

The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

Facing the Generals

From Sudan to Mali,
opposition against coup
leaders grows





COVER: Generals are not having it all their own way (p18). Protesters in Khartoum deposed Omar al-Bashir in 2019, giving others hope that change was possible. Then the military seized control. Hundreds have been killed. On the other side of Africa, a similar story is playing out in Mali, as it did before in Egypt and Zimbabwe. But Sudan's protesters are undeterred, and revolution is in the air again.

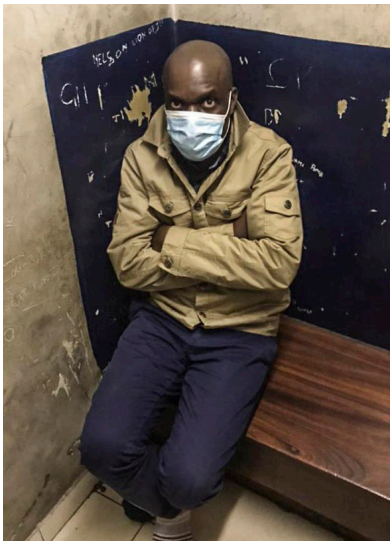
Inside:

- **The 10 African stories** to follow this year, chosen by our editorial team (p7)
- **Afcon has kicked off** in Cameroon with goals, with controversy and half-filled stadiums (p8)
- **Ecowas shuts its borders** with Mali, and the junta is feeling the pressure (p14)
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Thank you!

The Continent started with the idea that readers want quality African journalism. We're now on our 71st edition and 17,000 of you get this newspaper from us each week (and, by the time it gets shared to your networks, that figure rises to more than 100,000). We asked you to join this project by donating to support our work. That drive raised \$5,000 and this will all go to paying journalists and ensuring we do 40 more editions this year.

Correction: *The Continent* chose the data scientist Timnit Gebru as one of our Africans of the Year for 2021. In the write-up, we incorrectly said that she'd been fired by Google for writing a paper on facial recognition. The paper was actually on language technology. Gebru has promised to explain her research – and its very disturbing implications – to us in an interview.



ZIMBABWE

Press freedom goes on trial in Moyo accreditation case

Jeffrey Moyo, a well-regarded Zimbabwean journalist, is being tried for allegedly obtaining fake accreditation documents for two *New York Times* colleagues he was working with in May last year. An official of the Zimbabwe Media Commission, who issued the documents, is being tried separately. Moyo's lawyer says he believed he was dealing with a bonafide government official to obtain work permission for his foreign colleagues. Global press freedom defenders have condemned the trial as an attempt to stifle journalism.

COVID-19

AU misses vax target by a country mile

African countries are returning to what used to be business as usual before the Covid-19 pandemic normalised locking down, home or no schooling, social distancing, and wearing face masks. However, Africa remains largely unvaccinated. The African Union's target was that 40% of the continent should have been vaccinated by December 2021. That number is still less than 10% overall. Only seven African countries have vaccinated 40% of their population. At least 17 countries have fully vaccinated fewer than 5% of their citizens.

KENYA

New world record in mobile transactions

In 2021, Kenyans moved well over \$55-billion between their phones, a world record for use of mobile money. At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the government removed tariffs on small transactions (less than \$9), encouraging some eight million people to join the service. Although the tariff relief was later ended, the volume of mobile money transactions remained high, leading to an unprecedented \$55-billion in transactions between January and November 2021.

UGANDA-DRC

Ghosts of past misadventures

In a joint statement, the armies of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo say they have intelligence that the militants they have been pursuing in eastern DRC since November 2021 will try to turn residents against the foreign army, by attacking them while wearing Ugandan army uniforms. The Ugandan army has a tainted history in DRC. In the 1990s, it pursued the same groups into the DRC and got into a war with Rwanda and Zambia. The UN also found Ugandan soldiers had smuggled out massive amounts of gold and wood during this period.

CAMBODIA

An African giant rests in peace

Magawa, the African giant pouched rat which was successfully trained to detect landmines, died this week in retirement at age eight. Magawa was trained at an early age to smell a chemical in the explosives and sniff them out in fields. Although larger than other rats, he was still small enough not to trigger landmines. In a five-year international career, Magawa sniffed out more than 100 landmines and explosives in Cambodian fields. He was awarded a gold medal for this life-saving work.

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The aftershocks of Nigeria's Twitter ban

Illustration: Wyonok Mutsi

NIGERIA

Twitter, which never actually left, is back

Twitter has been banned in Nigeria since June 2021, when it removed a tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari. Thanks to the effortless and widespread use of virtual private networks – or VPNs, as they are commonly known – the prohibition existed more in theory than practice. But now the country's Twitter users can stop pretending to be banned. Nigeria says that as part of the deal to restore the service, Twitter will open a local office and pay local taxes – although the company's solitary tweet on the matter neither confirms nor denies this.

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RWANDA

Unvaxed 'flee' to DRC

About 100 Rwandans have reportedly fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, citing Covid-19 vaccination mandates back home. Rwanda requires anyone wishing to use public transport or go to a restaurant, bar or public event to be vaccinated. Of its adult population, 60% have accepted the vaccines so far. Travelling by canoe, the alleged vaccine refusers crossed Lake Kivu to the DRC, where residents are said to be alarmed by the arrivals, saying their reason for exile is "unclear".

SOUTH AFRICA

Road worriers

South Africa has a whole one machine to print driving licences. Its transport minister says this is to clamp down on the production of illegal licences. But that machine is now in Germany for repairs, and a backlog of 300,000 people are thought to be driving illegally.

SOUTH AFRICA

Terrorism charges for parliament fire

The homeless man accused of starting the 2 January fire in parliament now faces terrorism charges. Zandile Mafe had been charged for breaking in, theft, arson and possession of an explosive. The fire took about four days to completely extinguish. It destroyed the main national assembly building and damaged other buildings in the historic parliamentary complex in Cape Town.

ETHIOPIA

Biden changes his tune on Abiy Ahmed

The United States, which has long criticised the conduct of Ethiopian authorities and their allies in the Tigray civil war, including accusing them of blocking humanitarian aid to the civilian victims, appears to be rethinking its stance. This week, President Joe Biden made his first call to Ethiopia's prime minister Abiy Ahmed. He is also recalling Jeffrey Feltman, the US's envoy to the Horn of Africa since April 2021. In Feltman's time, the US authorised sanctions targeting Eritrean military leaders who entered the conflict on Abiy's side and expelled Ethiopia from its Africa Growth and Opportunity scheme.

Here we go again

The year 2022 is already shaping up to be a busy, busy year for journalists...

These are the 10 stories that *The Continent's* editorial team expect to dominate the African news agenda, in no particular order. What have we missed? What do you want us to focus on? Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org

The pandemic: WHO officials say the end of the Covid-19 pandemic is "in sight". Will this apply on a continent where fewer than 10% of the population are vaccinated?

Ethiopia's civil war: The brutal conflict has already claimed untold lives in one of the world's most populous countries, with no sign of a peaceful resolution.

Kenyan elections: Uhuru Kenyatta has had his turn to eat. Who's next?

The Sudanese revolution: Two years later and citizens are still in the streets, fighting for their rights. But the generals appear to be going nowhere.

Zambia's debt crisis: With a new president at the helm, the international community is hoping that Zambia can show other developing nations how to escape the debt trap.

American-style culture wars: Conservative groups in the US have identified Africa as a new ideological battleground, and are throwing money at groups that oppose LBGTQI+ and women's rights.



Uhuru's next? President Kenyatta contemplates retirement.

Photo: State House

Mozambique's insurgency: Multiple foreign military interventions, lucrative gas deposits, extreme weather and a humanitarian crisis: what can possibly go wrong?

South Africa's stagnation: There's not enough energy to power Africa's most advanced economy – and the people in charge can't stop fighting among themselves.

The new Cold War: Russia, with the help of some friendly mercenaries, is taking an active role on the continent once again.

Silicon valley in Africa: Big tech companies want our money, and our users, but are not prepared to invest enough to keep Africans safe on their platforms. This can have deadly consequences, as we saw with Facebook in Ethiopia. ■

Cameroon

Photo: Kenzo
Tribouillard/AFP
via Getty Images



Welcome to the AFCON party!

(Although the volume could be a little louder)

Njie Enow in Yaoundé

Fifty years ago, the Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo in Yaoundé hosted the opening fixture of the 1972 Africa Cup of Nations. Now, after a very long wait, the continent's flagship football tournament is finally back in Cameroon and the stadium – named for the country's first president – is once again being pressed into action.

The Continent is in attendance as the

Black Stars of Ghana – seeking their first continental silverware since 1982 – take on Morocco's Atlas Lions in their Group C curtain-raiser. It is the tournament's first proper heavyweight clash.

With the temperature at a gentle 24 degrees and the pitch bathed in the golden rays of the setting sun, the scene is set for a glorious evening of football.

But something is not quite right. "Where are the fans?" asks Ghanaian



Omi-gone? Socially un-distanced fans celebrate as Cameroon take on Burkina Faso in the Africa Cup of Nations opener. Photo: Ulrik Pedersen/NurPhoto/Getty Images

journalist Mike Okuley in the press box.

A few dozen passionate Moroccan fans can be seen to our left, led by a vocal man in his late 50s. Wearing a green peaked cap and a long red velvet coat, he could be heard screaming, “Long Live King Mohammed VI, Go the Atlas Lions!”

Opposite them are about 60 members of the Ghana Supporters Union, all in yellow shirts with green, black and red trim. Some of them wield drums and trumpets but the sound we hear loudest is that of their vuvuzelas.

But apart from them? The stands are mostly empty. Save for the occasional volunteer patrolling the rows of empty seats, urging those few who did turn up to wear their masks and respect social distancing rules.

Even when Morocco score a late goal to seal their victory, the crowd’s response

is strangely muted.

It’s a Monday, so maybe the logistics of getting to and from work made it difficult for fans to attend. Others seem to have been put off by the requirement to present proof of Covid-19 vaccination as well as a negative PCR test before entering the stadium. Easier to just watch at home or in fan zones.

“Not everyone’s comfortable getting the vaccine,” Mirabel Nyong, a Cameroonian football fan, tells *The Continent* after the match. “We waited for years to stage this tournament and now we can’t go because of the price of tickets and these mandatory things. I’ll watch the game at home or in the pub rather than go through all of this stress.”

Even outside the stadium, there is little in the way of fanfare or hype – it doesn’t help that traffic has been stopped to let the

Crowd allowed:
Fans had to prove
they were vaccinated.
Photo: Getty Images



teams and officials breeze through.

Admittedly, it was a different story across town yesterday. A respectable 48,000 people had packed themselves into the shiny new Paul Biya Stadium – named for Cameroon’s second and current president – in the city’s Olembe suburb, to watch the home team beat Burkina Faso 2-1. But few fans stayed for the second match of the double-header, Cape Verde versus against Ethiopia, which had kicked off barely an hour later.

It’s fair to say attendance across the board has been well below organisers’ expectations, especially given the country’s track record when it comes to hosting international matches.

This is a country that posted a record attendance of 17,000 fans during a women’s football game between Nigeria and South Africa in 2016.

Barely 10 months ago, more than 30,000 fans graced the final of the 2020 African Nations Championship.



Kicker: Gustavo Sangarhis of Burkina Faso celebrates after scoring against Cameroon. Photo: AFP/Getty Images

Tournament director Michel Dissake Mbarga blames the Covid-19 restrictions. “We have fans who are buying tickets but can’t get into the stadium because of these measures,” he said, adding that there are “mechanisms we are putting in place” to increase crowd sizes.

As Mbarga observes: “What makes the beauty of this tournament is the excitement from fans.” ■

Climate

It's getting hot in here

2021 was yet another scorcher, surprising precisely no one

Last year was the sixth hottest in recorded history. The last seven years are the hottest period in recorded history. Last July was the hottest month ever recorded for the world as a whole. That month also came with what is thought to be the hottest outside temperature ever recorded anywhere, with Death Valley in California hitting 54.4 °C.

These latest numbers were confirmed this month, as various research bodies reported their numbers for 2021. Data from American-based Nasa and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration show that the world is now 1.2 °C hotter than it was when the Industrial Revolution tied human development to the burning of coal and oil.

This is despite last year being a La Niña year, a phenomenon which usually cools global temperatures. The hottest years on record remain 2020 and 2016.

Subsequent research from Berkeley Earth showed that 25 countries had their hottest years last year. Nine of those are

in Africa: Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Guinea, Senegal, Liberia, Togo, Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso.

At the same time, the levels of the greenhouse gases that drive this heating have continued to rise. While everyone will pay the price, those who pollute the least and have the least will pay the highest price as the world unravels.

The African continent contributes just 4% to global emissions.

After 21 years of climate negotiations, the world's countries agreed in Paris in 2015 to do all that they can to keep global heating to "well below" 2 °C and ideally below the 1.5 °C that African states have said would be catastrophic. ■



Helter Swelter: California's Death Valley recorded the highest outdoor temperature ever. Photo: Unsplash

Egypt

Pouring oil onto the climate fire

Despite the climate crisis, an Italian firm is drilling for new fossil fuels

Italian oil multinational Eni has been awarded five new exploration licences by Egypt's petroleum ministry. They cover about 8,400 square kilometres of potential oil blocks scattered in the Mediterranean sea, the Gulf of Suez and inland in the western desert.

Burning oil is one of the biggest drivers of global heating. Egypt will host this year's global climate change summit, COP27, with the world warming at an ever-accelerating rate. The nations attending are expected to arrive at the summit with ambitious plans for lowering their carbon emissions.

Egypt is hardly unique. Many other countries are ploughing ahead with fossil fuel – including the United States, which recently gave the green light to huge petroleum projects in its own waters.

Elsewhere in Africa, however, resistance to fossil fuels is growing. The new licences for Eni come weeks after the South African high court scuppered Royal

Dutch Shell's plans to explore for oil in the Indian Ocean, along that country's pristine Wild Coast.

With an exploration licence in hand, Shell – one of the world's biggest polluters – had already sent a survey vessel to Cape Town to prepare to collect data on potential oil reserves under the ocean. This would have involved blasting powerful air guns into the ocean floor every 10 seconds for prolonged periods.

South Africa has robust environment laws, however, and a civil society prepared to appeal to the courts to enforce them. Lawyers representing coastal communities sued to reverse the plan, which they argued would harm marine life. In response, the country's energy minister raised eyebrows (and ire) by defending Shell, saying activists wanted to deprive Africa of energy resources.

Eni likewise enjoys a warm relationship with the government. It's a pattern replicated across the continent and the world, pitting oil giants and their government allies against communities and the environment.

In the same week Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate was on the cover of *Time* magazine urging a turn away from fossil fuels, the president of her country, Yoweri Museveni, penned an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* arguing that such demands are trapping Africans in energy poverty. ■

Madagascar

Uncivil French infrastructure colossus runs out of road in island nation fraud fracas

It has been a bad couple of weeks for the French multinational Colas, which builds roads and railways all around the world.

First, in a damning statement on 4 January, the World Bank said the civil engineering firm had fraudulently colluded with government officials in Madagascar in a tender bid to renovate and run the country's two main airports.

Consequently, the World Bank "debarred" the company's Malagasy subsidiary for two years – which means they are not eligible to participate in any World Bank-funded project.

As part of a settlement with the World Bank, Colas acknowledged "responsibility for the underlying sanctionable practices" and agreed to clean up its act in order to be removed from debarment in 2024.

Meanwhile, in Gabon, where the multinational has been operating for

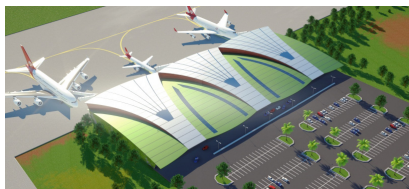
more than 50 years, the construction giant has been embroiled in a public row with government officials over alleged over-billing.

The dispute stems from a 2016 agreement to upgrade a dual carriageway in the capital Libreville. In November, a government taskforce revealed that the company's bill for that work amounted to about \$17-million per kilometre of road built, leading to a public uproar.

Colas executives vigorously contested the accusations of over-billing and were even reported to be considering exiting Gabon over the claims. An exit would mean laying off more than 300 staff in the country, most of them Gabonese.

However, Colas agreed this week to pave another 9.5 km of road in Libreville at no extra cost, Gabon's *L'Union* newspaper reported.

On the continent, Colas also operates in Algeria, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Mauritius, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and Tunisia. ■



Wings clipped: An artist's rendering of the terminal that Colas Madagascar fraudulently got a contract for.

Mali

Military leaders sent to the naughty corner

Ecowas is tightening the screws on the ruling junta – and it's starting to hurt

Mohamed Salaha in Bamako

Assimi Goïta appealed for stoicism during his address to the Malian people on Monday: “Let us keep in mind that the path to happiness is a very hard one,” he offered.

As it happens, the coup leader and self-appointed interim president Goïta has little else to appeal to, because in Mali the path to happiness has just become a whole lot harder – and many citizens are holding Goïta’s military junta directly responsible.

After the collapse of negotiations with the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), the regional bloc has imposed punishing sanctions on the country in an effort to force the junta to hand over power to a civilian administration.

These unprecedented sanctions



Regional block: Soldiers patrol the streets of Timbuktu in armoured vehicles. Photo: Florent Vergnes/AFP

include closing the land and air borders between Mali and Ecowas member states; freezing Malian assets that are being held in the regional central bank; and suspending all but the most essential cross-border payments.

The stern response from Ecowas has received strong diplomatic support from France and the United States, though a motion of support at the United Nations Security Council was blocked by China and Russia. Still, the sanctions are likely to have a devastating impact on Mali’s already fragile economy.

In Mali, many responded to the junta’s call to protest Ecowas but others, like activist Issa Kaou who took part in the *Mouvement du 5 Juin* in 2020, shunned it. The movement coordinated massive popular protests in Bamako that fatally weakened the presidency of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, paving the way for Goïta



Pick a side: A junta supporter holds a sign reading 'Support to the army, Long live Russia and China. Ecowas and France get out'. Photo: AFP

– then a colonel with Mali’s special forces – to seize power in August 2020.

Goïta appointed a transitional authority that was supposed to pave the way for a civilian government, only to launch a second coup in May 2021. Now he is demanding five years in power before handing over to civilian rule, saying that the country’s chronic insecurity makes it impossible to hold free and fair elections.

Ecowas is not buying it. Nor is Kaou – who, like many Malians, initially supported the junta. “These sanctions are the result of stubbornness; responsibility for the consequences lies with the Malian government,” he told *The Continent*.

Goïta, unsurprisingly, sees it differently, describing the sanctions as “illegitimate, illegal and inhumane”. Nevertheless, he says he remains open to

further dialogue, and analysts are hoping that the tough stance from Ecowas will force him to make real compromises.

“In 2012, similar sanctions were taken against Mali and, after 10 days, the soldiers were forced to hand over power to civilians. Faced with the harshness of the measures, the only solution is dialogue,” said Etienne Fakaba Sissoko, a prominent economist and former advisor to the deposed President Keita.

Adam Dicko, the executive director of the Youth Association for Active Citizenship and Democracy, says a speedy resolution is essential – and not just for Mali. “Mali and Ecowas need each other,” she said. “We are interdependent. Today dialogue must be restored quickly. Mali must propose a realistic timetable for a return to constitutional order.” ■

Left out in the cold, Mali's military regime is in the market for some new friends

After leading not one but two coups last year, the junta now finds itself ostracised by its regional peers – and at the centre of a dangerous new geopolitical game, writes **Aanu Adeoye**

On Sunday night, the heads of the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) imposed far-reaching sanctions on the recalcitrant regime in Mali.

The sanctions were as emphatic as it gets, including the suspension of all non-essential financial transactions and an indefinite freeze of Malian state assets in all banks in the Ecowas region. The hardest blow of all was the closure of most of Mali's land and air borders – potentially crippling for a landlocked country.

The trigger for the sanctions was, ostensibly, the delay in a return to democracy.

A week earlier, the Assimi Goïta-led regime had proposed a timeline of as much as five years for elections originally scheduled for next month. Ecowas deemed this unacceptable, and with good reason. Many democratically elected presidents in the region serve terms of just four years. An unelected transitional government, led by army generals

responsible for two coups, was seeking five years in power. It was a proposal as ridiculous as it was infuriating to Ecowas negotiators, led by Goodluck Jonathan, a former Nigerian president.

But Ecowas's turn as a staunch defender of democracy is perhaps a little surprising.

The region has seen a surge of democratic backsliding over the last few years. Dodgy constitutional amendments have elongated tenures in Guinea (Alpha Condé has since been deposed by putschists) and Côte d'Ivoire (where Alassane Ouattara reneged on a promise to not run for a third term). Quasi- and full-blown dictatorships abound. In Togo, Faure Gnassingbé has been in power since 2005; Ali Bongo became Gabon's leader four years later. Both inherited their posts from their long-serving dictator fathers who expired in office.

Beyond mildly worded condemnations, nary a peep has been heard from Ecowas in any of these cases.

Trojan Horse

So what, then, is behind the regional bloc's sudden commitment to democracy?

Consider Mali's argument: that Ecowas is being used as a Trojan Horse for grievances held by powers outside the bloc. This argument is made in the junta's statement released Monday. Ecowas, Mali said, is being "exploited by extra-regional powers with ulterior motives".

One does not need to read tea leaves to know this broadside is directed at a certain République that used to be the colonial master of eight of the bloc's fifteen member states.

Paris still holds a lot of sway in the region, thanks to its history of colonial plunder and outsized financial influence. It is also a crucial security partner in the "war on terror" in the Sahel.

But the war has achieved mixed results at best. Despite a surfeit of foreign help, from American intelligence gathering to French troops, the Malian government barely has any control beyond its major cities. Jihadists rampage in the north.

Emmanuel Macron, France's president, has decided the war is no longer worth the effort and has begun a troop drawdown that will halve the size of his soldiers in the Sahel.

In turn, Mali has turned to the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary outfit that deploys freelance fighters to conflict hotspots globally, and increasingly in Africa.

They bring experience from Sudan, Mozambique, Libya and Syria. The UN has accused the group of human rights abuses. The Kremlin denies it is using

the young men as part of its diplomatic engagement in Africa.

France has been vehemently opposed to Wagner's presence in Mali. In December, it led 14 other Western nations to sharply criticize Russia and Mali.

The Malian junta repeatedly denied it had struck any deal with Wagner. But pictures published on Monday by *France24* (a broadcaster owned by the French state) showed that Wagner's men are already present in Segou, a town in south-central Mali.

And so a power-grabbing military regime clings to power, bereft of friends amongst its traditional allies. It is now shopping for friends wherever it can find them.

Russia is proving to be a new friend, a security partner in Mali's time of need. Alongside China, Russia blocked the UN Security Council from issuing a statement supporting the Ecowas sanctions.

A day later, Mali, a country with exactly zero participants in next month's Beijing Winter Olympics, issued a statement of support for the Games that has been diplomatically boycotted by the West.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that Mali is at the centre of a dangerous geopolitical game – and while we don't know who is going to win, we can say with increasing certainty that it is ordinary Malians who will lose. ■

Aanu Adeoye is a Mo Ibrahim Foundation Academy Fellow at Chatham House, and former news editor of The Continent

Sudan



On guard: Soldiers watch a growing protest outside the palace in Khartoum Photo: Ayin

Tireless protesters take on the generals – again

In 2019, Sudan's dictator Omar al-Bashir was forced from office after a massive wave of protests. But the generals who replaced him won't hand over power. Now the flames of revolution are being rekindled.

Ayin Network for *The Continent* in Khartoum

Khartoum's protesters will not yield. "We will continue to protest, even when they fire tear gas at us, even if they

shoot us," shouts Hind Abdelrahman*, a young anti-coup demonstrator on the streets of Khartoum during last Sunday's anti-coup protests. "And we will do it alone if no one wants to help us."

Her determined stance reflects the

youth who crowd the streets of Khartoum and its sister cities, Omdurman and Bahri.

Rallies calling for a return to full civilian rule have taken place across the country since the army seized power from the transitional authority on October 25.

Military authorities, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, attempted to appease the public and international community by reinstating the former prime minister and agreeing on November 21 to seek a consensus on resolving the country's constitutional and political crisis. The international community clearly bought the deal – Sudan's streets did not.

Opposition parties read the room and realised backing Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok at this stage would be political suicide. Without support, Hamdok resigned last week and now the main opposition to the military coup leaders remains the country's indefatigable protesters.

"We are used to the tear gas," protester Mohammed Yusuf told *The Continent*. "We've learnt to throw it right back."

Out of touch

If the military and political elite thought they had understood the will of the people, they miscalculated. Instead of losing steam, pro-democracy demonstrations are gathering pace. A protest on 25 November took place in 23 locations across the country. Synchronised protests on December 25 took place in 30 different locations, including former war zones.

These days, there are at least three protests per week in the capital,



Widespread: The protests in Khartoum in December were accompanied by demonstrations in the capital's sister cities Omdurman and Bahri. Photo: Ayin

sometimes more. Last Monday, Sudanese with dreadlocks protested the targeting of their Rastafarian community by the security forces. "They are harassed a lot," said protester Cammon Ahmed, whose long dreads reach his waist. "Security routinely cut off our hair with frequent beatings." Three Rastas have been killed in the anti-coup protests since the military takeover, he said.

Sometimes using live bullets, security forces continue to target the protesters. These forces have killed at least 62 people since the anti-coup protests started. Two demonstrators were killed during Sunday's demonstration, according to Sudan's Central Doctor's Committee.

"They are hoping for a war of attrition," says Cameron Hudson, senior fellow at the think-tank the Atlantic Council. "By killing one or two protesters, the military is sending a deadly message to try and wear the protest movement down – but not so many so as to avoid international condemnation."



Sign of the times: 'We go through adversity to live in dignity' reads this placard. Photo: Ayin

The bloody crackdown on 3 June 2019, when security forces killed more than 100 protesters during a sit-in protest in front of the army headquarters, is still painfully present in the minds of the public.

No direction

But while the protests appear perennial, any potential political solution remains stuck in limbo, and Ahmed fears the protest movement could lose steam if no clear unified political vision emerges. "There is a lack of an agreed vision for the future, and this may lead to a loss of hope for change in the short term for citizens, especially with the difficult conditions people are living through," he said.

In early January, the military government sharply increased the price of electricity in the country, severely affecting factories and agricultural production. "The ruling authority resorted to increasing electricity prices since Sudan lost four billion dollars this year from financial pledges from countries and international institutions that were suspended after the October 25

coup," said trade union leader Osama al-Tayeb. This has led factories to raise their prices by between 30% and 50%.

Many protesters have lost faith in both Sudan's political class and the international community. The military generals continue to rely on influential regional players in the Arabian Gulf – especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – to support their leadership by offering weapons, political support and financial flows through purchases of gold.

Other international actors who claim to support the protest movement have shared mixed messages. The United Nations and other western countries backed the 21 November agreement between the former prime minister and the military, for instance, a weak deal the public immediately saw would be ignored, entrenching the military's de facto rule.

That is one of the reasons why protest groups rejected the recent UN-backed offer to host political negotiations. The Sudanese Professionals Association, leaders in the December 2019 revolution that toppled Bashir, has flatly refused to participate, sticking to its message for the coup leaders: "No negotiations, no compromise."

"I do not know what the future will be like," admits protester Mohammed. "But we all know what future we don't want – that is why we're here." ■

This report is published in collaboration with the Ayin Network, an independent Sudanese media house. The writers are known to The Continent, but they write anonymously here for their safety.

The digital divide

We live in a world where everything and everyone is connected – if you live in the city, that is.

Sustainable Development Goal 9, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, calls for universal and affordable access to the internet. Access to information and communications technology is critical if people are to benefit from social, economic, and political opportunities – not to mention from education if the schools are closed during a pandemic.

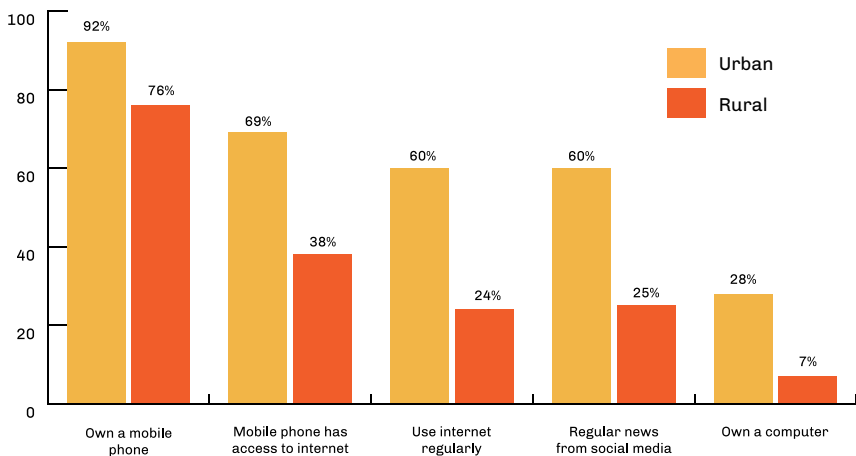
But if you live in a rural area, you may be on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The gaps are wide.

On average, across 34 African countries, rural residents are significantly less likely than city folk to own a mobile phone (a gap of 16 percentage points), especially one with internet access (31 points); to use the internet regularly (36 points); to get news from social media on a regular basis (35 points); and to own a computer (21 points).

If you're a woman living in a rural area, the gaps are even larger, because women trail men in digital access, too – a divide worth exploring in greater depth.

Gaps in digital access: Rural vs urban | 34 African countries | 2019/2021


















Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- 2 to 3 percentage points.



Africa Cup of Nations Quiz

The Africa Cup of Nations is under way in Cameroon and there are 24 participating men's national teams. Can you identify each team based on its flag?

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C
1. _____ 	5. _____ 	9. _____ 
2. _____ 	6. _____ 	10. _____ 
3. _____ 	7. _____ 	11. _____ 
4. _____ 	8. _____ 	12. _____ 

GROUP D	GROUP E	GROUP F
13. _____ 	17. _____ 	21. _____ 
14. _____ 	18. _____ 	22. _____ 
15. _____ 	19. _____ 	23. _____ 
16. _____ 	20. _____ 	24. _____ 

HOW DID I DO?

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

1-8

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

9-16

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

17-24

"My nations cup
runneth over"



A Netflix first for Uganda

The Girl in the Yellow Jumper teaches us that the good thing to do is not always the right thing

Dika Ofoma

After touring festivals across the continent, the Ugandan film *The Girl in the Yellow Jumper* became available on Netflix starting December 26.

Netflix officially started investing in Africa in February 2020, licensing

and commissioning films and shows, especially from Nigeria and South Africa, the countries with a more consolidated film industry.

Now it's Uganda's turn, with *The Girl in the Yellow Jumper*, directed by Loukman Ali, a crime thriller based on the true story of a series of seemingly unrelated murders in the Nadunget area of Uganda. This localisation is amplified in its use of local parables to drive home a grand message: the good thing is not always the right thing to do.

The film's journey to being acquired by Netflix was not easy. In 2020, it was set for a cinematic screening across Kampala, the first locally-made Ugandan film to be accepted by commercial cinemas in the country's capital, which usually show US blockbusters.

But just weeks before its premiere the government announced a lockdown and restrictions on public gatherings, and these plans came to a halt.

Like most young African filmmakers, Loukman Ali, the film's writer and director, is self-taught.

He got his movie making education from YouTube and on the job, thanks in part to the dearth of credible film schools on the continent.

The Girl in The Yellow Jumper is Ali's debut feature film, made with sweat, passion, zeal and about \$8,000 that he raised from a crowdsourcing drive on Facebook.

Those funds were not nearly enough to complete the film's production.



Mellow: Director Loukman Ali put the film together on a shoestring budget.

“We had no money,” Ali tells *The Continent*. “We got kicked out of a location because we didn’t have \$10 to bribe a guard. No one on the crew had that much left on him.”

The team also had to take breaks while filming, creating continuity issues when some actors left the project. Ali had to hide this, using body doubles and masks for some characters. He says these challenges have helped him in subsequent productions, short films streamed on YouTube. These hurdles sprang up against the backdrop of a country with little official support for its creative industries.

The team also had to take breaks while filming, creating continuity issues when some actors left the project. Ali had to hide this, using body doubles and masks for some characters.

When *The Girl in the Yellow Jumper*

started streaming, the health ministry spokesperson tweeted: “Watched, but it’s just fake.”

This unleashed widespread solidarity for the film and its director, especially from local creatives who work with little formal support and a lot of denigration from the government. President Yoweri Museveni, for example, routinely urges Ugandans to abandon the arts for the presumably more useful sciences.

“I agree that all art should be evaluated critically but I am very protective against criticising the ‘firsts’ of anything,” says Kemiyondo Coutinho, another Uganda filmmaker. “I always say there are two stories in a film: the story of the film and the story of making the film. So if you didn’t like it, cool, but [Ali] has showcased Ugandan film and crew to the world and I personally love that story the most.”

For his part, Ali says he hopes the international spotlight Netflix has brought to *The Girl in the Yellow Jumper* opens the eyes of the world to the potential of Ugandan filmmakers and artists. ■

The world's double standards on covering Rwanda

EDITOR'S NOTE: *In September, Paul Rusesabagina was convicted of terrorism in a Kigali court after being renditioned to Rwanda. He was found guilty of backing an armed group that committed deadly attacks in southern Rwanda in 2018 and 2019 and sentenced to 25 years in jail. He denied the charges against him, and Human Rights Watch said the verdict was compromised by "multiple violations of the right to a fair trial".*

The case attracted enormous international attention, including in this newspaper: Rusesabagina is the inspiration for the movie Hotel Rwanda, and is credited with saving hundreds of lives during the Rwandan genocide. After President Paul Kagame, he is the most famous Rwandan in the world. Here, the Rwandan government spokesperson Yolande Makolo reacts to the perceived "double standards" in the international coverage of the trial. Does she have a point, or is this just propaganda? Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org.

Yolande Makolo

One Saturday morning in 2018, 17-year-old Isaac Niwenshuti boarded a local bus bound for a nearby village, to visit his father, whose work had taken him away from home. Isaac never arrived at his destination. His father would never see him again.

During Isaac's journey, his bus was ambushed. A group of armed assailants set the bus on fire, trapping several passengers inside. Isaac was burned alive, murdered alongside five other passengers, including a 13-year-old girl.

In the following days, an armed group took to local radio to publicly claim responsibility for the attack that took Isaac's life. Later that year, around the time of a second major attack nearby, the group's founder posted a statement on YouTube, in which he pledged his "unreserved support" for the group, and hailed the launch of its "liberation struggle".

The murders of Isaac and at least eight other innocent civilians in 2018 were acts of terror. Had this story played out in Europe or the Americas, those responsible for these murders would have been known to the world as terrorists.

Yet, when the members of the National Liberation Front (FLN) responsible for

these attacks were successfully brought to justice, international uproar ensued. The reason? The FLN's founder, the man who had so publicly glorified the group's actions, was Paul Rusesabagina, a minor celebrity in the West.

After his arrest, Rusesabagina was hailed as a "hero" and a "human rights activist", whose "only real crime was to be critical". His armed militia, which had openly claimed responsibility for murdering innocent men, women, and children, was dismissed as an activist "political movement". Their victims were left anonymous, unmentioned.

For terrorism in the West to be met with this type of reaction would be inconceivable. But this series of events took place in Rwanda – in Africa, where the standards for terrorism are apparently different.

Rather than holding Paul Rusesabagina to account for his role in the murder of 17-year-old Niwenshuti, 13-year-old Ornella Sine Atete, and at least eight other innocent Rwandans, protests of his innocence were immediate and widespread.

Fiction was privileged over reality: a Hollywood script, of the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda*, was sufficient to exonerate him in the court of public opinion. In the real world, however, Rusesabagina's involvement with terrorism was beyond doubt.

During his trial, the prosecution revealed communications and Western Union transfers which established Rusesabagina's links to the FDLR, an armed group designated as a terrorist

group by the United States, and sanctioned by the United Nations for "serious violations of international law". These links have been publicly known since at least 2011, when text messages between Rusesabagina and FDLR President Ignace Murwanashyaka were revealed at a Stuttgart trial.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The FDLR was designated a terrorist organisation by the United States in 2013. In the same statement, the US State Department added M23, another armed group, to its list of terrorist organisations, and said that "there is a credible body of evidence demonstrating support from the Rwandan government to M23, including significant military and logistical support, as well as operational and political guidance".*

Rusesabagina described the foundation of the FLN in an online press conference, as a force made up of ex-soldiers from known terrorist groups, and bragged about their presence in the forests of Burundi on public radio, including on Voice of America.

The rest of the world had seemingly confused Rusesabagina for Don Cheadle, the actor who played Rusesabagina in a fictional 2004 film. Thus, the picture painted by the global media was of heroism, rather than terrorism.

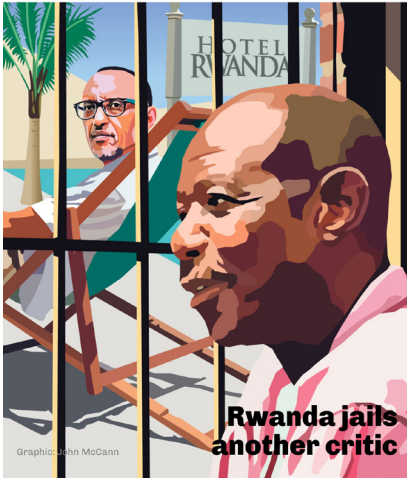
It was not just journalists who fell into this trap. American senators, British

African journalism. September 5 2020

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Graphic: John McCann

**Rwanda jails
another critic**

Un-Cheadle your mind: Rwanda argues that critics of its treatment of Paul Rusesabagina are allowing fanciful Hollywood movies to overwrite reality.

MPs, European MEPs, and several NGOs lamented Rusesabagina's arrest and conviction. To them, there was no point in even considering the notion that the much-lauded "real-life hero of *Hotel Rwanda*" could put a foot wrong.

Regrettably, these blatant double standards are hardly surprising. Nor are the failures to treat the victims of terror with the respect they deserve.

For centuries, African realities have been flattened, distorted by one-dimensional perspectives, which privilege simplicity and sensationalism over nuance and analysis.

As if to underscore this, Rusesabagina's 20 co-defendants, also confessed members of the FLN, were swept aside, ignored by Western audiences fixated on headlines alone. Even less column inches were devoted to the FLN's victims.

Time and again, African realities are fit into pre-conceived frameworks, and thus violent armed movements like the FLN are depicted as "activists", repressed freedom fighters taking arms against "authoritarian" governments. The Manichean dichotomy – good vs evil – distorts the field of reality. Governments trying to protect the peace and safety of their citizens are demonised as "repressive".

It is time that the world reassesses how these underlying biases affect the way in which Africa is treated. Governments who are fighting day and night to protect our communities against this violence are not necessarily asking for material support. What we do ask for is solidarity.

When terror strikes the Western world, solidarity, thoughts, and prayers pour from every corner. Yet too often, the reaction to similar events in Africa and elsewhere is scorn and suspicion, cynicism rather than sympathy.

We cannot, to borrow Teju Cole's words, accept the deaths of African civilians like Ornella and Isaac as "natural and incontestable". Each life lost to terrorism is a violation, an assault on humanity. ■

Yolande Makolo is the spokesperson for the government of Rwanda

Re-saluting the resolute



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Happy 2022 to you, beloved reader! May each day in the year ahead be better than the one before. A tall order, to be sure, but with determination and resolve nothing can stop you from sticking to your resolution, whether it's to eat healthier, get your 10,000 steps in every day, or even if it's just to do your best to not overthrow your government in a military coup.

Perhaps you've resolved to acquire a new skill – like Zambian football referee Janny Sikazwe, who we're reliably informed has his heart set on learning how to tell the time. You might have caught his courageous first efforts in the Africa Cup of Nations match between Mali and Tunisia. Sure, he blew the full-time whistle twice before the 90-minute mark, but you could see he was really trying! Keep going Janny, you'll get it one day.

Based on the last few weeks, it seems some of our favourite leaders have also made a few resolutions.

No, President Kenyatta has not decided to address the Pandora papers and, no, Boris Johnson has not resolved to stop lying and no, we've heard nothing about authorities in Sudan cancelling orders for

tear gas. You can't expect people to resolve to do the impossible, after all.

That said, there are some truly ambitious resolutions in the mix.

Take President Paul Biya of Cameroon who began this year in ... Cameroon! If his resolution is to spend more time in the country he presides over, then he's off to a great start! The elusive 88-year-old statesman was spotted at the AFCON's opening ceremony on Sunday. Perhaps this is the year where he finally manages to kick his Swiss hotel habit, rolls up his sleeves and gets to work governing Cameroon? Maybe he could start with the restive north-western region, where opposition senator Henry Kemende was shot dead this week.

Now, focusing on friendship and reinvesting in relationships is a worthwhile resolution – especially in this world where Netflix and the internet fall over themselves inviting us to opt out.

So let us then take inspiration from Guinea's transitional president Mamady Doumbouya, who has shown some serious solidarity with fellow military leader Assimi Goïta of Mali.

After a national pow-wow last month, the transitional military authorities in Mali said they were going to need a bit more time to pave the road to elections for a civilian government. About five years should do it, they reckon. Which is unfortunately a tiny bit longer than the



Pop-up Prez: Have Paul Biya and his wife Chantal resolved to get out more?

Photo: Paul Biya PR

February 2022 deadline they had been given by the regional bloc, Ecowas.

It would seem that Ecowas leaders have made their own resolutions to not let anyone mess them around. Stern lines were drawn in the sand during a summit attended by such luminaries as presidents Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire (currently enjoying his controversial third term) and Charles Kabore of Burkina Faso (who last year turned the internet off in the country for a few days in November), and a representative of Faure Gnassingbé who has ruled Togo since 2005.

Embodying the mantra, “Do unto others before they get any ideas about doing something unto you”, the regional bloc announced a range of sanctions on Mali. These include the closure of land and air borders between Ecowas countries and Mali; the suspension of commercial and financial transactions between member states and Mali and the freezing of Malian state assets in the Ecowas central bank.

Some hard economic knocks, right there, prompting some of the less charitable among us to wonder whether

Mali would now have to change Timbuktu’s name to Two-Buck Tim.

While some are choosing to be nicer to each other, could it be that there are those leaders who have decided to be nicer to the people over whom they preside?

Yes we know in many cases that would require therapy, a brain transplant *and* divine intervention, but maybe there is reason to find hope in Nigeria, where the government has finally lifted the ban on Twitter, which had been put in place seven months ago after the platform deleted one of President Muhammadu Buhari’s tweets. The government says Twitter has agreed to a range of conditions, including “establishing a legal identity in Nigeria” and “managing prohibited publication in line with Nigerian law”, meaning that everyone in Lagos and beyond can finally switch off the VPNs that made the ban meaningless.

Meanwhile, it looks like it’s going to be a rough year for freedom in general on the continent. In Uganda, novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija has been arrested and, his lawyer says, tortured in detention for “offensive communication” over tweets he made about President Yoweri Museveni and his son.

In Zimbabwe, freelance reporter Jeffrey Moyo went on trial this week accused of violating immigration laws, a case which critics say is another attempt by the government to stifle media freedom.

A good few of the aforementioned governments and their leaders could benefit from a new resolution or two. But this time maybe let it come from the heart, not from Ecowas or the UN. ■

'Armed bandit' – or 'bandit terrorist'? In Nigeria, the game of the name is deadly

Fola Aina

What's in a name? Quite a lot when the issue is what to call armed outlaws in Nigeria. Over the past two months a controversy has developed over the government's desire to relabel these groups, commonly known as "gunmen", "kidnappers", "warlords" and "criminal elements", as "bandit terrorists".

The government's position has gained traction due to some evidence of linkages between violent crime and Boko Haram. But critics say that the rebranding is designed to deflect blame – and access international support – by rebranding what is essentially a domestic criminal problem as an international terrorist issue.

The name change now seems likely to stick, at least at the governmental level, after a federal high court in Abuja prescribed it and the government confirmed this by gazetting the ruling. Those affected by the violence hope that it signals renewed urgency and resources

in the state's fight against rising insecurity.

Attacks on civilians, including cattle rustling, child abductions, theft, sexual violence and kidnapping for ransom have affected hundreds of thousands of people in local communities across the north-west states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna and beyond.

But human rights defenders worry that calling these bandits "terrorists" will legitimise the use of unsuitable military strategies, while leading to the profiling of the Fulani community, from which many armed bandits hail. This could further exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions at a time when the country is gearing up for what are likely to be fiercely contested polls in February next year.

They also point out that the violence has deep roots – including in the country's worsening farmer-herder conflicts – which are more related to government failings than to radical Islamic narratives or terrorist movements.

Resolving the crisis means dealing with the underlying triggers of the crisis, which include socioeconomic grievances, poverty, inequality, poor governance and climate change dimensions, to name a few.

Until this is done, re-framing "armed bandits" as "bandit terrorists" will be more of a distraction than a cure. ■



Fola Aina is a Doctoral Fellow at the African Leadership Centre at King's College London. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

French disconnection: Mary, a 20-year-old ex-pat from Nigeria, in the apartment she rents in a 'Khaoua' site in Nantes, western France. Khaoua is a 'Social children house' managed by French association Les Apprentis d'Auteuil to accommodate young people under 21 from overseas. Photo: Loic Venance/AFP



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