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The Continent

**The battle
for facts**

*– Maria Ressa on
this ‘untenable’
moment*

Photo: Joel Saget/AFP



THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

More than 70% of all people now live under authoritarian regimes. Filipino journalist Maria Ressa knows a thing or two about this. Her Nobel Peace Prize came after her newsroom *Rappler* investigated Rodrigo Duterte, who was president at the time. Lawsuits, threats and a flood of online hate followed. Duterte and his successor – the son of Ferdinand Marcos, whose regime looted the country for decades – came to power by manipulating the algorithms of tech platforms. With that experience, Ressa is warning the world about attacks on facts. In an interview with *The Continent*, she says we should be very worried. And the tech companies have to do better (p11).

Inside:

- **Angola:** The first general strike since independence (p7)
- **Ghana:** President sacks his finance minister/cousin (p8)
- **Obituary:** The skies are now faster with record-holder Kiptum's passing (p16)
- **Coastal life:** The old ship that took the fish (p18)
- **Nigeria:** Prohibition is on the books but the liquor industry lobbyists are circling (p21)
- **Review:** When dystopia becomes real life (p24)



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ZAMBIA

Authorities battle to contain deadly cholera outbreak

A cholera outbreak in Zambia that began in October has killed 400 people and infected at least 10,000 others so far. The country's largest sports stadium has

now been converted into a treatment facility and the Zambian government has restricted gatherings and rolled out surveillance for possible cases. The outbreak came in the wake of Cyclone Freddy, which flooded large swathes of southern Africa at the start of 2023, demonstrating the cost in life and liberty of the climate crisis that industrialised nations thrust upon Africans.



Crowd control: President Paul Biya has ruled Cameroon for 42 years and is seeking a seventh consecutive term in office in the October polls. Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP

CAMEROON

Biya's goons guilty, but get slap on wrist

A Swiss court of appeal upheld two judgments against six of President Paul Biya's guards, who assaulted a journalist in 2019. Adrien Kreuze was covering an

anti-Biya protest outside a Geneva hotel that the longtime Cameroonian ruler frequents, when the men beat him and took his phone. In court, their lawyer asked for immunity saying the guards were protecting the president. He found no takers. But with "suspended fine" sentences, the guards did get some of the impunity they are accustomed to.



Firing line: A South African soldier on patrol for the UN mission in the DRC.

Photo: John Wessels/AFP

DRC

SADC military intervention in DRC claims its first lives

Two South African soldiers were killed and three were injured in the first week of the DRC mission by southern nations, to which South Africa is contributing 2,900 troops, alongside deployments by Tanzania and Malawi. A similar mission by the East African Community ended without de-escalation in the eastern DRC conflicts, which have displaced more than seven million people. A UN mission is also ending with little to show. A South African helicopter in the UN mission was recently damaged by ground fire, injuring its crew.

SOMALIA

Intimate partner violence sparks protests

The murders of three women, allegedly at the hands of their intimate partners, has caused demonstrations over the rise of femicide in Somalia. Two of the women were reportedly pregnant at the time of their deaths. Women's rights groups say a pervasive culture of impunity, lax laws and entrenched gender inequalities have made Somali territories especially dangerous for women and girls. Last month, in neighbouring Kenya, thousands of women and their allies marched in the capital city Nairobi and other towns, to protest against femicide.

LIBERIA

Wage-warring WAGs get war-wager axed

The wives and girlfriends of Liberian soldiers have had the country's newly appointed defence minister booted from office. Former warlord Prince Charles Johnson had been appointed by newly elected President Joseph Boakai. Protesting against military corruption, living conditions in barracks and low wages for their husbands, army spouses demanded that Johnson be sacked. Boakai then replaced him with General Geraldine Janet George.

SENEGAL

Approval of election delay was illegal, says top court

Parliament acted unconstitutionally on 5 February when it passed a bill rubber-stamping President Macky Sall's decision to delay the presidential election, the country's Constitutional Council ruled on Thursday. It also annulled Sall's 3 February postponement decree and said that while it's no longer possible to hold the election on 25 February as scheduled, it should be held "as soon as possible". The actions of the president and parliament led to violent protests in which at least three people were killed.

SEYCHELLES

Opposition leader in the clear: You're not a wizard, Herminie!

As if by magic, witchcraft charges against Seychelloise opposition leader Patrick Herminie have been dropped. The public prosecutor gave no reason for dropping them. Last year, dozens of police raided Herminie's party offices, claiming they had connected him to two bodies that had been exhumed for ritual purposes from a cemetery on Mahé island. The former speaker of parliament, who plans to run for the presidency next year, said then that these actions were politically motivated.

INDONESIA

Former dictator's top enforcer headed for presidency

Controversial Indonesian general Prabowo Subianto appears set to enter the presidency on his third run for power. He claimed victory on Wednesday night. Prabowo was a trusted general of Indonesian dictator Muhamed Soeharto, whose 30 year rule was ended in 1998 by student-led protests. Prabowo's brutal response to those protests included a crackdown at Jakarta's Trisakti University in which four students were killed. He was dishonourably discharged from the army after Soeharto's fall.



Ruthless: Presidential favourite Prabowo Subianto rebranded from torturer to "cute". Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

MALAWI

Room to roam – and to trample folks to death

Africa Parks, an NGO that has had British prince Harry Windsor as president and board member, moved more than 250

elephants into a Malawian game reserve that doesn't have adequate fencing. Seven people in the area have been killed by elephants in the 18 months since, the *Guardian* reports. In partnership with the Malawian parks service and another NGO, the project moved the elephants from a better-fenced area.



No small feat: Park officials transport a sedated elephant.

Photo: Amos Gumulira/AFP

EMPIRE

US 'war on terror' led to more terrorism

In 2002, 23 Africans died in terrorist attacks. Then the United States brought its "war on terror" to the continent. A new report from the Pentagon shows that in 2022, 23,000 Africans died in terror attacks. "These findings contradict claims by the US Africa Command that it counters transnational threats and malign actors," Nick Turse, a contributor to *The Continent*, wrote in *Responsible Statecraft* this week.

PALESTINE

Israel strikes Rafah despite ICJ's order

Rafah's population quadrupled to 1.4-million as the Israeli army drove Palestinians out of the rest of Gaza. On Sunday Israel started bombarding Rafah too, ignoring the International Court of Justice's provisional order for it to stop anything genocidal. On Tuesday, South Africa asked the ICJ to escalate its order for the violence to stop. But, under cover of its Western backers, Israel has little incentive to care what the ICJ orders.

Angola

Civil 'slavery' fuels fervour for first-ever general strike

Workers want to raise the minimum wage by 750% – but the state says they must be out of their minds.

Borrvalho Ndomba in Luanda

Angolans will next month embark on the country's first general strike since independence in 1975. It's focused on a dispute over the country's current minimum wage: \$38 a month – "slave wages" according to labour unions.

"Anyone who receives \$38 is nothing more than a real slave," said Francisco Jacinto, secretary-general of the General Centre of Independent and Free Unions of Angola.

Trade unions have demanded that it be raised to \$288, given government statistics show that a basket of basic food items now costs over \$100. Angolan authorities have proposed increasing it to \$45.

The main opposition party,

the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita), said it stood with the workers on the issue.

"If the salary is no longer enough to pay for quality education for the children or build a decent house or buy a means of transport or save money, let it at least be enough to put food on the table," said Unita parliamentarian Domingos Palanga.

In the past five years, Angola has seen more than a dozen strikes in different sectors of the civil service, including education, health and justice. This time, employees across all sectors are being mobilised to take part in the strike en masse and they appear ready to.

The government said union demands were unreasonable. "A national minimum wage of \$288 ... seems to me to be a figure outside of any common sense," said Labour Minister Teresa Dias. "We have to make the union centres realise that none of us, and even themselves, would be in a position to pay wages at this level."

Last month, the government increased its workers' pay by 5%.

Ademar Jinguma, a teacher in Bengo province, told *The Continent* his salary increment was "not enough to buy a 25kg bag of rice for a household of five people". He added: "A sack of rice costs \$31, and that money is not enough to buy a box of cooking oil, which costs \$26." ■

Ghana

First Cousin of Finance disinherited from Cabinet

Ken will finally have to stop borrowing everyone's stuff.

Marian Ansah

President Nana Akufo-Addo has bowed to pressure and sacked his finance minister (and cousin) Ken Ofori-Atta – interrupting a multi-generation tradition of nepotism among the Akufo-Addo/Ofori-Atta families.

Ofori-Atta's father, Jones Ofori-Atta, a brother to Akufo-Addo's mother, served as deputy finance minister during the presidency of Edward Akufo-Addo, Nana's father.

Ofori-Atta Junior has struggled to steer an economy unmoored by the Covid pandemic. He introduced unpopular taxes, such as a 1.5% tax on electronic transactions and bank transfers, and took a \$3-billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund, among other loans.

The rise in national debt saw Ghana's international credit rating tank and at one point the cedi became the world's worst performing currency.

The fallout from these disasters reverberated through the public, Parliament and even the governing party.

In November, 98 legislators from the

ruling New Patriotic Party threatened to boycott Ofori-Atta's 2023 budget reading. A month later, Parliament attempted to censure him, while on the streets and online, Ghanaians were calling for his sacking, using the hashtag #KenMustGo.

Taking his seat will be his former deputy, Mohammed Amin Adam, who will have to negotiate with Ghana's creditors to restructure some of the debt.

Akufo-Addo also dropped his roads and health ministers, and 11 other cabinet members who were either fired or shuffled to different posts. But that has not quieted calls for his own resignation.

“The best way to end the suffering and hardships of Ghanaians would have been for both President Akufo-Addo and Vice-President Alhaji Bawumia to resign,” said the leader of opposition in Parliament, Cassiel Ato Forson. “This government has been characterised by excessive borrowing, unsustainable debt, an economic crisis, high appetite for taxes, poor governance, reckless wasteful expenditures, syphoning of state resources ... as well as state capture by family and friends of the president and his vice.” ■

Russia

Alexei Navalny dies in prison

He was reviled by Russia's elite and revered as Putin's most prominent critic by the West, which preferred to gloss over Navalny's ties to white supremacy.

Russian prison authorities say Alexei Navalny died on Friday at the Arctic penal colony he was transferred to late last year. He was the country's most prominent opposition leader.

Navalny's death, for good reason, was quickly followed by lionising obituaries in the press around the world. He came to global acclaim as a fierce Russian anti-corruption activist. In one two-hour video posted in 2021, Navalny exposed a palace built at a cost of more than a billion dollars, allegedly for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who denied owning it.

Navalny published dozens of videos that exposed the corruption and excess of Russian oligarchs and politicians. In 2020, he fell into a coma following suspected poisoning from a nerve agent. On recovering in Germany and returning to Russia, he was quickly arrested, charged and eventually sentenced to decades in prison, where he has now died.

The charges he was sentenced for were related to extremism. Navalny and his allies said they were politically motivated. But his political history left Russian

authorities plenty of plausible deniability.

During his 2013 run for mayor of Moscow he promised to curb migration to the city and got 27% of the vote, placing second. Prior to that, Navalny's racist, Islamophobic and white supremacist views had been more obvious. In the 2000s, he made videos comparing Muslims to cockroaches. He attended the Russia March, an annual gathering of white supremacists, at least three times. And he was expelled from Russia's oldest liberal political party for "nationalist views". ■



Kremlin critic: A worker paints over an image of the late Alexei Navalny in Saint Petersburg. Photo: Olga Maltseva/AFP

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Photo: *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*

Maria Ressa: 'We are no longer living in the same shared reality'

Simon Allison in Johannesburg

Nobel laureate Maria Ressa is watching a video of herself being interviewed on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. On the screen, Ressa says: "Right now my number one source of income is a new automated crypto trading program. It's the biggest opportunity I see in my entire life to make a big fortune quickly."

In person, in a boardroom in a Johannesburg hotel, Ressa – the fearless Filipino journalist and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner – pauses the playback. "They did a good job, no? It sounds like me!"

It is true that Ressa has appeared on

The Late Show. But she is not selling any kind of cryptocurrency – and never uttered the words in the clip. This is a deepfake – her words and images have been manipulated by an artificial intelligence programme. The doctored video suddenly appeared on Facebook last year, and linked to legitimate-looking websites that mimicked CNN and *Rappler*, the media house that Ressa co-founded.

Rappler is still investigating who created the deepfake, and why. But it almost doesn't matter. In the big picture, "Maria Ressa the Crypto Bro" is just a minor example of a bigger problem: the



Unreal: Disinformation campaigns rewrote history so the son of the brutal authoritarian and kleptocrat Ferdinand Marcos could take power. Photo: Ezra Acayan/Getty Images

battle for facts.

The ubiquity of social media is now supercharged with the advent of generative AI, setting us up for “disinformation at industrial scale,” Ressa says. In many ways, we no longer have a shared reality. “What happens when you have an information ecosystem where you can have your own reality? A house like that, in the past, where people all have their own versions of reality – it’s called an insane asylum.”

In 38 years of being a journalist, Ressa has reported on many threats to society and encountered almost every personal threat imaginable: financial, legal and physical. Her reporting into the alleged “death squad” of former Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte infuriated the country’s most powerful person and made her the target of vicious online hate campaigns and a litany of trumped-up legal charges (she is still fighting several of these).

But she says that the threat journalism and society now face from a disordered information ecosystem is of a different order of magnitude.

Just look at the Philippines where a sophisticated information operation whitewashed the legacy of former president Ferdinand Marcos, paving the way for his son to take power in 2022.

“It changed Marcos from a guy who stole \$10-billion to the guy who is the greatest leader the Philippines has ever had,” says Ressa. “And this is what Filipinos voted for. It literally changed history before our very eyes.”

Some 72% of the world now lives under authoritarian regimes, the V-Dem Institute at Sweden’s University of Gothenburg reported last year. That figure is up from 60% the year before. It may well be even higher after this year’s flurry of elections around the world, given an information ecosystem that politicians



Target: Maria Ressa's work has made her some powerful enemies. Photo: AFP

can use to manufacture their own realities and manipulate voters. “The world is on fire, in a way my generation has never seen, in a way your generation has never seen, in a way that is untenable for rule-of-law driven democracies,” Ressa says.

Abdicating responsibility

Ressa lays the blame for the “corruption of our information ecosystem” squarely at the door of the big technology companies, and their algorithms that determine what information we see online.

“Once big tech became the gatekeepers [of information], they completely abdicated responsibility for protecting the public sphere,” says Ressa. That’s because there is more traction – and therefore more money – in lies. “In 2018, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said lies spread six times faster [than truth] ... If you lace the lies with fear, anger and hate, they spread even further.”

The devastating impact of that is already happening and goes beyond our political systems. “Our evolution as a species is connected to this. When you are pumping us full of toxic hate, when you are pumping us full of the worst of

humanity, which is what these social media companies are doing, you’re changing us. This world, the world that makes a lot of money for big tech, precludes the goodness of human nature. That is not who we are. I’m very angry.”

Ressa is using this anger, along with the considerable clout that comes with winning a Nobel, to do something about it. She’s on the Real Facebook Oversight Board, which is a group of prominent activists, academics and journalists trying to get Meta to make better decisions.

“In 2018, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said lies spread six times faster [than truth] ... If you lace the lies with fear, anger and hate, they spread even further.”

She is producing a documentary series with Al Jazeera on AI in the global south. And, with *Rappler*, she’s experimenting with how these new technologies can be used ethically and responsibly – to promote civic discourse, rather than destroy it. Her visit to South Africa is in her capacity as chair of the steering committee of the World Movement for Democracy, a global civil society network that will convene in South Africa in November. Figuring out a unified approach to the dangers – and the opportunities – of big tech will be high on the agenda.

“There’s also a great opportunity right now. This is creative destruction. The destruction is already happening. So what are we going to create?” ■

Tech is already being used to manipulate us

From Egypt to South Africa, fake accounts, bots and generative AI are already manipulating African politics. And 2024 is a record year for elections.

**Marian Ansah
and Justina Asishana**

Politicians are used to manipulating would-be voters, through overhyped promises or outright threats – vote for me or lose your social grant. It’s an area of constant innovation, from rallies in mega stadiums to billboard adverts and pamphlets handed out in minibus taxis. The new frontier is technology.

In South Africa in 2016, British public relations firm Bell Pottinger used an army of Twitter bots to stir up racial tensions. Their “white monopoly capital” campaign amplified the sentiment that white people in South Africa were hoarding wealth, while depriving black people of jobs. Fake accounts would tweet hate. This would then make its way into society at large. And this distracted people from the clients of that campaign, brothers Ajay, Tony and Atul Gupta, who were working with then-president Jacob Zuma to systematically loot the country’s state entities, such as its already struggling energy utility, Eskom. The slick operation was eventually revealed and the fallout contributed to the collapse of Bell Pottinger.

Using this playbook, honed in the election of Donald Trump and the campaign to pull Britain out of the European Union, companies have been selling their manipulation skills across the continent. Their success is despite more than half of people in 38 African countries having no internet access.

Platforms like Facebook have been slow, or loath, to respond.

Ahead of the 2017 Kenyan election, automated bots on Twitter accounted for more than a quarter of the most influential accounts discussing the election, according to research by consulting company Portland Communications. Countries like Lesotho, Equatorial Guinea and Senegal saw a similar influx. The research found that these accounts had more of an impact than the accounts of politicians and their campaigns.

These “served primarily to agitate, pushing negative narratives about major issues, candidates, and perceived electoral abnormalities.” After the elections, many had their election content deleted, said the report.

Facebook employees and researchers at the Stanford Internet Observatory

revealed in 2019 that a firm tied to the Russian mercenary Wagner Group was running a network of at least 73 Facebook pages targeting Africans. The pages blasted over 8,900 posts, praising controversial figures like Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar or flattering incumbents in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sudan. Facebook removed the pages but not before they had garnered over 1.7-million likes.

Ahead of Uganda's 2020 election, Meta deleted 32 pages, 220 user accounts, 59 groups, and 139 Instagram profiles promoting President Yoweri Museveni. These focused on smearing support for his opponent Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (aka Bobi Wine) as "hooliganism".

Facebook found that a few individuals at a government office and PR firms had used fake or duplicate accounts to manage these disinformation assets, a practice that the platform labels as "inauthentic coordinated behaviour". Facebook was banned in Uganda for deleting the network and remains inaccessible without the use of a virtual private network (VPN).

In the DRC, people connected to political figure Honoré Mvula created fictitious personas to run 63 accounts on Facebook, as well as 25 Instagram accounts. The US-based Digital Forensic Lab reported that the Mvula network started as "pour le buzz" accounts – pages and groups impersonating celebrities or their fans. Once they had followers, they were renamed and their starter content was deleted. Heading a "movement of

young Congolese intellectuals," Mvula campaigned for President Félix Tshiskedi in the 2018 election that brought him to power. Meta deleted the accounts in 2020.

In Kenya, with its vocal Kenyans on Twitter community, researchers at the Mozilla Foundation uncovered a network of 3,700 Twitter accounts which pushed at least 11 paid disinformation campaigns. Over two months in 2021, these blasted out over 23,000 tweets attacking journalists, civil society and public workers like judges.

In Kenya researchers at the Mozilla Foundation uncovered a network of 3,700 Twitter accounts which pushed at least 11 paid disinformation campaigns.

In Nigeria in 2022, a BBC investigation found that political actors were secretly paying social media influencers as much as \$43,000 to spread disinformation against their opponents ahead of the February general elections.

Because it is straightforward to create fake accounts and garner a following for them, campaigns like this are widespread. And this is before generative AI, which is predicted to become a big player in elections this year – 2024 will have more elections than any year in history.

As *The Continent* reports in an interview with Maria Ressa (p10), the technology dramatically increases the capacity of groups that want to manipulate things like elections, and the regulation to stop this is falling behind. ■



First over the line:
Kelvin Kiptum of Kenya
wins the 2023 London
Marathon. Photo: Alex
Davidson/Getty Images

Kelvin Kiptum

2 December 1999 - 11 February 2024

Michelle Katami in Nairobi

When Kelvin Kiptum clocked 2:01:53 at the Valencia Marathon in December 2022, the athletics world reluctantly paid attention. Beginner's luck?

Only legends Eliud Kipchoge and Kenenisa Bekele had run faster but the day's winner was relatively unknown, running his debut marathon on the world stage. Before that, he had run half marathons, with a fastest time of 58:42.

That incredible performance in Valencia was followed by a 2:01:25 finish in the London Marathon in April 2023. Now, the athletics world was intrigued. Who was this guy with no track and cross-country experience?

Six months later in October during the Chicago Marathon, he threw the hammer down, delivering a remarkable time of just 2:00:35. He broke Eliud Kipchoge's world record of 2:01:09 by 34 seconds – a new world marathon record! The world of athletics stood up. Kipchoge's heir had arrived.

Kiptum's world record was ratified last week. On Sunday night, just days later, he was killed in a road accident that also claimed the life of his coach, Rwandan runner Gervais Hakizimana.

A rare gem and raw talent

There's a tragic poetry to the two dying together. For years before the world of athletics ever took note of Kiptum, when

he was too poor to travel to international meets, Hakizimana was polishing the gem out of his raw talent. Hakizimana met Kiptum when he was barely a teenager. He was among the village kids that ran after the runners training in Iten, the athletics training village in eastern Kenya.

When Hakizimana retired from running and became a coach, he took him on. But he had to fight for Kiptum to pursue athletics rather than get a college diploma and become an electrician, as his father wanted. For years, they trained without notable success, even as the coach insisted he had a future in athletics. Then, in 2022, Kiptum overcame his fear of the full marathon and blasted into fame.

He was the kind of athlete who stayed with the leading pack in the first half, only to pick up blistering speed in the second, dropping off the pacers.

He scooped the 2023 World Athlete

of the Year for men's out of stadia award within only a year of marathon running.

At 24, he was preparing to conquer another milestone: becoming the first person to run the marathon in under two hours in an official race.

The Rotterdam Marathon in April would have been his first attempt. Now we will never know if he would have pulled it off. He left the world as he entered athletics history: unexpectedly.

Kiptum was born in Keiyo district in Kenya and was his parents' only child.

He was married to Asenath Cheruto Rotich with whom he shared two children.

As a boy he loved running barefoot in the forest and helping his father look after the cattle in their rural home 30km away from Eldoret.

He has left his family in agony and Kenya is devastated. But the skies are now faster. Go well, KK. ■

**Too soon:
Before his
untimely death,
Kenya's Kelvin
Kiptum was on
track to bring
down a raft of
world records.**

Photo: Justin
Tallis/AFP





Photo: DR Evans Ago Tetteh

Ghana won't walk its talk on shipbreaking regulations

Taking advantage of Ghana's environmental laxity, more ship owners are dumping old vessels on its coast.

Marian Ansah

Nestled along the Gulf of Guinea, Kpone Beach in Ghana is a stretch of coast featuring flat sandy patches and large rocky headlands. Known for its biodiverse marine ecosystems, it has been a vital source of livelihood for generations of fisherfolk. But when an old fishing vessel, the *Naftilos*, was demolished along Kpome's shores in 2021, the community was placed in jeopardy.

Ghana's 530km coastline is gradually

becoming a preferred site for old ships to be dismantled for scrap.

According to the Ghana Maritime Authority, seven vessels were dismantled in 2019, 11 in 2020 and five vessels in 2021.

However, as the demolition of the *Naftilos* showed, the country is very lax about occupational standards and the environmental guardrails that should govern shipbreaking.

That laxity may be why ship owners are increasingly beaching their end-of-life

vessels there, said Evans Tetteh, a lecturer at the Regional Maritime University.

Hazardous business

Owned by Greece's Fairport Shipping Limited, the *Naftilos* was a refrigerated fish carrier built in Japan in 1985 and registered in Kiribati Islands.

The 92m ship operated in East and West Africa and was detained multiple times before being abandoned at the Tema outer fishing port in 2017.

Five years later, a local company hired residents of Kpone Beach as informal shipbreakers to cut, burn and torch the ship's parts. Women were offered \$10 and men \$15 a day for the work. No personal protection equipment was provided, despite the inherent health risks from spilling oily water, heavy metals such as lead and mercury, diesel, toxic Tributyltin (TBT) paint, debris, and other contaminants. Heavy metal toxicity, for instance, can cause disability or death.

"Workers only received medical

attention if their injuries were severe, leaving those with less serious concerns uncompensated," said shipbreaker Bernard Abenyake, who worked on the *Naftilos's* demolition.

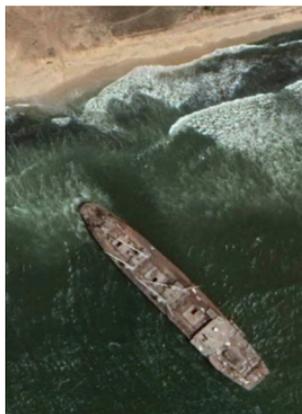
Fishers in the area were hamstrung. "We cannot venture into the sea once the shipbreaking commences," said fisherman Oyoo Quartey.

Satellite images from Google Earth show that breaking down the *Naftilos* took several months, continuing into early 2022. The consequences stretched beyond the shipbreaking exercise.

"The aftermath leaves us with few fish to catch and sell," Quartey said.

Edem Mahu, a marine scientist at the University of Ghana, explained that marine pollution from ship demolition affects vital habitats such as mangroves, which are essential for fish reproduction and stock replenishment.

Studies elsewhere have also shown that oil and grease spilling from broken ships reduces light penetration, affecting



October 2021



December 2021



February 2022

Beach blight: Satellite imagery showing the *Naftilos*. Photos: robindesbois.org



Boneyard: Villages spring up to ship owners with old vessels to dismantle. After they are done the villages are abandoned. Photo: Stock/Getty Images

the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide at the air-seawater boundary. This disruption hinders the growth and populations of marine life, especially plankton and fish.

Moreover, Mahu added, shipbreaking poses a clear risk to anyone who consumes seafood: “Contaminants may either dissolve in the water and be absorbed through the skin of fish,” she says, “Or they may be absorbed by phytoplankton that are consumed as food by fish.”

Absentee regulators see no evil

In Ghana, such impacts are not being monitored, and shipbreaking remains largely unregulated.

Ghana signed the 2009 Hong Kong Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships.

With it, the International Maritime Organisation set the standards for addressing the dangers of shipbreaking across the maritime industry.

But Ghana still has no sector regulations dedicated to overseeing ship recycling. Henry Kwabena Kokofu,

who heads the Environment Protection Agency, said that while the shipbreaking industry is not regulated, his agency evaluates and permits these activities on a “case-by-case basis”.

But the agency did not respond to a request for an interview to elaborate on what it did in the *Naftilos* demolition case.

However, a shipbreaker who worked on the demolition said that EPA officials were absent from the site and only appeared afterward to clear the shore. This did not surprise industry watchers like Tetteh. “I don’t think the EPA is doing their job properly,” he said.

“First of all, why would you even allow shipbreaking at the beach? It destroys the marine environment. There is no excuse for them to allow this to happen there.”

The Ghana Maritime Authority grants licences to shipbreaking yards and the Ghana Port and Harbour Authority issues permits for the scrapping process. Neither responded to requests for comment on their role in the *Naftilos* demolition. ■

Booze ban bruises liquor likers' spirits

Many in Nigeria favour teetotalitarianism but it's a hard sell for many more.

Justina Asishana in Minna

Officials in Nigeria's Niger State are at loggerheads over a proposed ban on alcohol. Mohammed Ibrahim, an official of the state's liquor licensing board announced the ban in December.

Days later, following backlash from liquor sellers, the state governor called it a "false pronouncement" and instructed security agents to arrest Ibrahim. But the local government chairman of Suleja, which is home to over 260,000 people, has insisted on the ban and is enforcing it.

The kerfuffle highlights the complexities of alcohol regulation in Nigeria where drinkers spent 600-billion naira (\$399-million) on beer in the first half of 2022 alone, according to the *Vanguard* newspaper.

That figure – equivalent to 4% of the Nigerian federal government's 2022 budget – was based on the sales reported by the country's four biggest brewers and didn't include informal and small brewers.

In 2018, the WHO reported that more than half of Nigerians over 14 years-old drink alcohol, with 60% being heavy drinkers who consumed in one sitting more than the equivalent of five beers at least once a month.

One driver of such habits is the ubiquity of alcohol. Last year, a study covering parts of Abeokuta city in Ogun State found that some areas had as many as 200 alcohol outlets per square kilometre.

"We found only two schools and three religious institutions located further than 600m from an alcohol outlet. The shortest distance from an outlet to a school was 18.77m and 44 schools were located within less than 100m of an alcohol outlet," said Ogochukwu Odeigah, one of the researchers, a psychology lecturer at Chrisland University in Ogun.

That can manipulate people into drinking more than they would. "Each alcohol outlet people pass serves as a visual reminder of alcohol consumption, possibly shaping collective norms by suggesting that a higher percentage of people drink alcohol," Odeigah said.

Money, money, money

But that ubiquity also represents jobs for some, and tax and licensing income for states and the federal government. Trying to roll it back risks that.

"The average Nigerian man who waits tables at hotels and establishments in order to feed and sustain himself and his family ... would be forced out of a job," said Okosisi Atama, who chairs the

association of hoteliers in Suleja where the recent ban is still in effect.

Atama also argued that banning alcohol can be divisive along ethno-religious lines. Non-Muslim communities could interpret it as an attempt to nationalise the teetotal tenets of Islam, which is more established in the north than elsewhere in Nigeria. These sensitivities have led to a significant regulatory gap.

It's not that there is no regulation at all. This month, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control started enforcing a 2022 ban on alcohol packaged in sachets and tiny bottles.

But piecemeal regulation is not enough in a country with an “exponentially increasing young population,” said Odeigah.

She recommended a national law on alcohol that sets when and where alcohol can be sold; mandatory health warnings on alcohol products; restrictions on how

much pure alcohol one drink can contain; and widespread campaigns guiding people on low risk drinking.

Any federal law would need to flexibly allow states to pass their own local legislations and have local licensing committees, to work around the cultural and religious differences that make implementing federal laws and policies difficult.

For comprehensive national regulation, authorities would have to look beyond the taxes and liquor licence fees they earn from the alcohol industry and, Odeigah said, to “the larger social and public health cost of alcohol use”.

But she added: “The alcohol industry has been lobbying the government aggressively against the formulation and implementation of alcohol policies that would affect alcohol consumption or negatively impact the industry”.

The deep-pocketed lobbyists typically win. ■



On the rocks, in a hard place: Opponents of alcohol say it destroys lives, but opponents of alcohol bans say prohibition does too. Photo: Frédéric Soltan/Getty Images

Digital news surges, but radio is still king

In observance of World Radio Day (13 February), let's tune in for some news on where Africans are getting their news.

Afrobarometer surveys show that while the share of digital news consumers has grown dramatically over the past decade, radio still outranks all other channels – except maybe word of mouth – as a source of regular news.

On average across 30 countries, two-thirds (67%) of African adults say they get news “every day” or “a few times a week” from the radio, down just a bit from 72% in 2011/2013.

TV has remained fairly steady as a

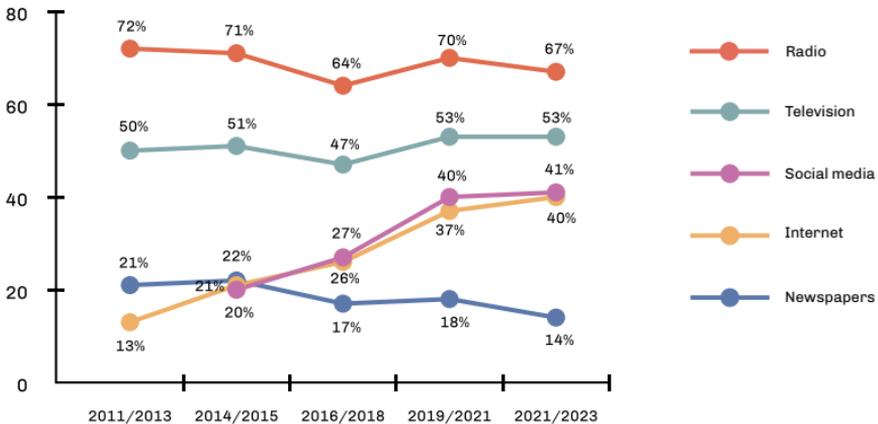
news source, drawing around half of adults (53% in the most recent survey) at least a few times a week.

Digital news has been the big gainer, tripling its regular audience via the internet, from 13% to 40%, and doubling (since 2014/2015) via social media, from 20% to 41%.

But growth has slowed between the last two surveys rounds (+3 and +1 percentage points, respectively).

Regular newspaper readership continues its decline, dropping by one-third, from 21% to 14%. Why don't we have a World Newspaper Day? ■

Most popular sources of news | 30 African countries | 2011-2023



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.



Photo: Still from
The Kitchen

Gritty Kitchen cooks with plots 'n plans

In the not-too-distant future, power and privilege conspire to tighten the screws on a downtrodden community.

Wilfred Okiche

The *Kitchen*, a sober dystopian vision set in a near-futuristic London is Daniel Kaluuya's directorial feature debut.

The British-Ugandan actor, who won an Oscar for his work in *Judas and the Black Messiah*, is also famous for working with the director Jordan Peele on the blockbuster *Nope*, and hopefully needs no further introduction.

In this new expression of his talents, Kaluuya works with Kibwe Tavares. The *Kitchen* is the last of the city's public housing projects that is yet to be taken over by the forces of gentrification. Not for long though as the authorities employ

drone surveillance, utilities blockades and police raids to force the mostly Black and Brown population out. In the face of violent oppression, the people come together to fight back, united by a sense of community.

Upwardly mobile Izi (Kane Robinson) has lived his entire life in *The Kitchen* but he wants out, fast. He works at a funeral home, hustling burial packages in order to afford a down-payment on a soulless apartment in a fancier neighbourhood. His solitary rhythm is rocked when he attends the funeral of his ex-girlfriend and comes across her teenage orphan Benji (Jedaiah Bannerman). *The Kitchen* explores the bond between these two damaged souls as they navigate their dependence on each other, tipping eventually into sentimentality. The actors are top-notch and are in tune with the screenplay's sharp economy, communicating through shared glances, ellipses and body language.

Righteous anger courses through *The Kitchen* and Kaluuya and Tavares employ an eclectic soundtrack from Africa and the Black diaspora, not only as protest but to highlight the diverse origins of the communities that make their home in *The Kitchen*.

The production design work is solid with neon colours and cultural markers existing alongside nods to the elaborate world building of a film like *Blade Runner*.

It's a solid, promising debut. ■

The Kitchen is streaming on Netflix

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

"If a rhino was a dino it would be a rhinosaurus, but it's not so it ain't."

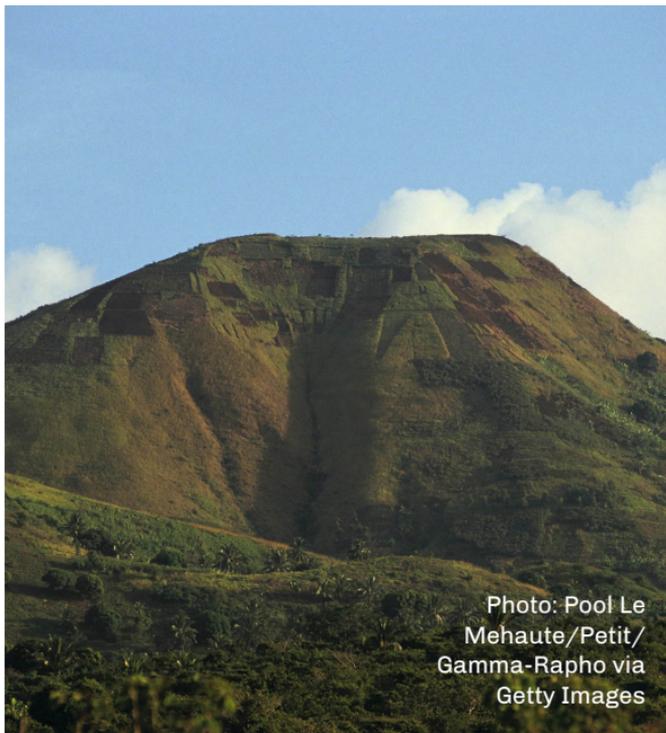


Photo: Pool Le Mehaute/Petit/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

- 1_ Mount Karthala (pictured) is an active volcano in which archipelagic country?
- 2_ Which country's national team won the Africa Cup of Nations last week?
- 3_ Name the British-Ugandan actor who won an Oscar for best supporting actor for *Judas and the Black Messiah* in 2021.
- 4_ Which country was long-distance runner Kelvin Kiptum from?
- 5_ Samia Suluhu Hassan is which country's president?
- 6_ What kind of rhinoceros is also known as the hook-lipped rhinoceros?
- 7_ Alexandria is which country's second largest city?
- 8_ The Cubango River separates which two African countries?
- 9_ What is the Cubango River known as in Botswana?
- 10_ This same river is known as the Kavango river in which country?

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

Here at *Drift* we are ardent gym-goers. This may come as a surprise if you thought the power, poise and poetry of these pages was *only* natural talent. But, don't let the illusion of effortless fool you, reader. Body, mind and soul: we put in the work. We drink those protein shakes. We watch those macros. We mix those metaphors. We lift those weights. And when they get too heavy to lift? We lift some more!

Between sets, our minds wander over to thoughts about our dear leaders – after all, some of them are known as strongmen. We wonder if they get any exercise in. In case any of them are reading this, please remember, running for office for the sixth time does not count as cardio!

Still, we do like to imagine at least some of them in the weights room banging out reps the way they bang out constitutional changes, or sprinting away on the treadmill while visualising a soldier chasing them to remove them from power.

There are those who are deadlifting away our hopes, dreams and taxes (here's looking at you Billy Ruto!). Those of you familiar with the physiques of some of the Coupdashians know that they definitely

train hard – all those lunges for power really paid off! – and while you may think that the gym soundtrack features some *Eye of The Tiger*, we suspect there's a bit of Destiny Child's *Soldier*, in the mix, and maybe more than a sprinkling of the Spice Girls' *Wannabe*.

Meanwhile, spotted throwing his own weight around this week was none other than Senegal's president-for-now, Macky Sall.

Ever since he announced that the postponement of elections initially scheduled for next week, the country has been abuzz with protest, as demonstrators took to the streets in anger. Security forces brought out the tear gas while authorities decided to engage in their favorite exercise and block the internet.

According to reports, three people were killed. Days later the internet was restored and some sense of normalcy resumed – but not for long.

This week a group of organisations announced that they would hold a protest over the election delay in the capital Dakar. Local authorities replied with a hearty “*non!*” – saying the march was banned because it would ... impede traffic? That's

Keeping fit for office



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani



Ding! Macky 'Mouse' Sall would be goofy if his regime wasn't so cartoonishly undemocratic. Photo: Getty Images

a new one! But just to be safe, authorities once again decided to block the mobile internet again, because people kept saying mean things about them online.

Alas, despite Sall's best efforts, Senegal's highest court ruled on Thursday that the postponement of the polls was contrary to the Constitution, which means he might as well grab his towel and hit the showers.

Did anyone notice Ecowas trying to get in on the action? Poor old Ecowas. The gang have not been having the best time over the last few years, let's face it. Coups and coups within coups in four member countries, three countries bailing on the organisation altogether, a cornucopia of political crises and more than a few decidedly shaky moments in countries like Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

Got to give it to them though, despite the hardships they're still trying to push through! The regional bloc has now deployed a delegation to Dakar to check in to see what's going on. Bless.

Meanwhile, in an interview with AP,

Sall denied that he is trying to hold on to power, and that his reason for postponing the polls was because he wants to leave behind a country "in peace and stability". Seeing as the internet blocks, tear gas, killing of protesters and casual ambient oppression didn't work, then sure, let's try some peace and stability rather.

Ecowas, bless its little socks, has also guest-starred in the latest episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, sticking its head through the compound window to urge Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali to reconsider their decision to withdraw from the regional bloc saying that the decision "would not only bring hardship to their people but also undermine regional integration efforts".

Continuing to do some heavy lifting is the South African government, as it asked the International Court of Justice to look into whether Israel's latest operations in Rafah violated the court's order for Israel to cease all plausibly genocidal actions.

Closer to home, the situation in Sudan is also getting worse. The World Health Organisation said this week the country has been plunged into "a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions", with an estimated 25-million people – more than half of the population – needing humanitarian assistance.

The coverage on events in Sudan has not been loud enough, yet the silence has been deafening. The leaders of this continent like to talk about solidarity, integration and Pan-Africanism, but where is that unity when a country is collapsing right in front of them? ■

New reforms, same results?

Tanzania's upcoming elections will tell if the president's reforms have enabled the opposition to bounce back.

Sammy Awami

In the local elections scheduled for October, Tanzania's opposition looks set for a much better performance than seven years ago.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan's government of three years has embraced an inclusive political approach, a welcome change from the repression opposition political parties previously suffered.

If this continues, the 2025 general elections will be far more competitive than the polls that saw president John Magufuli retain power in 2020.

The ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), held talks with the largest opposition party, Chadema, for nearly two years, gradually improving the latter's working environment.

In early 2022, President Hassan appointed a task force to examine the state of democracy in Tanzania, and make recommendations on improving the country's politics. A few of its recommendations were included in recent changes to the electoral law. In January, the CCM's new secretary-general, Emmanuel Nchimbi, described the opposition as constitutionally legitimate political players – a significant shift in

tone. Today, the opposition can hold rallies and demonstrations and the police won't respond with tear gas. Voters will feel a little less unsafe voting for them.

There has been more continuity, however, than change. Whether intentionally or because she faces internal opposition, Hassan has fallen short of her promises to deliver on a wider reform agenda. The electoral bills, for example, fail to remove government employees and party cadres from their role as supervisors of the election processes.

“The circumstances now are becoming more and more like those during the era of former president Jakaya Kikwete,” said journalist and political commentator Neville Mena. But the built-in advantages of incumbency enjoyed by CCM mean that “little will change,” Mena added.

In other words, Hassan's more inclusive approach means that Chadema will see a revival of fortunes this year and next – but that does not mean they will be allowed to come close to winning. ■



Sammy Awami is an independent journalist and consultant based in Dar es Salaam. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Deltalowda: From space, you can see how the Okavango 'Delta' in the Kalahari desert in Southern Africa got its name. It's not a true river delta as it does not empty into the sea. Instead, mineral deposits over millennia have given this pristine wetland its distinctive fan-shape – and its name.

Photo: European Space Agency



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