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The Continent

**Somehow,
the ANC
is still
standing**

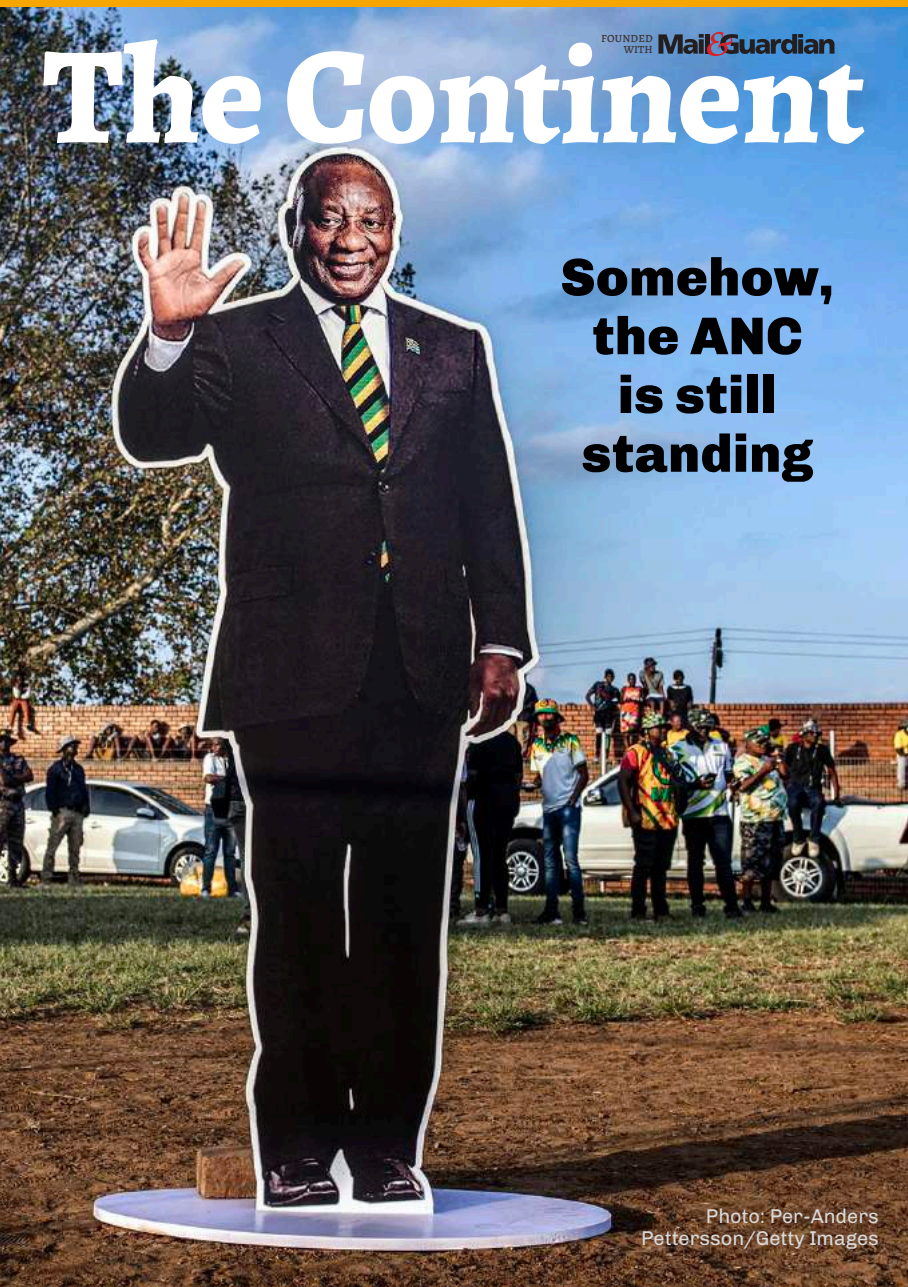


Photo: Per-Anders
Petterson/Getty Images



COVER: This week, voters in South Africa will give the ruling ANC its lowest-ever share of the national tally. The party's three-decade rule has been so dominant that its failures have become those of the country: the power grid is stuttering; crime and corruption are growth industries; unemployment is unfathomably high; and the economy is plodding along far behind its peers. But despite its manifest failures and with 70 political parties and 11 independent candidates also standing, the ANC will likely still form the government and pick the president (p12). Afrophobic policies help its cause (p18) – but its disgruntled ex-president certainly does not (p16).

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UNITED STATES

**'Genocide Joe'
bribes the youth**

With approval ratings low and November elections fast approaching, United States President Joseph Biden has broken out a crowd pleaser: cancelling student loans for 160,000 people – part of an earlier promise to write off \$167-billion in student debt for nearly 5-million Americans. The octogenarian ruler, whom the youth have nicknamed “Genocide Joe”, has angered young progressive voters by continuing to send money and arms to Israel, enabling it to bombard Palestinians in Gaza.



Average Joe: A Pro-Palestine demonstrator, wearing a mask of Joseph Robinette Biden. Photo: Probal Rashid/LightRocket via Getty Images

EGYPT

**Charges for
infamous migrant
drowning dismissed**

A Greek court has thrown out charges against nine Egyptian men accused of causing one of the worst shipwrecks on the Mediterranean sea, saying that the disaster in which 600 people drowned happened in international waters beyond its jurisdiction. In June 2023, a fishing trawler carrying up to 750 people from Libya to Italy, capsized off the Greek town of Pylos. Among the 104 men who survived, nine were charged with people smuggling, illegal entry into Greece, participating in a criminal organisation, and causing a deadly shipwreck.

BRITAIN

**Election coming
too soon for soggy
Tory gravy train**

Under the rain and nearly drowned out by protest music, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called for a 4 July general election. His ruling-party colleagues had hoped he would delay the election, which is likely to be won by the opposition, until October/November. Sunak's Conservative Party typically sell themselves as “a safe pair of hands” but has had five prime ministers in 14 years who botched the Covid-19 response, cut public services, gifted their cronies with public contracts, took the UK out of the EU and promoted the infamous Rwanda migration plan.



Ups and downs: Nepal's Kami Rita has climbed Mount Everest more than any other mountaineer. Photo: Prakash Mathema/AFP

NEPAL

'Everest Man' completes record 30th climb

Nepalese mountaineering guide Kami Rita reached the summit of Mount Everest for the 30th time on Wednesday. It was the second time this month that he was climbing to the world's highest peak. The 54-year-old, whose closest competitor has had 27 successful climbs, completed his first climb back in 1994. In sombre news, Nepalese tourism officials say that four people died on Everest: a Nepalese guide, climbers from Romania and Britain, and Kenyan mountaineer Joshua Cheruiyot Kirui.

NIGERIA

Hundreds of women and children rescued from Boko Haram

Some 350 hostages, who were held captive for months or years by insurgents in northeastern Nigeria, were rescued from a forest this week, the army said. According to the United Nations, 35,000 people have been killed and 2.1-million displaced since 2009 in the campaign of violence by Boko Haram insurgents. Those rescued this week include 209 children, 135 women and six men. They had been held in the Sambisa Forest in Borno, a senior Nigerian army officer said on Monday.

CHAD

PM resigns after disputed Déby win

Chad's transitional prime minister and opposition leader Succès Masra has resigned after unsuccessfully challenging President Mahamat Idriss Déby's victory in the 6 May presidential election. Chad's electoral body declared Déby to have won with 61%, but Masra lodged a petition in the constitutional council, which then ruled to affirm the result within days. Left with no other legal ways to contest the results, Masra dissolved the transitional government on Wednesday as required by law to make way for a new cabinet.

GHANA

Two-year-old painting ace breaks records

Ace-Liam Nana Sam Ankrah, who will turn two in July, first crawled onto a canvas when he was six months old. He has now had 15 of his paintings sold to clients including the First Lady of Ghana, who commissioned him for a piece after attending his first exhibition last December. The painter was recently officially recognised by Guinness World Records as the world's youngest male painter. He lives in Accra with his mother Chantelle Kuukua Eghan, who is also a painter.



Brush with fame: Behold the works of Ace-Liam Nana Sam Ankrah, and the artist himself. That's him on the right.

CLIMATE

Angola and Algeria double up on oil

Fossil-fuel megagiant TotalEnergies signed off on two new oil fields in Angola this week, signalling the start of a \$6-billion deepwater oil production project. The country produces about 1.1-million barrels of crude oil a day and plans to ramp that up to 2-million by 2028. The wealth from this has historically poured into the offshore bank accounts of the ruling elite. In Algeria, which produces about 1.5-million barrels of crude a day, the energy minister told Parliament on Thursday that the country has set aside \$3.5-billion to intensify oil exploration.

GEOPOLITICS

Russia adds new tool to its Africa arsenal

On Tuesday, Russia's deputy prime minister met the commander of Uganda's army (who also happens to be the son of President Yoweri Museveni). Russian news agency and/or propaganda tool *Sputnik* said the two talked about "conflict in Africa's hot spots" – and how to resolve it. Muhoozi Kainerugaba only recently got the job and is being positioned as a potential successor for his father. For decades, the Kampala regime was the go-to East Africa security partner for the West, but that is changing as Kenya's William Ruto embraces the role.

DJIBOUTI

GMO mozzies sent to wage war on malaria

In an effort to eliminate malaria, a batch of genetically engineered mosquitoes were released into the Ambouli area of Djibouti city on Thursday. Developed by a UK biotechnology company, the male mosquitoes have a gene that kills their female offspring before they reach maturity. Burkina Faso ran a similar trial in 2018. If this latest one works, Djibouti will expand the GMO mosquitoes to other parts of the country. The WHO estimates that malaria kills over 500,000 Africans a year.

SOUTH AFRICA

Lax bird-flu vaxing vexes fowl farmers

Astra Foods, the largest chicken producer in South Africa, told *Reuters* on Monday that the country's delays in rolling out a broad vaccination programme mean that the poultry industry is still exposed to the risks of bird flu. South Africa lost about a third of its chicken stock last year to the disease in the worst outbreak ever to hit the country, which prompted neighbouring countries to impose a ban on chicken imports, further hitting the sector.



ICC what you did there: Before he was president of Kenya, President William Ruto was tried with crimes against humanity by the same court that has now charged Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu with war crimes. Charges against Ruto were withdrawn after witnesses were threatened.

Mozambique

Frelimo brass linked to DRC coup leaders

Ties between the failed coup and a local liberation stalwart continue a history of Mozambique housing indecorous outsiders.

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

On Sunday, armed men entered the presidential palace in Kinshasa. Live-streaming themselves on Facebook, they proclaimed, “Félix, you are out.”

DRC President Félix Tshisekedi was not there. The coup failed and its leader Christian Malanga was killed. Little more is known about their plan to create a “New Zaire”. But a LinkedIn post from eight months ago connects Malanga to Alberto Chipande, a long-time leader in Mozambique’s ruling Frelimo party. A caption in the accompanying video reads: “I thank the leadership of Mozambique for advising #NewZaire in security reform.”

Chipande was Mozambique’s first minister of defence. Credited with firing the first gunshots in the country’s

independence struggle on 25 September 1964, he remains a member of Frelimo’s political commission. A legislator in the national assembly, he represents Cabo Delgado, the restive province where Rwandan troops are helping Mozambican security to put out a brutal insurgency.

In the video, the men declare that “the struggle continues” but seem to agree it should not be violent. Malanga says: “Now it’s economics. It’s not about killing.” Chipande echoes him: “It’s different. No more killing. Now it’s about the economy, development and wellbeing.” The Chipande Foundation, associated with the Frelimo leader, has issued a statement distancing itself from the coup plotter.

Malanga’s Mozambique ties extend beyond the post. He co-owned Global Solutions, a firm registered in Chimoio and focused on mining and security. Another co-owner, a US national, was arrested in the Kinshasa coup attempt.

Mozambicans criticise Frelimo, many of whose top members are now local oligarchs, for turning the country into a halfway house for dubious foreigners arriving under the pretence of commercial activity. Examples include the family of drug lords Pablo Escobar, who lived in Maputo during the 90s, and Gilberto “Fuminho” Aparecido dos Santos, who fled there in 2020 but was arrested and extradited within weeks of his arrival. ■

Kenya

Washington completes the Disneyfication of William Ruto

In a tradition that changes cast but not much of the script, the US has named its new man in Africa.

Kiri Rupiah

With parts of his country still reeling from deadly flooding, Kenya's President William Ruto is on an official state visit to the US – the first by an African leader in 16 years. It coincides with the arrival of 1,000 Kenyan cops in Haiti, for a US-backed security mission against the armed gangs running much of the country.

For US President Joe Biden, this is an opportunity to refocus on Africa at a time when rivals China and Russia are gaining influence. For Ruto, it's a big payday from the other constituency he has courted since coming into power: the global stage.

The “historic visit” was only briefly overshadowed by Ruto's domestic perception as a leader who preaches “we have to live within our means” but lives

with little regard to said means. Kenyans lashed out at news his team hired a private jet for an estimated \$1.5-million to take an entourage of more than 30 people, including a popular comedian, and his own kids, for the four-day trip to the US.

Save for being stood up by actor Tyler Perry, Ruto likely considered the trip a success. The US designated Kenya as a major non-NATO ally, making it the first “sub-Saharan” African country to receive the designation. On Friday, Kenya, Microsoft and UAE firm G24 signed a letter of intent for a \$1-billion investment package. And, with the approval of Congress, Kenya will become the first African country to receive funding under the US' Chips and Science Act.

And Ruto, who was once indicted by the International Criminal Court, is now a darling of the West – its go-to on security and climate finance in East Africa. ■



Top billing: Kenya's first lady Rachel Ruto and her husband William, with Jill Biden and her spouse Joseph. Photo: Al Drago/Bloomberg via Getty Images

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Morocco

The ‘desert dump’ for migrants

North African countries are using some of the “migration management” funding from the European Union for so-called “desert dumps” – arresting black people they suspect are headed to Europe, and abandoning them inland. Intercepted and held at a desert detention centre, a group of 18 Senegalese shared their ongoing ordeal with The Continent.

Borso Tall

Weeks after the Moroccan navy intercepted their boat en route to Spain’s Canary Islands, 18 Senegalese migrants say they are now on hunger strike, to protest their ongoing detention in Bir Gandouz, Western Sahara.

The migrants documented their interception at sea in a shaky grainy video later shared with *The Continent*.

“It’s really painful. We are only 500 kilometres from Spain! We sailed all the way here only to get caught after spending more than 500,000 CFA francs (\$826)!” one man exclaims. Between curses and sardonic laughter, another man on the boat says: “I really don’t know what to think right now.”

The migrants were taken to Bir Gandouz where they met others from Guinea and The Gambia. A few days

later, on 9 May, they reached out to *The Continent* for the first time.

“We are super tired. They left us here. They don’t want to let us leave or go home. We just need help. They serve bad food. We don’t eat or drink enough. We don’t sleep well. We just want to go home with dignity,” says a man in another shaky video. “We call upon the state of Senegal: your sons who are here are tired. We were 28 Senegalese, 10 fled. We are practically in the desert.”

A couple of days later, the migrants staged a protest demanding that they are repatriated to Senegal. In a short video of the protest, joined by migrants from Guinea, a lone Moroccan guard is seen overseeing it in silence. In a separate voice note, they say local authorities have promised that their return to Senegal is imminent – they are just waiting on a decision from Mauritania to allow their

bus to cross its territory.

But this decision is complicated. Since 2018, Mauritania has required all travellers between West Africa and Morocco to hold a transit visa called *Accès-Visa-Maroc*. “Without this visa, access to Morocco by air and land is impossible via Mauritania,” says Mouhamed Ag Ahmedou, an author and Malian civil society leader. This effectively killed the Senegal-Mauritania-Morocco migration route but it’s unclear why Moroccan authorities, who issue these visas in the first place, now need Mauritanian permission for the outbound bus to take the 18 back to Senegal.

“We are super tired. They left us here. They don’t want to let us leave or go home. We just need help. They serve bad food. We don’t eat or drink enough. We don’t sleep well. We just want to go home with dignity.”

Between 11 and 14 May, the migrants went eerily silent. In the meantime, local media picked the story up from clips on social media. When the migrants reached out again, on 18 May, they said their phones had been confiscated, save for one that they managed to hide. They also said they were beaten for informing the outside world, and had begun a hunger strike, hoping to attract the empathy of the Senegalese consulate in Morocco.

The ordeal of these 28 migrants is not isolated. In a year-long investigation

released this week, UK-based Lighthouse Reports revealed that European Union funding is being used for an ongoing wave of “desert dumps” across Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The investigation spoke to 50 people who survived being dumped. All were black people. Some had been captured off the streets in North Africa in clandestine operations that disregarded the legal status of their presence there.

The Guineans and some of the Gambians that the 28 met in Bir Gandouz have since been taken back home after their countries reportedly paid for flights, but there is little indication that the Senegalese government will follow suit. From its social media announcements, the Senegalese foreign affairs ministry appears preoccupied with forging new partnerships with the EU and renewing traditional relations with neighbouring countries. Despite being repeatedly tagged on social media videos shared by the 18 men in detention, Senegal’s President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko and the foreign affairs minister didn’t respond.

But the new government in Dakar also appears nonchalant about preventing people from leaving in the first place, which its EU partners would prefer. Receiving French leftwing leader Jean-Luc Melenchon in Dakar, Prime Minister Sonko said in a wide-ranging speech that “migrants are taking the path of resources plundered by Westerners”.

Along that path however, are EU-funded anti-migration enforcers waiting to stop and humiliate them. ■

The bakkie stops here:
ANC campaigners on the
stump ahead of South
Africa's elections on 29
May. Photo: Per-Anders
Pettersson/Getty Images



This is (still) ANC country

The big takeaway from this election is less about the weaknesses of the African National Congress, and more about its enduring strength.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Simon Allison in Johannesburg

There are plenty of good reasons for South Africans not to vote for the African National Congress.

The oldest liberation movement in Africa has now led the government of South Africa for 30 years. Over time, its weaknesses have compounded, and been repeatedly exposed under the relentless glare of media and civil society.

So dominant has its rule been that its failures have become those of the country, too: the corruption, the crime, the failure

to create jobs, the rising cost of living, the glaring inequalities, and the lack of preparedness for the unfolding climate crisis. In the most obvious metaphor for its decline, the party in power can no longer keep the power on – except, curiously, in the months leading up to next week's election, when the state utility burned billions of rands worth of diesel to temporarily suspend rolling blackouts.

And yet, on Wednesday, citizens of Africa's largest economy will almost certainly vote the ANC into office once again. Its victory will not be as emphatic as usual – the party has never previously

won less than 62% in a national election – and its majority may not even be absolute. It may have to form a coalition. But even the most damning polls suggest that 40% of the country will once more put their faith in the party of Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela (and, more recently and less laudably, of Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa). That number is edging higher as the election draws nearer.

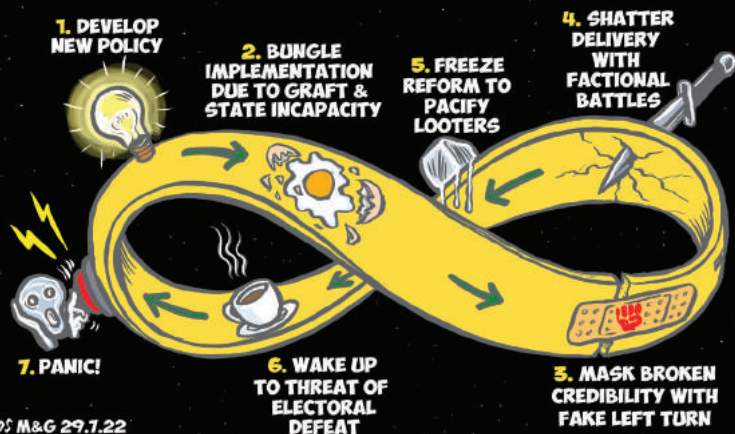
In some countries, support for the ruling party is vastly inflated by gerrymandering and ballot-rigging. This is not the case in South Africa, where there is little suggestion that the election will be anything other than one where people can vote freely. The ANC really is still the most popular party in the country.

This is partly due to the “liberation dividend” – a loyalty enjoyed by many liberation movements when they

eventually do take power. This loyalty is not entirely misplaced. For all its faults, South Africa has plenty of reasons to be grateful to the ANC. It ushered in multiparty democracy in 1994, and avoided a civil war. In office, it dismantled the apartheid regime and extended basic services – designed by the apartheid government to service only the white minority – to most of the country. It also enabled the creation of one of the world’s most liberal Constitutions, and an environment where media are able to publish in the public interest, often detailing the ANC’s failures.

For many voters, especially those who lived through the horrors of apartheid, nothing the ANC can do is worse than the government it replaced. This point is often overlooked by foreign commentators with short memories. In an especially

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egregious example of this, Britain's *The Times* wrote last week that "30 years after black people got the vote, South Africa is the most unequal society on Earth" – as if, somehow, South Africa was more equal under white supremacist rule.

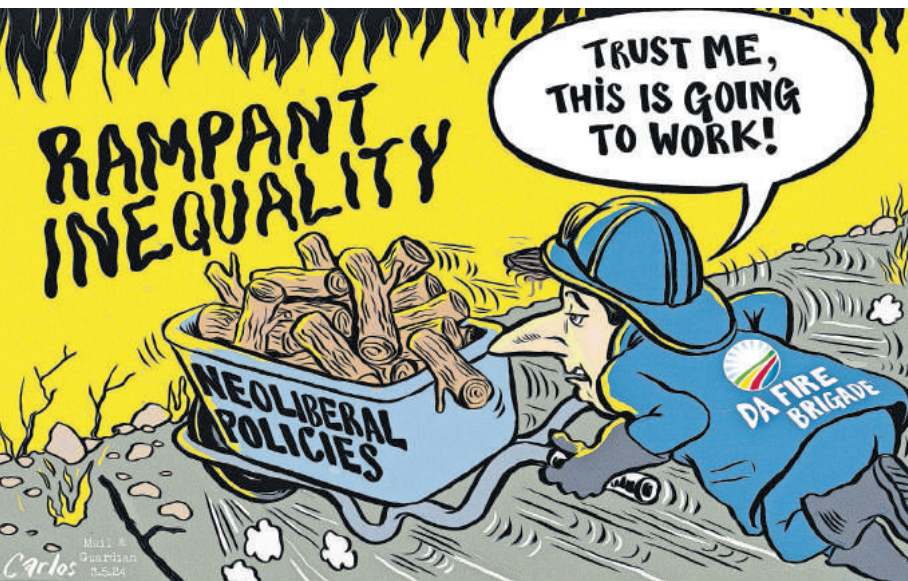
The ghosts of apartheid

It helps the ANC enormously that the official opposition has done so little to banish apartheid's ghosts. The Democratic Alliance has had just one black leader in its history, Mmusi Maimane – and it booted him after a disappointing electoral performance in 2019. Former DA leader Tony Leon later described Maimane's tenure as a "failed experiment" and, sure enough, the party replaced Maimane with a white man.

Fed up, a succession of senior black officials have left, reinforcing perceptions it is a white-run party that caters to elites.

"The racism I experienced in the DA was not overt. Rather, it was that less honest, covert, paternalistic, difficult-to-put-your-finger-on-it kind of racism," said Herman Mashaba, a former DA mayor who quit to start his own party, writing in the *Mail & Guardian* in 2021. "It was the kind of racism that questioned why we were spending time delivering services to informal settlements when they don't represent 'traditional DA voters' and 'those who pay the rates.'"

In response to a question from *The Continent*, the DA's leader John Steenhuisen said comments like these came from people who were "bitter and angry" after losing party leadership contests. But he appeared tone deaf when it came to the sensitive issue of race relations in South Africa. When asked if the country was ready for another white man as president, he compared himself to



Barack Obama, “a minority in America, and he was able to get elected”.

The prospect of John Steenhuisen getting himself elected is slim, however. He has said that winning just 22% of the vote would be a major achievement for the DA – a strikingly limited ambition for a well-established opposition party operating in a free and fair political environment, and competing against a corrupt and scandal-prone ruling party.

Other opposition parties are making plenty of noise, but failing to attract support in the kind of numbers that would pose a real threat to the ANC. The Economic Freedom Fighters, led by Julius Malema, is on track for around 10% of the vote, according to polls, matching its performance from last time.

Newcomers uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), led by former president Jacob Zuma, are the biggest surprise. Polls put them at around 13%, but their appeal is largely limited to areas of the country – like KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng – with large Zulu populations. And the Constitutional Court last week ruled that Zuma, sentenced to time in jail for contempt of court, cannot stand for the national Parliament, which thwarts some of their higher ambitions.

But while there is no doubt that the ANC will remain the most popular party in the country, it should still be worried about the decline in its support. The extent of its worries will depend on the



exact percentage of that decline. Should it retain over 50% of the vote, then it will have a majority of seats in the National Assembly – and that will allow it to appoint the president unilaterally. If it dips to 40% or below, it will need to work with at least one major opposition group – the DA, the EFF or MK – in order to form a government. If the track record of local government coalitions is anything to go by, this will be a messy process.

The most likely scenario is that the ANC receives somewhere between 40% and 50% of the vote. This should allow it to form a coalition government with smaller parties – outfits like the newly-formed Rise Mzansi, whose policies are strikingly similar to those of the ANC, but who position themselves as the “grown-ups” in the room in any coalition scenario. They will be able to extract minor concessions, but won’t be in a position to shape the government as a whole.

This is still ANC country, after all – at least until 2029. ■

Want to know more about next week’s election? *The Continent*’s partner Democracy in Africa is helping organise an X Space that will break down all that is at stake, with people in the know. Set a reminder [here](#).

Zuma's revenge

The former South African leader won't be president again – but he could still decide this election.

Andile Zulu

The biggest shock of this electoral season was former president Jacob Zuma's announcement that he was running for political office again – but not on the ticket of the African National Congress, which he served during the anti-apartheid struggle and then as president for two terms. Instead, Zuma is leading a brand-new, upstart party called uMkhonto weSizwe, which controversially takes its name (which translates as “Spear of the Nation”) from the ANC's armed wing during the struggle.

The new party is polling extremely well, attracting around 13% of the vote in some predictions, which would make it the third-largest opposition group in the country. Zuma's past, however, may finally have caught up with him.

The former president of South Africa was this week barred from running for Parliament by the Constitutional Court, due to a previous criminal conviction. As the president is chosen from among members of Parliament, this means he can't be president either.

The judgment came as a relief to his critics, who view him as a corrupt, lawless and destabilising force in South African politics.

That criminal conviction, handed down in 2021 by the same court, is a good example of what those critics are worried about. It came after Zuma repeatedly refused to testify before an official inquiry into widespread corruption – “state capture”, as South Africans call it – that happened while he was president.

He was supposed to serve 15 months in prison, but was released on medical parole after a few days behind bars. While he was in jail, there were deadly riots in parts of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, leaving more than 350 people dead and causing 50-billion rands (\$2.7-billion) in damage to the economy.

But despite his history of personal scandals and his disastrous tenure as president of the republic – which ended when the ruling party recalled him in 2017 – Zuma remains an enormously popular figure in some parts of the country.

There are three reasons for this.

First, the failures of his successor, Cyril Ramaphosa. When Ramaphosa succeeded Zuma, he promised to usher in a “new dawn” – eradicating corruption, reducing unemployment and ending the energy crisis. But that new dawn never arrived.

Instead, under Ramaphosa's neoliberal policies – including austerity measures that have slashed government spending



Poll vaulter: Jacob Zuma's new party uMkhonto we Sizwe is projected to gut ANC support. Photo: Ihsaan Haffejee/Anadolu via Getty Images

on public goods and social services – the economy has stagnated, in the short term, at least. Zuma, on the other hand, promises radical transformation in the name of the economically marginalised and politically neglected majority. It is a compelling campaign pitch, even if Zuma's own time in government did little to advance that agenda.

Second, Zuma is the most adaptable and strategic – not to mention Machiavellian – politician in South Africa today. He has a gift for discrediting his opponents and adopting populist talking points, always presenting himself as leading the political struggle against the economic elites who have frustrated South Africa's attempts to redress the toxic legacies of apartheid.

No matter that, all too often, this populism is hollow: just take his signature “radical economic transformation” policy, announced during his second term in office, which was neither radical nor transformative – unless you were within Zuma's extensive patronage network.

Finally, Zuma excels at portraying himself as an anti-establishment figure who is unjustly persecuted by white capitalists and black sell-outs.

Zuma merges this narrative with appeals to Zulu nationalism. He is proud of his own Zulu identity, and uses this to appeal to the substantial numbers of Zulu people who feel that KwaZulu-Natal, their ancestral home, has been severely neglected by the ruling party. This appeal to Zulu culture, at times militaristic and chauvinistic, can translate into a significant number of votes.

It is these votes that keep Zuma relevant. With the ruling party likely to need to form a coalition to stay in power, MK's large projected share of the vote makes it a potential partner, and Zuma a potential kingmaker. But what price would he demand for his support – and what would it cost the country? ■

Andile Zulu is a political essayist who runs the Born Free Blues blog



Cutting edge:
The border fence between South Africa and Zimbabwe near Musina. Photo: Phill Magakoe/AFP

Blame the neighbours, build a bigger wall

Anti-immigrant sentiment has become a major theme in the run-up to South Africa's elections.

Jan Bornman

Last week, state investigators conducted simultaneous raids at all five of South Africa's refugee reception centres. They said they were looking for evidence of corruption, but the timing – with an election around the corner – was telling.

ActionSA, a minor opposition party, welcomed the move. “It has taken this government too long to finally see reason that South Africa, and its appallingly porous borders, has an immigration crisis,” it said in a statement.

Porous borders, illegal foreigners and “the immigration crisis” are a big part of

ActionSA's electoral campaign. The party is led by former Johannesburg mayor Herman Mashaba, who was accused by immigrant rights groups of inciting Afrophobic violence while in office.

Another minor party, the Patriotic Alliance, is even more explicit in its attacks on foreigners. Its leader, Gayton McKenzie – a convicted bank robber – has warned undocumented migrants that this is the year that “we are coming for you”.

In January, McKenzie ran up and down along South Africa's border with Zimbabwe near Beitbridge in Limpopo with members of his party. They attempted to “intercept” people crossing

the border without documents.

In echoes of rightwing sentiments heard in Europe and the United States, the Patriotic Alliance wants to build a wall along South Africa's 4,862km-long land border, and blames undocumented foreigners for South Africa's high crime statistics, and for abusing social services. These claims do not stand up to scrutiny.

"What we find is, there is really no basis in terms of the evidence available to suggest that there is a correlation between the increase in undocumented migrants and crime," said Ringisai Chikohomero, a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies. "And there is no scientific basis to suggest that foreigners are putting pressure on social services."

Neither the Patriotic Alliance nor ActionSA are making much headway in the polls, with both polling at 3% or less. But these ideas are finding their way into the rhetoric of mainstream parties, and even the government, led by the African National Congress.

This was evident not only in the raids on refugee centres, but also in a controversial policy document by the department of home affairs. This calls for South Africa to temporarily withdraw from two major international agreements on refugee protection, and would make it significantly more difficult for asylum seekers to obtain citizenship.

Lawyers for Human Rights said that the government policy document "does not read coherently, nor does it provide credible sources for the statements it makes, or the statistics it provides. As a public policy document, this is



Borderline disorder personality: Small parties are stoking Afrophobic hatred.

unacceptable."

Despite this criticism, the ANC has made this proposed policy the foundation of its own immigration policy.

For migrants already in South Africa – many of whom have lived through previous cycles of Afrophobic violence – the hardening political rhetoric could have serious consequences.

Jean Bwasa, a former refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the founder of Rights 2 Live Africa, said: "Every election cycle, the migrant becomes the scapegoat because they are supposedly stealing jobs. But we don't take into account that migrants are creating jobs in this country and they also contribute to this society."

"People like Gayton McKenzie and Herman Mashaba don't necessarily see this. So it is important that we single out the contributions of migrants in South Africa," Bwasa said. "At the moment we live in fear because we know it is an election year. We are very cautious where we go, what we do, and what we say." ■

Jan Bornman is a freelance journalist based in Johannesburg, South Africa



Photo: Marco Longari/AFP

PHOTO ESSAY

On the campaign trail



Thank you, next: (Above) A man waves the flag, calling vacant land squatters to a meeting. (Below) Supporters of the new Rise Mzansi party gather for a community meeting. Photo: Marco Longari/AFP



Chain reaction: An uMkhonto we Sizwe supporter protests against the court ruling that declared ex-president Jacob Zuma ineligible to stand in the elections. Photo: Marco Longari/AFP



Code red: A crowd welcomes the Economic Freedom Fighters party president Julius Malema in Inanda, KwaZulu-Natal. Photo: Per-Anders Pettersson/Getty Images



Playing the field: A band of musicians roll out their top brass as they wait to perform at a campaign rally in Cape Town.

Photo: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP



Couch to MK: A supporter of the ANC meets with members of the uMkhonto we Sizwe party in Munsieville near Krugersdorp.

Photo: Emmanuel Croset/AFP



In the middle, Cyril: President Cyril Ramaphosa out on the stump during an ANC door-to-door canvassing tour of Ekurhuleni.

Photo: Olympia de Maismont/AFP



Neighbourhood watch: A supporter of the African Congress for Transformation looks over other parties' election posters in Sharpeville.

Photo: Olympia de Maismont/AFP

Are elections on the continent more free than fair?

If freedom and fairness are essential traits of high-quality elections, there's mixed news from Africa.

On the positive side, Afrobarometer surveys in 39 countries show that Africans overwhelmingly report feeling “completely free” (65%) or “somewhat free” (20%) to vote for the candidate of their choice without feeling pressured.

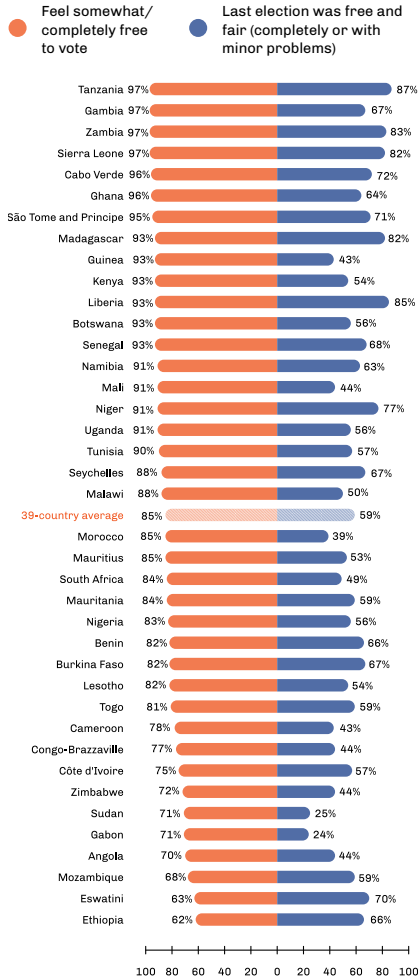
This sense of freedom is almost universal (97% “completely” or “somewhat” free) in the Gambia, Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania. It is far less widespread in Ethiopia (62%) and Eswatini (63%).

A far slimmer majority (59%) report that their last national elections were free and fair (“completely” or with “minor problems”). A third (34%) disagree.

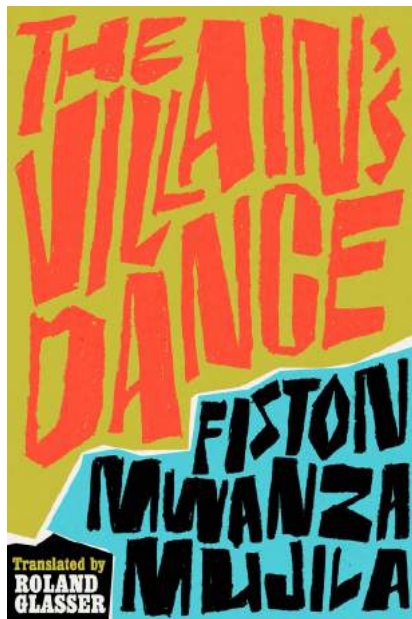
These assessments vary dramatically across countries: Almost nine out of 10 Tanzanians (87%) and Liberians (85%) report generally free and fair elections, but just one-fourth of Gabonese (24%) and Sudanese (25%) say the same.

On average across 31 countries surveyed consistently since 2014/2015, the perception of elections as generally free and fair has dipped from 64% to 58%.

Data: Free and fair elections | 39 African countries | 2021/2023



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



Intrigue and wonder in a surreal Zaire

A dive into DRC's lost days leaves you wanting more.

Jacqueline Nyathi

Zaire, as the Democratic Republic of Congo was known for a time, loomed large in the imagination: a place of excess, rumba and untold riches in the centre of Africa. Its larger than life leader, Mobutu

Sese Seko, was always in the news in his leopardskin hat. Fiston Mwanza Mujila's story is set in those heady days.

When civil war broke out in neighbouring Angola, Zaireans flocked to harvest – and smuggle – diamonds from the wild and ungoverned north. Few would become rich themselves; all chased the dream that they might.

At the centre of Mujila's narrative is the Madonna, Tshiamuena, a mysterious and possibly omniscient figure who mothers the miners who cross her path, and who has a million tales about her past and "parallel lives" (including in Japan, where her name was Fumie Ogawa).

Other narrators include young men who start out on the streets of Lubumbashi, and who take fantastical life journeys. There's also the mysterious man who catches them up in his net; to our relief, he turns out to be a shadowy political figure, a mere mortal in the end. And then there's a hanger-on, the hapless Austrian writer, Franz, who falls in love with the mystery, intrigue and exoticism of that time and place.

Potent in its vivid descriptions of a lost time, *The Villain's Dance* will live in your head for a long while. It does the tremendous work of telling the story of a people, place and time that are rarely visualised in Anglophone African literature except in as for wars and coups.

We would have liked to read much more about the mysterious Madonna. Perhaps she'll appear in a novel of her own, to explain all of those past lives. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"They say the party rules, but they ain't seen nothing yet."



Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

- 1_** Mahamat Idriss Déby was recently declared the president of which country?
- 2_** Which African president went on a four-day state visit to the US this week?
- 3_** What is South Africa's ruling party?
- 4_** What was Kinshasa called before 1966?
- 5_** True or false: Kinshasa is Congo-Brazzaville's capital city.
- 6_** Which city is the mining capital of the DRC?
- 7_** In which country is Lake Turkana (pictured) found?
- 8_** What was the original name of the lake?
- 9_** What day is celebrated across the continent on 25 May?
- 10_** It commemorates which organisation's founding? (We'll accept both old or new name.)

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

Some weeks we find ourselves with a little *too* little to write about, a challenge we gladly accept because it means our leaders have taken a few days off from ruining absolutely everything. And then there are weeks like this where we can barely catch our breath.

A bit like Britain's prime minister, Rishi Sunak, who must be hyperventilating by now after looking at the polls following his zany decision to announce the date of the UK's next election while dressed as a sad and unusually soggy kitty cat. The erstwhile colonisers will go to the polls on 4 July, which has caught lots of people with their pants down. Mostly in his own party though – his MPs are furious, likely because it cuts short not just their political careers, but also their state-sponsored holidays, which were just about to start.

Can't exactly blame them, though. We could all do with a fancy holiday.

Fortunately, we can vacation vicariously through our own homegrown jetsetting fave – the current holder of the Dora the Explorer title, ya boi Billy!

This week William Kipchirchir Sameoi Arap Ruto – as his mother probably calls him when he breaks something, eg the

spirits of Kenyan taxpayers – jetted off to the US to visit Tyler Perry.

Excellent timing for Billy, as the trip came just as the International Criminal Court's top prosecutor announced he was seeking an arrest warrant for the leaders of both Hamas and Israel – notably including American bestie Benjamin Netanyahu. The US would no doubt have

been superkeen to pick Billy's brains, seeing as he is an old pro at dodging arrest by the ICC.

Unfortunately his main mission seems to have failed: Tyler Perry reportedly stood our Billy up on their date. Awkward! Still, at least the prez got to meet celebrities like "Genocide Joe" Biden (as the kids are calling the US incumbent these

days), and NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal.

Shaq's cool, no cap – we'll give Billy that, free of charge. Unlike the private jet he chartered to get there. But why should he not travel in luxury? Just because he has proposed new taxes as part of the Finance Bill 2024 which has citizens in an uproar, and there is a shortage of vaccines due to unpaid bills, that does not mean he should not travel in style!

Sure, earlier this month we could have sworn we heard him say, "We have to cut

The ballad of Billy the Kid



CONTINENTAL DRIFT
Samira Sawlani



Love Shaq: Basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal poses with a fan who is said to have travelled all the way from Africa!

spending”, but maybe he was practicing his French and actually said “*Oui*, have to cut spending.” Or maybe he meant “you” have to cut spending, and was just getting his pronouns mixed up – an occupational hazard for men of his generation struggling to navigate the 21st Century.

Back home, our stressful week began when reports emerged from the Democratic Republic of the Congo that there had been a coup attempt in Kinshasa. According to authorities – and his own Facebook livestream – Christian Malanga, the leader of the so-called “New Zaire” movement, led a band of armed men in the storming of the presidential palace. Footage showed them entering the Palas de la Nation while waving the flag of Zaire (deadnaming the DRC – not the greatest look). It did not go well.

The army said Malanga was killed while resisting arrest and named three US nationals, including Malanga’s son Marcel, who were also involved in the

coup attempt. Which came as quite a shock – who would have ever thought Americans would try to overthrow a foreign government in this day and age? We thought they only tried that on their own government these days.

Another failed audition for *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, we guess.

Speaking of the Coupdashians, Niger this week released a joint statement with the US confirming that the withdrawal of American troops from the country has begun, and will wrap up in September.

This comes after Niamey suspended its military agreement with Washington, with Prime Minister Lamine Zeine telling the *Washington Post* that the Americans did nothing “while terrorists killed people” and had tried to dictate who Niger should be friends with.

As exhausted as we are, it’s probably not as tired as Chad’s new president Mahamat Déby, who was sworn in this week. (As opposed to being sworn *at*, which all new presidents have to put up with, at least until they get their tear-gas dispensers up and running). All that pomp and circumstance must have been exhausting, but we’re sure Ruto will give him some tips on de-stressing when he gets back from his vay-kay.

No such luck for us, no sooner has the dust settled in Chad than we another electoral rollercoaster kicks off in South Africa, which goes to the polls on Wednesday. Next week, we’ll catch each other up on where the people of the South placed their “X” – as opposed to their “ex” Jacob Zuma – if you catch our *Drift*. ■

Developing countries are owed a break on their crushing loans

This would stabilise economies, dislodge the debt jam and help lenders avoid future defaults.

Ishac Diwan and Vera Songwe

For the first time in two years, some low-income and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) can access the bond market. Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Bahrain, all with credit ratings that fall three or four tiers below the level considered low risk, issued bonds on the international market. But many others are in dire need of cash and face punishing interest rates – an ongoing crisis.

After 2010, a spike in medium-term loans helped developing countries to fund critical infrastructure projects. Typically, these loans would be rolled over, but this became impossible as economic policies in major economies drove up interest rates; lending from China dropped; the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic lingered; and fuel and food prices surged.

Moreover, global support for developing economies dwindled prematurely. By 2022, the G20 had ended its Debt Service Suspension Initiative, international financial institutions had reduced lending, and no new allocations of special drawing rights (SDRs, the International Monetary Fund's reserve asset) were announced.

As a result, developing countries have faced foreign-exchange shortages and been forced to devalue their currencies – the number of LMICs that devalued their currencies by more than 10% rose from eight in 2021 to 36 in 2022 and 24 in 2023.

Amidst this ongoing cash crisis, we, at the Finance for Development Lab, propose a liquidity bridge: pre-emptive refinancing that would extend the maturity of developing country's debts by 5-10 years.

Creating a liquidity bridge remains the most effective way to stabilize developing economies, for four reasons.

First, up to 34 developing countries' debt-servicing obligations are now estimated to exceed 15% of revenue. With the median debt-service burden at 23% in this group, they are unlikely to successfully refinance their current debt.

Second, faced with high interest rates and high debt-servicing obligations, countries like Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and Tunisia are forced to implement austerity measures, which impede investments in human and physical capital, aggravate social tensions, and hinder climate initiatives.



When the wheels come off: As debt mounts, economies stall, leading to more debt and default. Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

Third, multilateral development banks are not equipped to finance every illiquid developing country. To help Kenya re-enter the bond market, the IMF increased its lending to five times its quota, while the World Bank pledged \$12 billion. Extending such substantial financial support to all debt-distressed developing countries would not be feasible. The cash-strapped developing countries collectively owe more than \$40 billion annually to investors and China – more than three times the total flows from development banks to them.

Lastly, even countries that have successfully regained market access are not out of the woods. Kenya's annual debt service, for example, stands at around 25% of exports. If it continues to roll over maturities at an interest above its growth rate, its debt will increase rapidly, raising the risk of default.

Countries that have previously defaulted are struggling to restructure their debts. Zambia's restructuring

agreement, which required three years of intense negotiations with private investors, is a prime example. That is why pre-emptive refinancing is a preferable solution for illiquid countries, compared to risking mass insolvency in the future.

Kenya's recent liquidity injection offers a model for avoiding such a scenario, but there is significant room for improvement: debt rollovers must become cheaper and international institutions should scale up their financing more rapidly. Encouragingly, the IMF and World Bank have already started to increase their support, and private-sector financiers have come back to the table. But improved coordination among these various stakeholders, along with more coherent and transparent rules, is crucial. ■

Ishac Diwan is Research Director at the Finance for Development Lab. Vera Songwe is Senior Adviser at the Bank for International Settlements' Financial Stability Institute. © Project Syndicate 1995–2024

The custodians of democracy couldn't realise it in their own polls

The chaos of the Sierra Leone bar association's elections cloud more than just lawyers' hopes.

Amadu Wurie Barrie

On 18 May, the Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA) held elections for seven key positions, aiming for a fresh start. Instead, the process provided further evidence of the country's current crisis of democracy.

The SLBA's own Memorandum and Articles of Association says the election of the association president should be presided over by the most senior lawyer present. Instead, Francis Ben Kaifala, the anti-corruption commissioner, took on the role, overreaching his status.

His subsequent actions (which include allegedly distributing unverified voting slips to unverified voters and restricting access to the voting hall) are believed to have been designed to promote the candidature of Tuma Adama Gento-Kamara, who is seen to be affiliated with the ruling party.

The losing candidates – such as Wara Serry-Kamal, who is reportedly affiliated with the opposition, and Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah, who maintains no party affiliations – vehemently condemned the

process as representing the “killing of democracy.” They refused to accept the outcome, triggering a swift and intense public response, with many Sierra Leoneans venting their frustration and concern on social media.

The SLBA has once again divided the country, as it did in the aftermath of another flawed and bitterly contested election in 2023.

The SLBA has once again divided the country, as it did in the aftermath of the bitterly contested election in 2023.

If legal professionals cannot conduct their own elections without chaos and controversy, to whom should Sierra Leone turn to to plot a path back to the rule of law and democratic order or justice and accountability? ■



Amadu Wurie Barrie works at the University of Makeni. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Right field: A banner supporting Palestine towers over the crowd at the first leg of the CAF final between Esperance Sportive de Tunis and Egypt's Al-Ahly on Saturday.

Photo: Fethi Belaid/AFP



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