in 1961, the core mission of Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere was to build unity among Tanzanians of different tribes, races, beliefs, education and income. He called it a "National Conscience".

But the socialist principles that underpinned this nation-building project were abandoned in the late 1980s, and replaced by liberal economic and political policies in the early 1990s. The multi-party system was introduced in 1992. Nyerere, wanting to protect the national unity he held so dear, supported this development, and even spoke positively about those at the forefront of establishing new political parties.

Between 1995 and 2015, Tanzania conducted five general elections under a multi-party system. The overall performance of opposition parties kept improving. In 1995 the opposition won 46 elected parliamentary seats, which increased to 68 in the 2015 elections.

Those five elections were not entirely free and fair, but there was gradual expansion of space for opposition parties to organise and mobilise.

This has changed. Post-2015, the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, moved from a competitive hegemonic party to an autocratic intolerant party. Between 2016 and 2020, it was close to impossible for opposition parties to operate.

Nevertheless, the parties, in particular Chadema (the main opposition party) and ACT-Wazalendo, took innovative approaches to continue organising and mobilising. These efforts paid off during the 2020 election campaign, when they marshalled huge support in rallies across the country.

Election day was a different story, however. Violent incidents, threats and irregularities at polling stations were reported. The opposition accused the ruling party of rigging the vote on a grand scale. By the time the votes were counted, the opposition had been reduced to less than 10 seats in parliament – a result that strained the bounds of credibility.

Given the suspicion surrounding these election results, the ruling party is now operating at a considerable legitimacy deficit. The only way it can maintain power is through further polarisation of citizens based on their party affiliation. This is the opposite of what Julius Nyerere envisaged. His National Conscience has been well and truly dismantled. ■

*Aikande C. Kwayu is a political scientist in Tanzania and an honorary research fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison*

# Covid pandemic drives Kenyan e-commerce boom

Patrick Mayoyo

**A**s you approach the entrance of Artcafé, along Kenyatta Avenue in downtown Nairobi, a glossy banner catches your attention.

As tall as a person, it invites customers to “shop and select, pay online and order before 2pm for same-day delivery”.

Although Artcafé is already a renowned restaurant, it is now leveraging new innovations to sell various products to its clients online.

On its website you can order beverages, bread, fruits, vegetables, flowers, meat, seafood, milk, ready meals and much more, and have them delivered to your doorstep.

The Covid-19 pandemic has altered global economics, traditional ways of doing business and people’s lifestyles. Around the world, businesses have been forced to set up online shops and start experimenting with digital marketing innovations in attempts to turn the tide against the economic impacts of the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Kenya is no exception.

In a report titled “E-commerce, Trade and the Covid-19 Pandemic”, the World Trade Organisation says the enforcement

of social distancing, lockdowns and other measures in response to the coronavirus have led consumers to ramp up online shopping, social media use, internet telephony and teleconferencing, and streaming of videos and films.

Nebert Najori, a web developer based in Nairobi, says demand for e-commerce websites is on the rise since the outbreak of the coronavirus.

“Many businesses are shifting their services online and in the recent past I have received inquiries from clients interested in setting up websites and social media marketing platforms,” he says.

Another company that is changing how people are doing business in Kenya is online payments service provider DPO. The firm enables customers and merchants to transact securely online and offline, facilitating the growth of local businesses through the establishment of e-shops.

Despite these innovations, the economic picture remains bleak: annual global GDP growth is predicted to decline to 2.4% in 2020, and may even be negative in the first quarter of 2021, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. ■



## The Big Picture

**Morning routine: Cheih, a hunter with the Nemadi in eastern Mauritania, adjusts his turban before heading out for the day along the caravan route from Tichitt to Aratane. The Nemadi's way of life is slowly disappearing, threatened by climate change and economic development. (Photo: John Wessels/AFP)**

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