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The Continent

‘We must be our own leaders now’

Cover: As the United States returns to default settings, Africans in Nebraska, Massachusetts, California, Tennessee and New Jersey write about what this week was like for them, and their communities. More permanent immigrants talk about worrying about two homes – the one you knew and the one that harbours you. Precarious immigrants are anxious that the doors to certainty are about to slam tightly shut. For lots of people in it but on the margins, America feels more dangerous (p14-19). What does this all mean for those outside? Some uncertainty, yes (p20) but also a window to build the world order we want while America simmers in its own chaos (p21).

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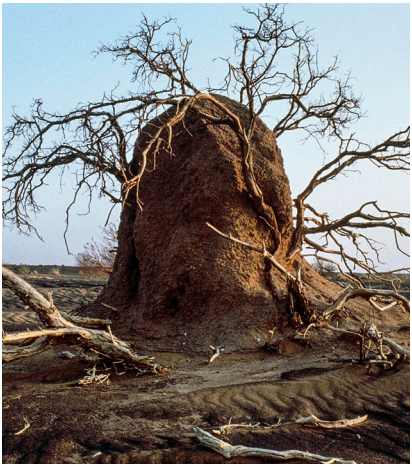
UNDERGROUND

The world's oldest termite mound

Soil scientists at the southern tip of the continent have found a termite colony that is 34,000 years old. According to *Al Jazeera*, they were digging up a mound of earth in Namaqualand, South Africa, to work out why the local water was so salty. Then they realised they were tearing into the home of countless termites – a home they'd been building for millennia. Their search for food is important for the local desert ecosystem and a reason that this part of the continent is known as the Succulent Karoo, because of its diversity.



Big heap: Scientists have discovered a termite mound older than even Paul Biya. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Philanderer's trysts spill into public eye

Equatorial Guinea is not taking things lying down after private videos of a senior government official engaged in sex acts with several women appeared on social media. The acts, in government offices, included the partners of other high-ranking officials. Local media say they were found as part of a corruption probe, during a raid on a finance ministry official's home. The official has been suspended. Until now, the country's claim to fame has been President Teodoro Obiang's hold on the world's longest running presidency: 42 years of incumbency under his belt.

CLIMATE

Deadly threshold set to tumble in 2024

In 2015, nearly 200 countries agreed to do all they can about the dramatic increase in global temperatures before it was too late to stop a cascading climate catastrophe. African countries wanted the goal to be a world where warming was kept below 1.5°C. This would allow people and ecosystems to adapt. The compromise reached was 2°C. The EU's climate agency said this week that this year will be the first to be 1.5 °C hotter. The United Nations' climate agency expects heating to be nearer 3 °C by the end of this century – *if* countries reduce emissions.

MOROCCO

Beneficiation keeps it on the continent

The rest of the world wins in the relationship with Africa, taking out raw materials and then turning them into a more expensive product they can sell back, while ensuring any profits and taxes also leave the continent. Morocco wants to change this, by using its vast reserves of gas and sunlight to create hydrogen and fertiliser. Both are lucrative exports and crucial for local industry. Last week, state-owned fertiliser company OCP announced billions of dollars of investment in a partnership with French energy company Engie.

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/ AFP/Getty Images

MAURITIUS

Social media ban lifted ahead of polls

With people voting on Sunday, a nationwide suspension of social media seems to have come to an end on the island state. The ban started on 1 November after audio recordings leaked, detailing abuses of power by government officials. The government said the recordings were a "serious threat to national security and public safety". Current Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, has been in power since 2017, when he took over from his father.

SOUTH AFRICA

Rivals friendly, but stakes dead serious

India and the Proteas – the South African men's cricket team – began a four-match series on Friday night. They're playing in the short, T20 format of the game. India beat the Proteas in the World Cup final in June. It was the first final in any format of the game for South Africa, who are perennial underachievers in this format of the game, despite regularly taking the #1 spot in other cricket world rankings. They insist it isn't a grudge series.

Minor reprieve: Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu and his wife Oluremi.
Photo: John Wessels/AFP

NIGERIA

Tinubu orders release of 'treasonous' minors

On Monday, President Bola Tinubu ordered the immediate release of 29 children who were facing the death penalty for their alleged involvement in the August demonstrations against the country's spiralling cost-of-living crisis. Under pressure from activists, he also called for an investigation into the security agents who had arrested and prosecuted the minors. The children, aged between 14 and 17, are among more than 70 people who appeared in court on Friday on charges of treason, destruction of property and mutiny. The protests turned violent when state agents killed at least 20 protesters and arrested hundreds more.

CHAD

Déby threatens withdrawal from regional force

President Mahamat Idriss Déby has threatened to withdraw Chad from the Multinational Joint Task Force because it has failed to curb insurgent groups around Lake Chad. The force was formed 30 years ago. It is made up of troops from Benin, Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. Déby says the force has failed in its mandate and "seems to be in a slump". He made the remarks during a visit to an area where 40 troops were killed by suspected Boko Haram insurgents. Part of his appeal to supporters is getting a grip on instability.

SOMALIA

AU soldiers killed by al-Shabaab

The al-Shabaab militant group killed two AU soldiers in a mortar attack on their base at Mogadishu's international airport. AU troops have been stationed in Somalia since 2007 and their mandate ends next month – despite intense negotiation. Ethiopia supplies the most troops, with up to 10,000 soldiers on the ground. But Somalia just signed a defence pact with Egypt, as part of a wider coalition to isolate Ethiopia.

SOUTH SUDAN

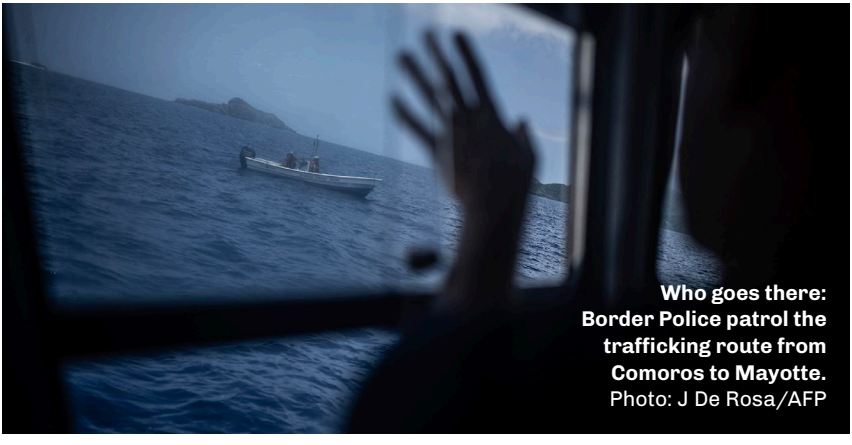
Geopolitics on the road less travelled

Ethiopia this week approved a more than $700-million loan to South Sudan to complete a 220km road across their border. One day, this might give landlocked South Sudan access to the port Ethiopia is trying to get in Somaliland – if the politics of that move and the resulting jostling don't unravel any further.

KENYA

Another marathon triumph

Sheila Chepkirui sprung onto the top step of the New York Marathon, alongside two other Kenyans, as the country continued its dominance of long-distance running. It's Chepkirui's first major marathon win. And it marks yet another win for Kenya over rivals Uganda and Ethiopia (as well as all the other countries that don't have a hope).



Who goes there: Border Police patrol the trafficking route from Comoros to Mayotte. Photo: J De Rosa/AFP

COMOROS ISLANDS

Human traffickers 'deliberately' capsize migrant boat

The International Organization for Migration says traffickers deliberately capsized a boat near the Comoros Islands last Friday, drowning 25 people, among them four children. It's the third such incident in recent months. Five survivors were rescued by local fishermen on Saturday, the UN agency said, adding that the boat was ferrying people to Mayotte. The disputed Comoros archipelago is a French department, making it officially a part of the European country.

Türkiye

Erdoğan wins again with Senegal deal

Türkiye's plan to be seen as Africa's partner rather than yet another coloniser appears to be working.

Signed: Senegal's Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Türkiye's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wrap up their deal in Ankara. Photo: TUR Presidency/Murat Kula

Kiri Rupiah

As the West's influence on the continent has faded, Russia and China's reach has come into focus. Türkiye, however, has been quietly positioning itself as the alternative choice – and its strategies of soft and hard power are paying dividends.

The latest big win for Ankara has been an oil and gas deal signed between Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Senegalese counterpart, Bassirou Diomaye Faye. Senegal is one of the world's newest oil producers.

Ankara's "energy diplomacy" has led to energy and mining deals with Niger, Egypt, Somalia, Morocco and Algeria. Türkiye is a net importer of oil and gas, spending around $40-billion each year for both. While the invasion of Ukraine caused some European countries to stop buying oil and gas from Russia, Türkiye continues to buy both commodities from there. This agreement with Senegal could go a long way in tempering this dependency on Russian oil and gas.

Meanwhile, in exchange for shoring up Somalia's maritime defence, Turkish seismic vessels will trawl for oil and gas off the east African country's coast. And, *The Continent* reported, Turkish drones were instrumental in helping the Ethiopian government in the war in Tigray. Türkiye also has a military presence in Libya.

Since launching its "Year of Africa" agenda in 2005, Erdoğan has worked hard to ensure his country is received as Africa's reliable partner rather than yet another coloniser. Armed with cultural and diplomatic programmes, scholarships, weapons and business deals, Türkiye is now a major player. ■

South Africa

A brutal response to illegal miners

Marché Arends

Operation Vala Umgodi, a joint effort by police and the army to combat illegal mining in South Africa, appears to have a new motto: By any means necessary. In the most recent escalation by the task team, this meant starvation and dehydration.

Last week, more than 1,000 illegal miners were forced to resurface from abandoned mine shafts in the North West province when law enforcement officials cut off their food and water supply. Many had been underground for years, and some who resurfaced are as young as 14.

Artisanal miners working illegally in abandoned or discontinued mines are known colloquially as zama zamas ("take a chance" in isiZulu). Some of the miners are South African but most are from neighbouring countries such as Lesotho and Mozambique.

Illegal mining is increasing rapidly and reportedly costs the country billions of dollars every year. Last December, President Cyril Ramaphosa ordered some 3,000 military staff to join the fight against these activities, which sit at the nexus of organised crime and gang violence.

Government officials, including North West Premier Lazarus Mokgosi, are lauding the latest operation as a great success. Local activists disagree, saying the miners are literally trapped by financial desperation.

Community leaders in the towns of Stilfontein and Orkney have been horrified by the scenes of people, their weak bodies covered in mud, streaming from the ground. They say the crackdown amounts to a humanitarian crisis and have sought intervention from the South African Human Rights Council.

The number of miners still below the surface is unknown, and it is expected that, when faced with imprisonment, some will not re-emerge at all. ■

Escalation: Police block the delivery of water and food parcels to illegal miners in Orkney. Photo: SAPS

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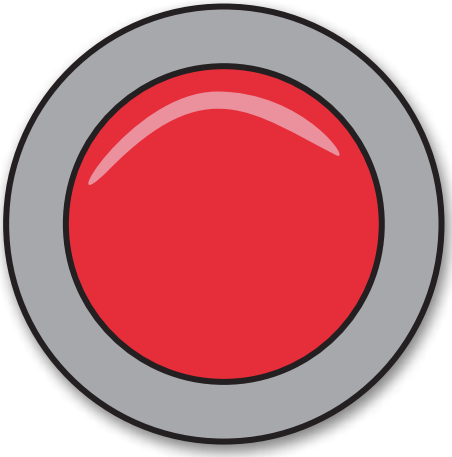

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Mozambique

Aluta continua in the capital

The army has been deployed to quell unrest as the opposition leader pledges to keep resisting.

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

Several thousand people took to the streets of Maputo on Thursday to continue their protest against the official results of the 9 October presidential election. It was the culmination of what opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane called the "third phase" of the protests.

Mondlane, who is encouraging the protests on regular YouTube live broadcasts watched by millions of people, had called for four million people to march on Maputo on Thursday.

Mondlane left the country shortly after the elections saying he feared for his life. He promised he would return to the country to lead the Thursday march but ultimately did not. He has said that demonstrations will last "until electoral truth is restored".

The electoral commission announced the winner as Daniel Chapo, from the ruling party Frelimo, with a majority of 70.67%. Frelimo has ruled Mozambique since independence in 1975, without interruption. Opposition parties have alleged massive electoral fraud, and organised nationwide protests that are now entering their third week.

Quell them: State security forces fire tear gas at protesters in Mozambique. All photos: Ismael Miquidade

The protests have been most intense in Maputo, Mozambique's capital. So has the state's response: between 20 and 50 people have been killed by security forces, according to civil society estimates. The army has been deployed to quell the unrest, so far without success.

On Thursday, *The Continent* witnessed security forces using tear gas against the protesters, injuring several.

"The police are using tear gas against the people, shooting in any way they can," said one protester, after an altercation with police. "It's a real war in Cabo Delgado, and they're throwing gas? Why don't they leave the gas? If you want war, come with your hands! Let's fight! This is war!"

There has been a violent insurrection in the northern Cabo Delgado province since 2017.

"We are demonstrating! Let us through! They're intimidating us! Let us through! Are they Frelimo police or are they the people's police?" another protester shouted.

Several shops have been looted in the city, where life has come to a standstill since the vote. A few of the city's biggest roads are impassable, thanks to tyres and rubbish bins that have been set alight.

Blood on the streets: Bloody battles have ripped through Maputo since election results were announced.

Some protesters have also been

throwing stones and other objects at security forces, with reports of clashes in most of Maputo's suburbs as well as the city centre.

The mysterious deaths of key political figures have further destabilised the situation.

Six days before the election result was announced, on 18 October, two of Mondlane's close allies – lawyer Elvino Dias and campaign manager Paulo Guambe – were killed. Gunmen in two unmarked vehicles opened fire on their SUV late at night on a main road in Maputo.

And last Saturday afternoon, the head of the intelligence service, Bernardo Lidimba, was killed in a traffic accident in the southern Gaza province.

An independent television station, *STV*, reported that a front tyre exploded, causing the car to spin off the road. Three colleagues in the car with Lidimba escaped with minor injuries.

Incumbent President Filipe Nyusi was last seen at Lidimba's funeral in Pemba on Wednesday.

He has not commented publicly on the unrest. Neither has the president-elect, Daniel Chapo, who has laid low since the announcement of the contested result.

The Daily Maverick reported that senior ruling party leaders have moved their families out of Maputo, in case of further trouble.

Amnesty International has called on the government to end the repression, and restore access to internet and social media, which has been repeatedly blocked over the past few weeks. ■

No mercy: Security forces have cracked down harshly on demonstrators, killing between 20 and 50 people since protests over election results began.

Time to tap in and forge our own futures

This is America. It is what it is, and it's what it always was, and might always be.

Donald Trump pulled off the greatest comeback in the electoral history of the United States. And he did it by winning more votes, in more places, than his opponent, Kamala Harris. A year into his presidency, that country will celebrate 250 years since its independence from Britain. And it will do so searching for a version of the past where it was the sole global power.

In 2016, many in America treated Trump's win as an aberration: "This is not America." The then outgoing president, Barack Obama, quoted Martin Luther King Jr and promised that this too would pass, that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice".

Trump's effective coronation in 2024 confirms that this *is* America now. As contributors to *The Continent* in five states document, it will be a fraught place. As ever, Africans seeking a better future will have to make it themselves. ■

Omaha, Nebraska

Miracles are a gamble

Ber Anena

When Beyoncé joined Kamala Harris on her campaign trail, something stirred inside me: hope. Hearing a thundering crowd of 30,000 in Houston, Texas and knowing that other celebrities had declared their support, I let euphoria sweep over me. That history was in the making, was no longer a prospect perched on the horizon. It felt so much closer.

For a couple of days, I allowed myself to forget that I lived in the red state of Nebraska.

As I drove 40 minutes from my home in Omaha to teach "Writing for Change" to University of Nebraska-Lincoln undergraduates, I ignored the bold letters – TRUMP – inscribed on a house along the highway. I saw this mural the day I first arrived in Nebraska in 2022. Its new coat of red paint now seemed to scream, "We're coming back" and, "Danger ahead."

I turned my eyes to the lush corn fields instead. On bike rides or walks with my husband in our Omaha neighbourhood, Trump campaign posters flickered along the sidewalk like lethal glow-worms: "Think of the Unborn"; "Trump Low Taxes, Harris High Taxes"; "Trump Secure Border, Harris Open Border".

Still, I told myself America and the world had seen that Donald Trump bowed to no legal, logical, or moral compass.

On election day, when I accompanied my husband to the polling station, my hope was starting to morph into anxiety.

When Hillary Clinton tried, America showed that it wasn't ready to have a woman at the top. Now here we were, presenting another woman – a Black woman, no less. Would America's fêted democracy and progressiveness reign over its racism and misogyny?

On Tuesday night, as we watched the scale tip slowly in Trump's favour, I prayed for a miracle. But Wednesday revealed that miracles are a gamble; that hope works no magic on its own.

This land of dreams has given me so much – an education, a livelihood, a family – but my head now swells with dread. Back home in Uganda, Yoweri Museveni's government is working double shifts on misrule and grand corruption. Trump's victory will embolden autocrats like him, and we, dear readers, will have to lead ourselves. ■

Ber Anena is a Ugandan poet and writer. She's a PhD Student in English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her memoir, The Lies We Tell in America, *is coming out in 2026 from Flatiron Books*

Waltham, Massachusetts

America is a trap for immigrants

All we have is each other.

Andrew Arinaitwe

On the eve of the election, without any real expectation of what was to come, we cursed the chilly 2°C in Waltham, Massachusetts, watched candidates campaign to the last hour, and mused about not fearing that the internet would be shut down. We marvelled at how normal church on Sunday had been: the gospel and the gospel alone – nothing about the upcoming voting exercise.

Most US citizens I spoke to said they would not vote because they did not see a reason to do so. "It's a trap," said one journalist, who was planning to vote – for Kamala Harris, because she is "no fan of fascism", but even she felt that she would be voting "the system" back in. Harris after all is the vice-president in the same incumbent regime that is being called out by the Free Palestine protests that continue in Boston.

Ugandan immigrants in Waltham town mostly work in healthcare, as caregivers and nurses. Many are undocumented or on precarious visas. We wished citizens would vote and give us some peace of mind over the next four years. The racist comments, irrational decision-making and bullying tendencies of Harris' opponent, Donald Trump, the former president who said we come from "shithole countries", had continued even in this campaign season. The fear of deportation is real.

But we could only wish that others would vote in our interest. Jajja Mable, a Ugandan babysitter who looks after two young US-born kids sent them to bed on election eve with a very serious joke: "If you ever support Trump we will evict you from this house!"

Male Kamya, a Ugandan immigrant who is now a US citizen, said: "We can choose to move forward together in Massachusetts in a way that respects the dignity and worth of every person, that focuses on what unites us rather than divides us." ■

Oakland, California

Democracy feels fragile in both of my homes

Adedayo Agarau

To be an immigrant is to worry about two homes: the one you knew most of your life and the one that now harbours you.

On the morning of the Nigerian presidential election in February, Nigerian graduate students gathered in Niyi's living room to cook and follow the updates online. We refreshed Twitter repeatedly, hopeful that by some miracle, Peter Obi's online traction would transform into actual votes. We never made that food. Sadness saturated the room as it became clear that Bola Ahmed Tinubu would take the election which was marred by violence, ballot snatching and institutionalised rigging. The blizzard came early and we silently left for our respective hostels.

As presidential candidate, Tinubu had shrugged off accusations of a criminal past in America after US courts ruled to protect his privacy from Nigerians who desperately sought documents they believed held crucial information about said past. The decision showed how US institutions shape African democracy even from afar. US institutions shape the lives of those who live inside the American borders even more profoundly.

The morning after this week's US presidential election, at Red Bay Coffee where I grab my morning coffee, I talked briefly with the terrified barista. They looked startled and disturbed by the election result. We talked about bodily autonomy and being transgender. In class, my professor mentioned that a sheriff in his hometown in New Orleans murdered someone he knew. "Off the record," he said. I learnt that my parents have cancelled their December vacation to Nigeria. They are afraid that they will somehow not be allowed back in if they leave the US.

Once, while Biden was president, a high school student in Iowa wrote me a racist poem. I had hoped that the next president would not be the one whose rhetoric stirs up such violence and discrimination toward immigrants. The fears of people like myself, the barista, my professor and parents, are likely to be ignored, mocked or exacerbated in Donald Trump's America.

The weather suddenly feels like Harmattan – chilly and eerie. In both of my homes, democracy feels fragile. At stake is not just policies and politics, but people's lives and dignity. ■

Memphis, Tennessee

Holding our breath even as we struggle to breathe

Gloria Mwaniga

The air is heavy with rain. It rains all day on election day. It also rains the day after. The weather matches the mood.

Before the election, I texted my friend C, a Salvadoran-American writer, to check on how she was holding up. Her response was: "It is like holding your breath when you're already struggling to breathe. My parents, friends and family all know it can get worse. We've lived worse."

My friends and I thought about the election but none of us really wanted to let the conversations go "there". Would voting even make a difference? "Yes," I would insist whenever this question arose, warning whoever asked of the dangers of voter apathy. "It is the reason why, back home in Kenya, we're experiencing the worst presidency ever," I would say.

Yet with 65% of eligible voters turning out in this week's US election, the country is set to repeat a Trump presidency!

Unable to sleep, I doomscroll. The outpouring of anger and disbelief on social media takes me back to his last presidency. I recall how hard he made it for foreigners to live and work in the US. Wasn't this the guy who fantasised about building 450 miles of wall to keep people out? Didn't he send asylum seekers back to the unsafe conditions they fled and deny many the chance to apply for asylum?

This land is my land: Trump supporters watch results of the election come in on election night. Photo: Saul Loeb/AFP

With the world's most powerful office in his grip for a second time, will Trump feel less threatened by inclusive, multiracial politics?

What about the supporters emboldened with intolerance by his aggressive words who ratcheted up race tensions, bullying and general bigotry? Can I, an African student in the US, still hope for a future in this place once deemed the land of endless possibilities?

Jersey City, NJ

Election blues in a blue city

Tolu Olasoji

Hours after Donald Trump was declared winner of the 2024 US presidential election, the air was thick with disbelief and despair in Jersey City, New Jersey's second-largest city.

"I'm still processing everything, but I feel hopeless," said Devin, a Jersey City resident, "Imagine how I feel about this?" asked another resident who works as a domestic violence advocate. "… and I work directly with the police," he adds, alluding to Trump's promise of immunity to police officers, his disturbing stances on women's sexual health, and the overall impact of these on his work.

Historically a stronghold for the Democratic Party, New Jersey State was won by Kamala Harris – but only narrowly, a tilt to the right that many find shocking. Trump's overall win only exacerbates the feelings of loss and uncertainty here. A Rutgers University poll revealed a significant spike in stress levels, statewide.

Harris's campaign had its baggage, particularly the Biden administration's role in the ongoing war in Gaza. Many voters also cite immigration and the economy as reasons they leaned right or leaned out, choosing not to vote.

Jersey City, located just across the Hudson River from Manhattan, shares the cultural richness and diversity of New York City. It is a haven for LGBTQIA+ individuals, immigrants, and people of colour, all expected to be in the crosshairs of Trump's alt-right rhetoric, oft-touted on the campaign trails – and were targets of his policies during his first term as president.

Now, they have to deal with this oddly familiar reality, should Trump – who will have a strong Republican backing in the US Congress – stick to his guns.

"I'm trying but my mind is racing. I'm anxious and terrified," says Devin, a first-generation Dominican-American with immigrant family members in New Jersey and across the country. ■

Kind of blew it: Miles from MAGA-land, even New Jersey saw support for the Democrats' dip. Photo: Tolu Olasoji

Berkley, California

Even Kamala's heartland was not fully blue

Daniel Ekonde

Since coming to the United States this August to begin a master's in journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, I have been struck by the fact that America still grapples with problems like homelessness, crime and high prices. This is the world's most powerful country and its largest economy. And it has hundreds of billions of dollars to pump into wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The result of this week's presidential election shows that US citizens are disturbed by this contrast too.

Hearing from low-income earners has been quite revealing. A black man, living in Democrat-dominated California, told me he voted for Donald Trump because he "is going to fix this country".

He accused the Democrats of favouring the rich while abandoning middle-class Americans. In Oakland, another Trump voter claimed that a multitrillion-dollar company is buying up all the houses in the US. "They simply want everything in America," he said of the Democrats, adding that he believed that Trump, who himself made billions as a property developer, would somehow put the country back on track.

Cast off: A homeless man sits on his belongings in Los Angeles, a Democrat haven. Photo: Frederic J. Brown/AFP

The day after Trump was declared winner, my journalism class discussed the election. When the professor pressed, one Palestinian-American student implied that they had voted for the former president and that their mother did too, for "the obvious reason".

Kamala Harris is from this state and still got less than 60% of the vote. Ten counties flipped from blue to red. One of two women I spoke to at a bank in Berkeley said they voted for her because "we have no choice – we are in California".

Watching as an outsider, I am keen to see how, as "leader of the free world" once again, Trump will resolve the crises in the Middle East and Ukraine. ■

No American president is good for Africa – but some are worse than others

So what does Trump's return mean for the continent?

Nanjala Nyabola

There's no such thing as a United States president who is unequivocally "good for Africa". This is the unfortunate truth that we as Africans have to sit with as we absorb the news of a second Trump presidency. But it's just half the equation.

Africa's primary place in US geopolitics is as a market for military and agricultural surplus, and as a physical location where international frictions can play out without domestic implications.

The last time a US president set foot on the continent was in 2016 – they only visit when they're about to leave office. In a world of high tensions between militarily and economically powerful nations, Africa is less than an afterthought: we are a *footnote* to an afterthought.

Yet a Trump presidency promises to make an already terrible situation worse, in part because of the condition of leadership on the continent right now.

The ideal scenario for an African country is freedom. In the absence of that, African countries do well if they have good leadership and are of only marginal geopolitical interest to powerful nations.

The worst scenario is for the country to be of geopolitical interest and to lack the democratic institutions that advance people's interests. Then foreign governments tip the scales towards autocrats in the name of stability or, worse still, allow an influx of weapons to feed a devastating conflict that no one cares enough to resolve as in Sudan.

It's worth remembering the Cold War was never cold in Africa: millions died. So Trump, a president who was only held back from a nuclear war with Iran by generals who had to keep vigil over him, opens possibilities for new horrors.

In a world of heightened tensions between militarily and economically powerful nations, Africa is less than an afterthought – we are a *footnote* to an afterthought.

Kamala Harris did not offer a promise of something vastly better for African people, but it was never a question of who would be better for Africa. Rather, it was a case of who we as Africans could better organise around. ■

Trump's return is our signal to move on

As the once and future president makes America grate again, the nations and institutions forging a new world order will simply pick up the pace.

Patrick Gathara

Donald Trump has been re-elected president of the United States and to what is ostensibly the most powerful office on the planet. Not that you'd know the last part given how its current occupant, Joe Biden, has been carrying on over the past year of genocide in Gaza.

Still, it is a powerful office and the decisions Trump makes will affect people around the world. That includes those of us in what he once colourfully described as "shithole" countries. So what to make of the return of the muck?

When Trump left office in 2020, many around the world were glad to see the back of him after four years of unending chaos and uncertainty.

However, it could be argued that Africa was largely shielded from the worst aspects of the maelstrom simply by his singular disinterest in the continent, which largely left the administration's policies in the hands of bureaucrats unwilling to rock the boat.

Except, that is, for things like stopping US funding going to organisations that help women make choices about their own bodies in the case of abortion.

Of course, we were also not immune from the global consequences of his corruption, arrogance, insecurity and incompetence – from gutting the global climate change pact to his coddling of dictators and human rights abusers.

Now that he's back it is unlikely that any of that will change.

But has Biden truly been all that different?

Sure, he talked a good game when it came to things like democracy and international cooperation.

But he has been more than happy to buddy up with wannabe autocrats like Kenya's William Ruto, to scuttle international law, and to stymie and threaten international institutions like the UN in the service of a genocidal apartheid entity in Israel.

A second Trump presidency is not necessarily a boon for the continent. It also does not necessarily spell more disaster either.

US policy towards the African continent will probably not change.

However, the international environment will certainly be in flux:

TRAMP

if Trump's first term positions are anything to go by, he may actually end up weakening some of the hegemonic institutions of the West and creating room for alternatives.

The international environment will be in flux. Trump may end up weakening some of the hegemonic institutions of the West and creating room for alternatives.

For example, fear could supercharge Brics moves to create an alternative international payment system, bypassing the Swift system. And even within Europe there is already informal talk of "de-dollarisation".

Trump's win will be far more consequential for the US than for the world.

Over the course of the next four years, if he is true to form (and there is little reason to believe he has learnt anything from his first term), the rest of the world will be working out how to function without its self-appointed "indispensable nation". And by the time the Americans realise that the rest are moving on, it may be too late to stem the tide.

For Africa, that means we have an opportunity to not just imagine a post-American order, but to get serious about building the sort of world order we want to live in, rather than leaving that up to others. ■

Patrick Gathara is a Kenyan journalist, cartoonist and author

Let it rain: An Umbrella for Democratic Change supporter celebrates in Botswana. Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan/AFP

The beginning of the end of the liberation party era

It is getting harder and harder to win elections with struggle credentials alone.

Nic Cheeseman

The once-dominant liberation parties of southern Africa are having a terrible 2024 . Just last week, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) suffered an embarrassing defeat at the polls, losing by a landslide. It is the first transfer of party power in the country's post-independence history. That political earthquake followed a historic election in South Africa, where the African National Congress fell below 50% of the vote for the first time since the end of apartheid in 1994.

It does not stop there.

The fate of the ruling party in Mozambique, Frelimo, remains uncertain after October's general election. Support for opposition candidate Venâncio Mondlane was so high – and Frelimo appears to have manipulated the polls so badly – that the country's Catholic bishops challenged the credibility of the official result, which gave the ruling party candidate a sizeable majority.

Opposition supporters continue to demand that the government leaves power and, despite a violent crackdown on those

protests, Frelimo may yet be forced to do so. Even if it stays put, its legitimacy and authority may have suffered a fatal blow.

Fading memories, fresh concerns

This wave of resistance to the dominance of liberation parties has been dramatic, but not unexpected. They have been haemorrhaging support for some time. The BDP, for example, has consistently failed to secure a majority of votes but – because Botswana does not use a proportional electoral system – would regularly win a majority of parliamentary seats nonetheless.

From the collapse of the parties that secured independence in countries such as Benin, Kenya and Zambia, we know at least three factors that fatally weakened their hold on power: generational shifts, economic stagnation and internal divisions.

From the collapse of parties that secured independence, we know at least three factors that weakened their hold on power: the passage of time, economic stagnation and internal divisions.

Decades after independence, the combination of increasingly young populations and fading memories of the anti-colonial struggle meant that leaders could not rely on their status as "founding fathers" for legitimacy. That shone a brighter spotlight on the governments' economic performance, which was problematic: their political dominance had encouraged corruption and inefficiency, exacerbating the challenges created by an inhospitable and often unfair international financial system.

These failings amplified personal rivalries, ethnic tensions and ideological disagreements within ruling parties, which were inevitable in parties that came to power as broad churches unified more by opposition to colonial rule than anything else. The more individuals quit the government or were expelled, the greater the size of the "opposition in waiting".

By the early 1980s, nationalist parties in much of the continent were holding onto power by their fingertips, propped up by the one-party state political system, which insulated them from having to contest competitive elections. Once it was removed in the early 1990s, they were living on borrowed time. In countries where governments and leaders were more committed to the national interest and respecting the will of the people, as in Benin and Zambia, they rapidly lost multiparty elections. It was only where leaders were willing to systematically manipulate elections and use violence to intimidate and divide their opponents, as in Kenya and Togo, that ruling parties held on.

The same is true today. The popularity of the ANC, BDP and Frelimo has been undermined by economic decline. In Botswana, a sharp downturn in the global diamond market means that the economy is only expected to grow by 1% this year, which means the unemployment rate of 28% is likely to increase.

Citizens have attributed these problems to government failures rather than global trends because they were already concerned about corruption. A recent report from Afrobarometer revealed a sharp increase in the number of citizens across the continent who believed "the president and officials in his office" to be corrupt. In Botswana, a key concern is nepotism, after large contracts were awarded to a company owned by outgoing President Mokgweetsi Masisi's sister. Concerns about graft are even greater in Mozambique and South Africa, where state capacity has been increasingly undermined by the emergency of entrenched kleptocracies.

Internal splits have also continued to be damaging, contracting the support base of today's ruling parties. The new political vehicles built around former ANC members Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema won 24% of the national vote in the 2024 general election which would have given Cyril Ramaphosa a landslide victory had it been mobilised behind his government. The BDP was similarly harmed by the fallout between President Masisi and his predecessor Ian Khama, the son of the country's founding father Sir Seretse Khama, who quit the party and subsequently denounced it. As well as bolstering the opposition, these very public spats undermine the claims of governments to have a right to hold power because it embodies the values and traditions of the liberation/independence movement.

The way these trends play out varies, but their cumulative impact has undermined the ability of almost all independence and liberation parties to stay in power democratically. The reason why the vote share of ruling parties in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe has not fallen as much as those in Botswana and South Africa is not that they have performed much better, but that they have used greater intimidation and repression, and manipulated election outcomes.

Irregular action: Opposition party supporters demonstrate in Maputo on 24 October. Photo: Alfredo Zuniga/AFP

All eyes will now turn to Namibia, which goes to the polls on 27 November. Economic downturn, rising unemployment and corruption allegations have eroded support for the Swapo government. If it allows a free and fair election, there may yet be another liberation party licking its wounds when 2024 winds to a close. ■

Nic Cheeseman is the Director of the Centre for Elections, Democracy, Accountability and Representation (CEDAR) at the University of Birmingham

PHOTO ESSAY

The scars we bear

The war in Tigray ended two years ago. But the loss and suffering it brought is still plain to see in Ethiopia's northernmost region: missing limbs, scattered families, and damage to buildings and infrastructure that is thought to amount to $20-billion. One local institution, the Tigray Disabled Veterans Association in Mekele, survived the carnage and is rehabilitating disabled people regardless of their role in the war. Bahare Teame, the director of the 34-year-old centre, takes pride in this neutral stance. But not all survivors carry visible wounds. As many as 120,000 people were sexually assaulted in a "systemic" campaign of using rape as a weapon of war, a 2023 study published in the *BMC Women's Health* journal confirmed. This is harm that only its survivors, like Bahare and Mamay, can carry. ■

Photos: Michele Spatari/AFP

Hidden scars: Bahare, 30, was raped by three men in Eritrean army uniforms in 2022.

Brutal assault: Mamay, 25, was imprisoned and gang-raped for almost two years, together with other 60 other young men and women.

One step at a time: A young girl practices walking with prosthetic limbs at the Tigray Disabled Veterans Association in Mekele.

Stepping in: A Tigray Disabled Veterans Association worker prepares a prosthesis.

Off the bench: A patient watches a worker at the Tigray Disabled Veterans Association prepare a prosthetic limb for use.

Dehumanising hospitals fail mothers with impairments

More than 1.7-million people in Malawi live with disabilities. But the hospital system is not set up for them, so they suffer indignity – and worse.

Josephine Chinele and Chisomo Ngulube

Each of Christian Chibisa's antenatal visits to the local health facility was confusing and frustrating. She is non-verbal and Limbe Health Centre in Blantyre did not have any sign language interpreters. "I tried to explain how unusual I felt, but was ignored. The nurse on duty just did a physical examination, jotted something in the health passport and sent me off."

She shared her experience with *The Continent* through a sign language interpreter, while breastfeeding her nine-month-old baby girl.

To deliver her baby, Chibisa played it safe by having her sister go with her to the facility. "She helped me with communication." Being able to communicate with nurses proved critical because Chibisa didn't recover well enough after delivery, requiring referral to a bigger facility.

When *The Continent* visited three of Blantyre's most important health facilities, Limbe, Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital and the Zingwangwa health centre, none had an interpreter. None had bathrooms or ambulances fitted to be accessible for people with mobility challenges. The height of delivery and examination beds could not be adjusted. "The labour ward is almost inaccessible for us," said Lynes Manduwa, a disability rights advocate.

These limitations recur across Malawian public hospitals, forcing adult patients like Chibisa to rely on "guardians" as interpreters or assistants to use bathrooms and other amenities. These limitations are worse in rural Malawi and have persisted for decades.

When Fanny Malemia had an ectopic pregnancy in 2018, the absence of sign interpreters nearly cost her life. At the Zingwangwa health centre her life-threatening condition was not treated because her husband is also non-verbal and could not translate her pain to the nurses. Malemia only got surgery when her pastor's wife agreed to escort them to Queen Elizabeth.

The delay, and inability to get full information from the doctors, left Malemia worried that she would not conceive again. "I endured a double psychological battle. This also disturbed my relationship with my husband until

I became pregnant again a year later," Malemia said through a sign interpreter.

Health workers' prejudice sometimes makes the indignities worse. "Recently, one woman was slapped during labour because the nurses and the patient couldn't communicate," Bryson Chimenya, who heads the Malawi National Association for the Deaf, told *The Continent* in July.

That too has persisted for decades. Manduwa said that when she had her baby in 1992, nurses ganged up against her husband to confront him for impregnating a disabled woman.

Formal training for Malawian health workers barely covers caring for people with disabilities. According to Christopher Namagowa, the registrar at Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Malawi's major medical training institution, only cursory content on disability care is included in the four-year nursing programme.

And the Malawian government appears to be far better at talking about disability than providing reasonable accommodations.

The country is party to progressive international treaties like the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the African Disability Protocol. It passed a disability act in 2012 and improved it this year.

But, according to last year's review of the implementation of the UN convention, there are only 10 qualified sign language interpreters in Malawi. Most work as on-screen news interpreters.

In other crucial areas like hospitals, interpretation is left to unqualified friends and family, if anyone.

Review: Health surveillance assistant Bruno Banda checks up on children at a clinic in Rumphi. Photo: Anthony Asael/ Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

Doreen Ali, the director of reproductive health services in Malawi, conceded that inaccessible infrastructure and health workers without the appropriate training have led to poor treatment for women with disabilities. But she said the ministry has a plan to better train staff through the pre-service curriculum.

The government has a poor track record for following through on its stated plans. A 2018 five-year national strategy on improving disability services included the aim for "the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities". When it expired last year, there was little to show for that.

Aware of the government's dismal track record, independent activists are instead working with other allies like Sight Savers and UK Aid Match to train health workers. ■

This story was supported by the Pulitzer Center through the Underreported Stories in Africa project

In none we trust?

George Michael sang: "I gotta have faith." When it comes to public institutions, that's certainly true.

Trust in institutions holds society together. If people think their country's institutions are generally fair, honest, competent, efficient, and accountable, they're more likely to believe in the system, respect laws, support policies, take the risks of economic investment.

But across 30 African countries, popular trust in institutions has been on a steady downward trajectory for the past decade, dropping to below half the population for key public bodies.

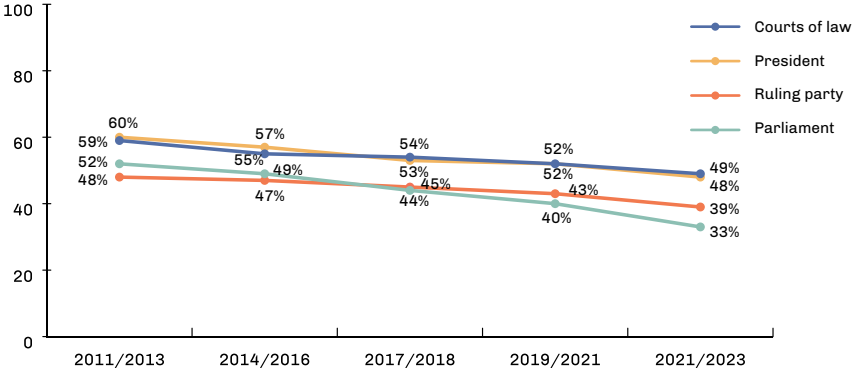
For example, only 48% say they trust their president "somewhat" or "a lot," down from 60% in 2011/2013. Trust in Parliament has dropped by 19 percentage points, from 52% to 33%.

Trust has also registered losses for courts of law (-10), the ruling party (-9), the national electoral commission (-8), traditional leaders (-8), religious leaders (-7), opposition parties (-7), the local government council (-6), and the police (-5).

Trust levels vary by country and tend to be higher than average among rural residents and people with less education. But not high enough to reverse a disturbing trend.

Declining trust in key institutions | 30 African countries | 2011-2023

Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say 'somewhat' or 'a lot')



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.*

AFRO BAROMETER
Let the people have a say

Photo: Film still

A ride through Paris – and life – with Souleymane

A beautifully humanising film takes us into the frantic, undocumented life of a delivery rider.

Line Sidonie Talla Mafotsing

A grey and underground economy has grown alongside the multibillion-euro food delivery industry in France. Registered couriers play the system by "renting" their verified accounts to those most desperate to make ends meet: typically undocumented migrants and asylum seekers willing to work long hours for low pay under all weather conditions.

L'Histoire de Souleymane (Souleymane's Story), is a dive into the hectic life of those invisible workers.

French director Boris Lojkine's newest feature follows Souleymane Sangare, an undocumented Guinean immigrant played by first-time actor Abou Sangare, whose asylum hearing is imminent. Hectic is an understatement.

Scrambling for the money to pay his immigration broker, Souleymane can't rest to prepare for the interview that could change the course of his life. He must make food deliveries. Each time the app asks for face-verification, he must chase after Emmanuel. Zipping through Paris, he practises the story he will tell at the interview: the broker said that his actual story would not suffice. Until Emmanuel ghosts him; and he learns the woman he loved in Guinea is marrying someone else.

Lojkine's screenplay – co-written with Delphine Agut – is a realistic account of undocumented life in the big metropoles. Xavier Sirven's editing delivers intensity and urgency, Tristan Galand's cinematography allows the viewer to fully inhabit each situation and Lojkine's choice to go without music allows the noise of the city to become the film's score.

Sangare's emotional performance explores Souleymane's vulnerabilities and anxieties as if they were his own. Perhaps it helped that the actor himself had only recently been granted a six-month temporary visa in France after living undocumented since 2017. He knew those anxieties intimately.

This is a story about the choices one makes when all they know is survival. ■

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
"Billy Ocean could have told Ubangi-Shari: Get out of my dreams, get into my..."

1_Which city does Algeria get its name from?
2_Freetown is which country's capital city?
3_ Name the present-day country that was previously called "Ubangi-Shari".
4_What is the demonym for people from Côte d'Ivoire?
5_Before politics, what was former Liberian president George Weah's profession?
6_Mauritius is located off which coast of Africa?
7_Nouakchott is which country's capital city?
8_Yahya Jammeh was president of which country from 1996 to 2017?
9_Which country is former football player Yaya Touré from?
10_Sidi M'Cid Bridge (pictured), once the highest bridge in the world at 175m, is located in which country?

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

THE BIG PICTURE

All's well that ends swole: A competitor warms up ahead of the 2024 Mr & Miss East Africa Bodybuilding Contest in Nairobi, which celebrates strength and dedication in East Africa's vibrant fitness culture.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

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