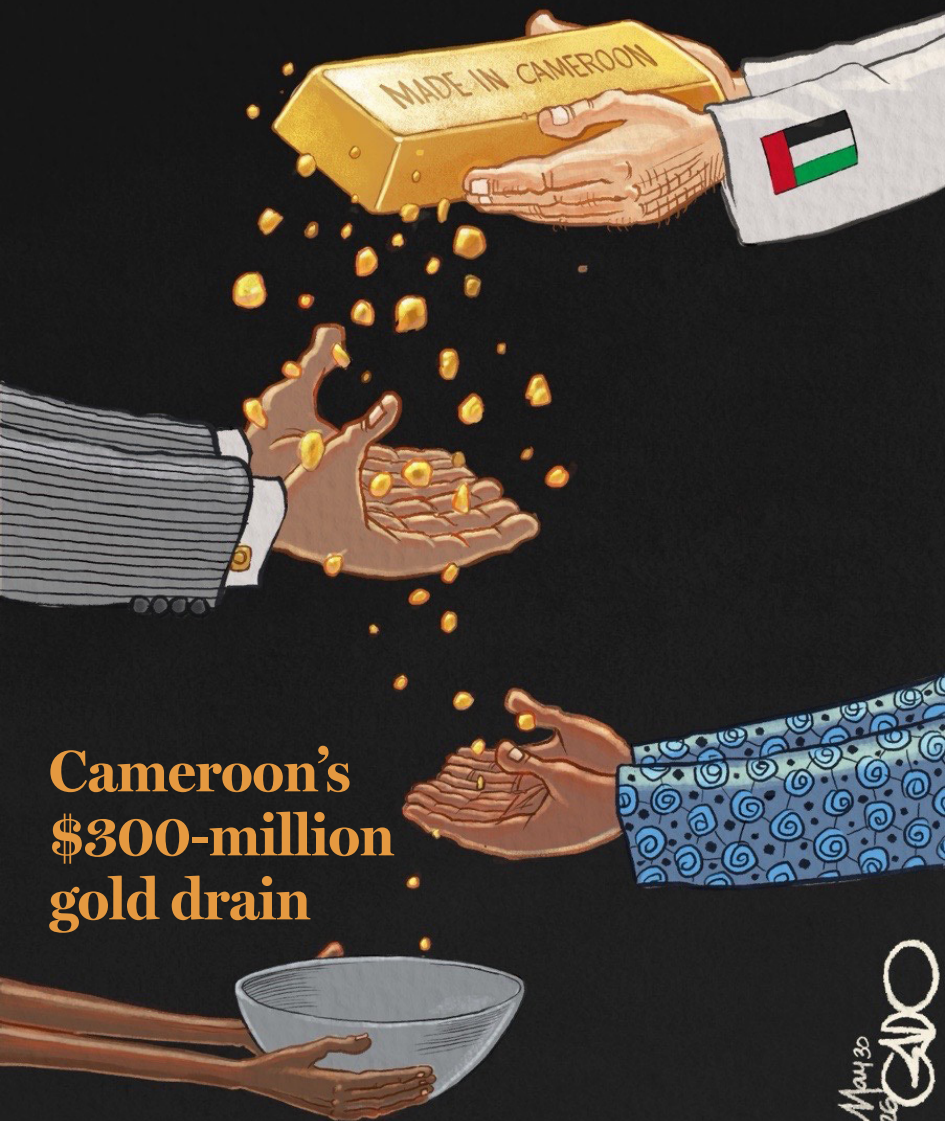


The Continent



**Cameroon's
\$300-million
gold drain**

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2016
CADO



COVER: African countries lose about \$90-billion a year to illicit financial flows. These are “mostly linked to trade misinvoicing in extractive commodities, half of them in gold”, according to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation. Cameroon’s gold sector is a sharp example of this. The country’s official records report gold exports of just 22.3kg in 2023 – equivalent to one suitcase. But import data from other countries shows more than 15 tonnes of gold originating from Cameroon. The leading importer of its gold is – no surprises here – the United Arab Emirates. *The Continent* travelled to Zamboï in Cameroon’s East Region to investigate the conditions for – and impact of – the illicit gold mining and trafficking that left Cameroon with the short end of the stick. (p15)

Inside

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THE WEEK IN BRIEF

UGANDA

Border with DRC closed

Uganda has shut its border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo after Ebola cases spread among health workers who treated infected patients, *Deutsche Welle* reports. Authorities said only emergency travel, cargo, and security movements would be allowed, with arrivals facing 21 days of isolation. The World Health Organisation has warned border closures could worsen the outbreak by pushing people to use unmonitored crossings. Nearly 1,000 suspected Ebola cases and 220 deaths have been reported in the eastern DRC.

KENYA

Pupils killed in dorm fire

At least 16 students were killed and 79 injured after a fire tore through a dormitory at Utumishi Girls Academy in Gilgil, central Kenya, *AP* reports. Authorities said the cause of the inferno remains unknown. The tragedy is the latest in a series of deadly school fires in Kenya, where concerns over boarding-school safety have persisted for years. The deadliest blaze was a 2001 dormitory fire in Machakos county that killed 67 students. More recently, 21 pupils died in a 2024 school fire in Nyeri county.

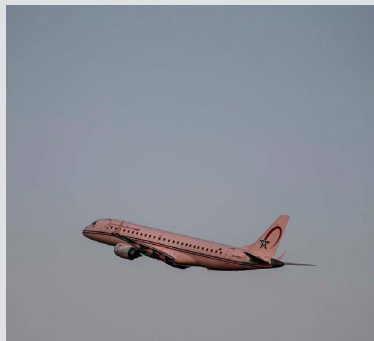


PHOTO: ARMANDO FRANCA/AP

Hangary: Morocco's national carrier's beating will continue till more oil improves.

MOROCCO

The sky's at its limit

Royal Air Maroc has suspended 12 routes across Africa and Europe due to rising prices of jet fuel and weaker demand for some international flights. Affected routes include Casablanca to Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Yaoundé and Libreville and Europe-bound flights from Marrakech and Tangier. The airline said the suspensions are temporary and will depend on fuel prices and market demand, *Africanews* reports. Global oil prices have hovered near or above \$100 a barrel since the start of the US-Israel war against Iran in late February.



SOUTH AFRICA

Cyril trades upholstery for panel beating

President Cyril Ramaphosa is back in court trying to stop Parliament from reopening the never-ending Phala-Phala saga, also known as the case of the mysteriously dollar-stuffed sofa. Ramaphosa is challenging a report that found he may have to answer for cash allegedly stolen from his farm in 2020, the *BBC* reports. He is accused of concealing the theft from authorities while misusing his presidential security personnel to pursue the thieves. Ramaphosa insists the panel may have “misconceived its mandate, misjudged the information placed before it, and misinterpreted the four charges”.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Country to open its borders to all Africans

The Republic of the Congo will abolish visa requirements for all African nationals starting on 1 January 2027. Announcing the move, President Denis Sassou Nguesso urged African states to move beyond the “selfishness and nationalism” of visa restrictions and instead accelerate continental integration and intra-Africa trade. Congo joins a growing list of countries, including Benin, Togo, Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana, and Seychelles, that have adopted visa-free policies for Africans. Flying within Africa remains nearly 50% more expensive than comparable distances on other continents, however.

ANGOLA

Landslide kills miners

At least 28 people are dead after a landslide at an unregistered gold mine in Angola's Bengo province. Thirteen members of the same family were reportedly among the dead, *Business Insider* reports. Four people were rescued. Both formal and unlicensed gold mining have increased in Angola as diamond prices have fallen, with cheaper lab-grown stones becoming more popular. Angola is also diversifying to reduce its reliance on oil, a major global polluter that is facing pressure to phase out from advocates for a livable planet.



PHOTO: LIGHT DRIVE/TAMUNOTONYE/AFP

Take two: President Bola Tinubu will seek a second term. He already has the hat, after all.

NIGERIA

T-Pain is sprung on the presidency

President Bola Tinubu is officially gearing up for a second term. He breezed through his party's presidential primary and was announced flagbearer at a conference centre that was renamed after him last year. The internal ruling-party contest, which required contestants to pay a \$73,000 entry fee, was so competitive that Tinubu had exactly one little-known challenger. Opposition parties are scrambling to mount a more credible challenge in January against Tinubu, whose party now controls 31 of Nigeria's 36 states after a stream of defections.

TANZANIA

Sanctions against torture cop

The United States has announced sanctions against senior police official Faustine Jackson Mafwele over torture and sexual assault allegations by activists Boniface Mwangi and Agather Atuhairi. The pair was detained and held incommunicado in Tanzania in 2025 after attending opposition leader Tundu Lissu's trial. Secretary of State Marco Rubio barred Mafwele from entering the US, saying there was credible evidence he was involved in serious human rights abuses. Tanzania has denied the claims but the sanctions add to growing international concern over the country's human rights record.

EBOLA

Africa-India summit on ice thanks to outbreak

This weekend's India-Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi has been indefinitely postponed because of fears over the Ebola outbreak in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, the *BBC* reports. In a joint statement, India and the African Union said the decision was taken to protect the health of leaders, officials, and delegates attending the summit. The convening would have been the fourth India-Africa Summit and the first since 2015. It was expected to focus on trade, investment, and strategic co-operation.

AFCON

Jailed football fans receive royal pardon

A group of Senegalese football fans jailed after January's chaotic Africa Cup of Nations final in Morocco have returned home after receiving a royal pardon from King Mohammed VI. A statement from the royal court said their release was for "humanitarian reasons". The fans were imprisoned for what Moroccan authorities said was hooliganism during and after the match. Senegal took the trophy after a 94th minute goal, but the Confederation of African Football handed the title to Morocco two months later.

SOMALIA

Famine deepens without a safety net

Nearly a third of Somalia's population are facing life-threatening food insecurity, the United Nations and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network say. Three consecutive rainy seasons have failed and food harvests are the lowest they have been in 30 years. Price shocks from the war on Iran have added to the pressure, as did the collapse of aid. Some 90% of Somalia's food-security response is run by the World Food Programme, which says it may halt operations by July without new funding.



PHOTO: AP

NEWS

UGANDA

Museveni Jnr's 'shabby' play for papa's power

Muhoozi's soft coup answers Uganda's succession question.

LYDIA NAMUBIRU

ON MONDAY, Uganda's Parliament accepted the speaker hand-picked for them by army chief General Muhoozi Kainerugaba – who also happens to be President Yoweri Museveni's son.

The election of Jacob Oboth-Oboth is a landmark in a series of events that appear to position Muhoozi as Uganda's de facto leader.

Oboth-Oboth, who was the minister of defence, was not the ruling party's first choice. It had endorsed incumbent Anita Annet Among for a second term, despite questions about the surge in her personal wealth during her first term.

Museveni had defended her, even as she faced scrutiny, protests and sanctions. But days before the speaker vote, Muhoozi's pressure group within the ruling party withdrew support for Among and endorsed Oboth-Oboth.

Soon after, police and soldiers raided Among's homes, apparently in search of



New recruit: Muhoozi Kainerugaba and Jacob Oboth-Oboth, the new speaker of Parliament.

the proceeds of corruption, at Muhoozi's direction. She withdrew from the race.

Although the army chief has no formal authority over civilian investigations, Muhoozi claims to be leading an anti-graft campaign.

President Museveni has been in power for 40 years. He is now 81, and the question of succession has become unavoidable.

Opposition politician Salaam Musumba has long warned that Museveni's family would answer that question with a self-coup – the installation of one of their own. She believes it is happening now, but has described the recent moves as “shabby ... they don't know how to deal with it yet.”

At least one Muhoozi ally appears to agree with the succession interpretation.

Journalist Andrew Mwenda, who speaks for Muhoozi's pressure group, celebrated the manoeuvres as a “new political dispensation being born before our own eyes”. ■

PHOTO: MUHOOZI KAINERUGABA/X

SENEGAL

Money talks, Sonko speaks

Dismissed for denouncing IMF deal, former PM grabs the mic.

KIRI RUPIAH

PRESIDENT Bassirou Diomaye Faye sacked Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko last Friday. “Alhamdulillah. Tonight, I will sleep with a light heart,” Sonko posted on social media. It was the end of the bromance that brought Faye to power in March 2024. Economist Ahmadou Al Aminou Lo is Faye’s new prime minister.

On Sunday, speaker of Parliament El Malick Ndiaye resigned, paving the way for Sonko to be elected speaker by ruling-party legislators – giving Sonko the power to thwart Faye’s legislative agenda, even without holding the office of the prime minister.

At the heart of the break-up is money – or rather the lack of it.

A 2025 audit revealed previously hidden debt of \$7-billion, which pushed the country’s debt burden to more than 130% of GDP. The two leaders have been at odds on how to get the country out of this hole. Sonko rejected the idea of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme and argued for continuing

to pay lenders, however painfully. Faye has been more amenable.

The government is already running on a deficit equal to 14% of GDP. It needs to raise or save about \$25-billion over the next three years. To cut spending, it closed 19 government agencies in March and raised taxes on mobile money, gambling, tobacco, and cashew nuts.

Faye met IMF boss Kristalina Georgieva during the Africa Forward Summit in Nairobi early this month. Weeks later, in a speech in Parliament, Sonko rallied against accepting IMF terms. He was sacked hours later.

Sonko probably does sleep well now. Getting sacked preserves his standing with voters – being part of a government that makes unpopular economic decisions would erode it. Faye and Sonko came to power on the back of a protest movement by poor urban people who were asking for more government support – not more taxes. ■



PHOTO: MISPER AP/ANU/AP

ChatGDP: Ousmane Sonko, speaker of Parliament.

VATICAN

Deus vs Machina

The pope's encyclical cautioned humanity against selling its soul to AI devilry. But why was a tech elephant in the room?

ISOBEL COCKERELL IN ROME

THIS week, Pope Leo published “Magnifica Humanitas”: his 40,000-word treatise on artificial intelligence.

In it, he argued that we cannot let “the logic of efficiency, control, and profit alone shape personal, social, and economic decisions”. He called for AI to be “disarmed”, to prevent domination, exclusion, and death.

Without naming any AI firms, Pope Leo warned of dangers of a profit-obsessed tech industry. He was staying true to his papal commitment: leading the Catholic Church through the industrial revolution of artificial intelligence.

But as he delivered his address in the Vatican on Monday, one AI firm was represented on stage: Christopher Olah, co-founder of Anthropic, which markets itself as the “most ethical” of the major AI players. Anthropic, which owns Claude AI, has been lauded for rejecting a contract with the US department of war because of insufficient safeguards against misuse of its products. But it's been criticised for allowing Claude to be used in the US-Israeli air strikes on Iran.

Some people were sceptical of Olah's



PHOTO: ALESSANDRA TRANTINO/AP

Holy See, holy do: Pope Leo in St Peter's Square.

presence on stage with the Pope.

On Wednesday, near the Vatican, there was a gathering of clergy, journalists, and AI researchers to discuss the encyclical. It was held under Chatham House rules, which prohibit revealing speakers' identities and affiliations.

There was no doubt, people said, that the encyclical makes a valiant attempt to wrestle with the technological phenomenon of our age. But, one speaker said of Anthropic's involvement: “Is it not possible to solve problems without Big Tech?” ■

This is an edited excerpt from an analysis first published on Coda Story. *The Continent* is partnering with Coda Story to expand our international coverage. If you missed it, you can find our new joint publication – *The Atlas* – [here](#)

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ETHIOPIA

Just can't win, *can* just cancel the coronation

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's victory in next week's election is near-certain. Opposition politician Mistresilasie Tamerat says her campaign is less about winning power than it is about denying the incumbent an uncontested mandate.

RAHEL ASSEFA IN ADDIS ABABA

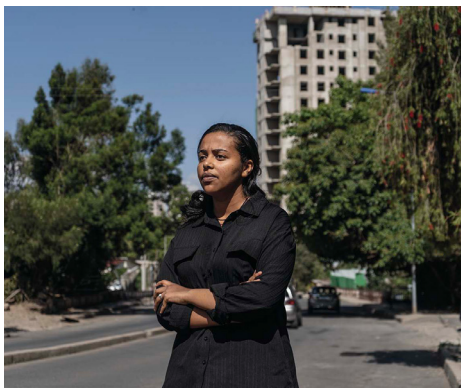
ETHIOPIANS will vote next week in what analysts describe as the country's least competitive election since multiparty democracy was introduced 35 years ago.

Five years ago, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party, won 96% of parliamentary seats. He and the party are all but guaranteed another landslide victory. Ruling-party candidates are running unopposed in dozens of parliamentary constituencies.

Large parts of the country where Abiy and the ruling party are not popular are too restive to meaningfully take part in the election. Tigray is entirely excluded from the vote and polling has already been cancelled in parts of Amhara.

It's in this atmosphere that 23-year-old Mistresilasie Tamerat insists on campaigning against the incumbent.

"I might be jailed, kidnapped, even killed for my politics, but it's a way to bring change," she told *The Continent*.



No kings: Mistresilasie Tamerat is on the ballot for the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party.

PHOTO: THE CONTINENT

"I entered politics to bring change and I refuse to be a silent observer of what's happening in my country."

The space for dissent in Ethiopia has narrowed sharply since Abiy first came to power promising democratic reform and political opening.

On the campaign trail, opposition

parties say they have been denied rally permits, blocked from venues and prevented from campaigning freely.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, one of the few public institutions still viewed as relatively independent, echoed these allegations this month.

“I don’t see it as a competitive race at all, with opposition that has been systematically wiped out and to call it that... is a joke,” said current MP Christian Tadelle, who has spent the past three years in prison after his parliamentary immunity was revoked.

Tadelle spoke to *The Continent* from detention in Addis Ababa, where he says his health has deteriorated after repeated beatings and delayed treatment.

The opposition parties that have continued to participate do so largely to avoid losing their legal registration. The government has threatened to revoke the licences of inactive political parties.

Much of their campaigning has been confined to Addis Ababa. Critics accuse the ruling party of openly using state resources to campaign countrywide.

Purpose in a lost cause

Tamerat first became known as a television journalist who publicly confronted senior government officials on air. She hosted a weekly political programme on Asham TV, a station that later lost its licence after platforming opposition voices and demanding accountability from powerful figures.

Tamerat is now secretary-general of

the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party, a once-influential movement rooted in the country’s student uprisings of the 1970s.

This week, the party’s diaspora committee urged its members to withdraw from the election as its outcome is a “foregone conclusion”.

But Timerat is staying the course, a decision that comes less from optimism than from a belief that silence would amount to surrender.

“I know whatever is happening to opposition leaders [is] going to happen to me,” she told *The Continent*.

In an earlier interview with the *Addis Standard*, she described her participation in politics, even in such a constrained environment, as necessary to ensure the incumbent does not go unchallenged.

The crackdown has extended beyond opposition politicians.

Former minister of peace Taye Dendea was imprisoned and later charged with terrorism after criticising the prime minister on social media. Journalists who challenge official narratives have also faced arrest and prosecution.

It is a particularly striking reversal by a prime minister who was once celebrated internationally as a symbol of Ethiopia’s democratic opening.

Shortly after Abiy first took office in 2018, he released jailed journalists and dissidents, moves that helped to earn him the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Eight years later, Ethiopia is now ranked 148th of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index. ■

NIGERIA

Death from above, shrugs from below

Struggling on the ground, the army turned to the skies. But as strikes kill more civilians, accountability is up in the air.

KIRI RUPIAH

AN AIRSTRIKE killed an estimated 100 people in northwest Nigeria earlier this month. Army spokesperson Major-General Michael Onoja confirmed the Nigerian military was responsible, but said the target was “a confirmed high-level gathering of terrorist ringleaders”.

Residents, local officials and Amnesty International, however, say the army bombed a crowded market and dozens of the dead were civilians.

The incident in Tumfa, a village in Zamfara State, is part of a growing pattern of misfired airstrikes. Since 2017, the army has killed more than 300 civilians in airstrikes that either missed their target or were based on faulty intelligence.

In January 2017, a Nigerian Air Force jet bombed Rann, a town near the border with Cameroon, killing at least 70 people, including aid workers from Médecins

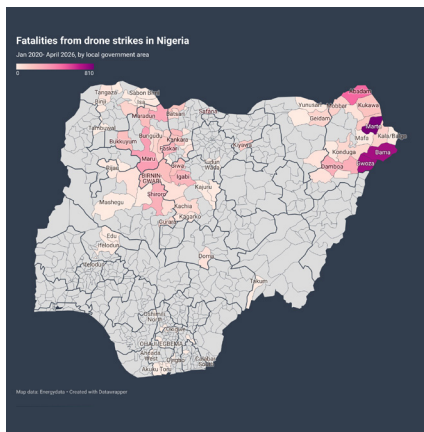


IMAGE: AIGED

Northern exposure: Nigeria's military has killed hundreds of civilians in mistargeted airstrikes.

Sans Frontières. The army called the bombing – which struck a camp for displaced people – an operational error.

In January 2023, an airstrike killed at least 40 Fulani herders in Nasarawa State. Officials said that they were mistaken for bandits. And in December that year, a drone strike hit Tudun Biri in Kaduna State, killing at least 85 civilians at a religious gathering marking Mawlid, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The army admitted the strike was a mistake, saying its intelligence had pointed to the presence of armed groups in the area.

The rise in such mistaken mass killings is linked to Nigeria's increasing reliance on air power over the past 17 years.

In the early years of the Boko Haram



Overkill: The Nigerian military said a “precision” airstrike in Borno State killed suspected militants.

insurgency, the army depended on ground troops, with limited success. Airstrikes and drones have since become central to its operations in the north.

Critics say this turn has come at an unacceptably high cost.

“Air strikes are a reckless use of deadly force, killing civilians and without accountability,” Isa Sanusi, director of Amnesty International Nigeria, told *The Continent*. “Instead of helping to bring security, they are making things worse by destroying lives and communities.”

Amnesty International argues that the military uses airstrikes in situations that should be law-enforcement operations.

The typical army response to the mistaken killings does not help its case for continuing to rely on such tactics.

“There aren’t any accountability measures for such events,” said Miriam Adah, a researcher at the Armed Conflict

Location & Event Data project. “If there are internal processes within the military, they have not been made public.”

In 2024, the military prosecuted two personnel over the mistaken strike in Kaduna State and promised an investigation. Its findings were never released. Neither the military nor the Office of the National Security Adviser responded to requests for comment

“In a few instances when the military claims to carry out investigations, they only and always exonerate themselves,” Sanusi said. “This shows their contempt for the rule of law and human rights.”

Adah warns the army’s nonchalant response to misfires erodes community trust, which could undermine Nigeria’s counter-insurgency efforts. Communities that do not trust security forces are less likely to share intelligence or co-operate with operations. ■

INVESTIGATION

The vanishing gold of Zamboï

Global trade data records 700 times more gold originating from Cameroon than official figures show. An investigation in an East Region mining village exposes the illicit flow.



Slippery slope: Cameroon gold exports are drastically underreported.

ALL PHOTOS: GIOVANNY ENGAMBA/CENTRE POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET LE DÉVELOPPEMENT

**ANGE MOÏSETTE TJEGA ATALA
IN EAST REGION**

CAMEROON'S government closed 200 mining sites in the East and Adamawa regions this month, in an effort to disrupt the country's huge illicit gold economy.

Vast quantities of Cameroonian gold leave the country illegally, partly because mining sites are often informal and not tracked in real time. Cameroon could be missing out as much as \$300-million in tax a year, according to the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative.

This is as much as President Paul Biya announced in loans last year that would fund countrywide roads, power, and agricultural infrastructure.

Data from 2023 – the most recent available – demonstrates how large the gold reporting gap is. That year, official records from Cameroon’s customs directorate reported gold exports of only 22.3kg – equivalent to one heavy suitcase. Of this, nearly 21kg was recorded as exported to the United Arab Emirates.

But the UN’s global trade data showed that 15,194kg of gold originating from Cameroon were imported by other countries that year – almost 700 times higher than officially recorded. Some 92% of this was imported by the UAE.

In recent months, knowledge of this massive underreporting of Cameroon’s gold exports sparked national outrage.

In February, Biya bowed to pressure and launched an official investigation into gold trafficking. The mines ministry began raiding unregistered mining sites in late April.

The gold corridor

The UN links some of the gold leakages to a migration and smuggling route between Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic. Earlier this month, *The Continent* travelled to Zamboï, a mining village in Cameroon’s East Region to investigate. The district lies along that migration corridor.



Top of the heap: The mines pull in youth who abandon their schooling to ‘chase the illusion of gold’.



Sift shift: Artisanal mining appears to have replaced the Mbororo pastoral way of life.

Thirty years ago, people could make a decent living in Zamboï selling bushmeat. Its lush landscapes, dominated by dense forest, were a sanctuary for elephants. Not any more.

The district is gripped by a gold rush. Mbororo women work in open pit mines, some carrying babies on their backs. Artisanal mining appears to have replaced their pastoral way of life.

Newer ways of life are being replaced too. The village is a collection of empty homes, abandoned public buildings, and unfinished construction projects.

“Our school officially has 145 pupils, but only three still attend,” said Zamboï primary school director, Adamou Oumarou Théophile. “The others have dropped out to work in the mines. Education is disappearing, replaced by the illusion of gold.”

In nearby Betaré-Oya, livestock

disappear into open pits that appear overnight. People regularly die digging mining tunnels.

The soil is contaminated by the chemicals that process gold and no longer supports traditional agriculture. Drinking water sources have become scarce and dangerous. The daily use of mercury by thousands of artisanal miners creates exposure levels that ought to trigger immediate intervention.

A report in 2022 by Cameroonian NGO, Forêts et Développement Rural found 71% of 134 artisanal miners tested in the country’s East Region had concentrations of mercury in their hair above World Health Organisation recommended levels.

In impoverished communities, current opportunity often trumps long-term consequences. Mélanie, an 18-year-old miner who asked to use only her

first name to protect her identity, said she understands the long-term health consequences but still uses the toxic metal with no protective equipment.

“We just mix [mercury] with crushed rock and let it sit. When the gold sticks to the mercury, we squeeze it through a cloth to separate them,” she said.

It is not only mercury that imperils locals’ health. The proliferation of open pits and abandoned mining sites has created ideal breeding grounds for malaria-carrying mosquitoes, leading to very high infection rates. Locals also attribute chronic diarrhoea, miscarriages, and skin diseases to contaminated water sources and environmental degradation.

A dark international trade

The mining activity in the area is informal but not always artisanal. Ngoz Alim, a miner from Zamboï, said Chinese companies dominate operations. The ministry of mines closed some of them earlier this month, but sources say some are trying to return.

Several sources, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal, say gold buyers arrive at mining sites under cover of darkness. They carry bags of money and operate only when government mining officials are absent. They reportedly pay exclusively in cash, offer no receipts, and maintain no records that could be traced by authorities.

For miners desperate for immediate income, these shadowy figures represent the only reliable market for their dangerous labour.

Nafissatou, a student at the École Normale Supérieure in Bertoua who also asked that only her first name be used, divides her time between academic pursuits and backbreaking labour in the mines around Zamboï.

Gold buyers arrive at under cover of darkness. They carry bags of money and operate only when officials are absent.

“I work three months to earn 150,000 Central African francs [about \$266],” she said, describing tasks that include washing ore, transporting materials, and draining flooded pits. “It’s the only way I can pay for my education.”

Patchy regulation

Cameroon’s government is beginning to respond to its illicit gold crisis, but there is a lot of ground to cover.

The country passed a mining code in 2016. It requires environmental-impact assessments and community consultation processes and establishes clear penalties for violations.

But in areas like Zamboï, operators can ignore such provisions – they are unregistered and official enforcement is limited to one-off interventions.

In theory, Sonamines, the national mining company, is responsible for artisanal-mining activities. But its presence in remote mining areas appears limited to periodic visits that

are apparently well-telegraphed to illegal operators. Environmental protection agencies similarly maintain minimal presence in remote mining regions.

Local government officials typically express frustration at their own powerlessness.

They say they lack the resources, training, and institutional support to confront international operations. These often have better equipment and more sophisticated logistics than government agencies.

“The mining code gives no role to the divisional office itself, yet we are commonly called ‘chief of the land,’” lamented Asse Julien Martial, Garoua-Boulai’s divisional officer.

There is “a disconnect between central government policy and regional

implementation,” said Marc Kamga from the NGO Centre pour l’Environnement et le Développement.

Yaoundé needs “to move beyond short-term enforcement measures towards more durable systems for oversight and accountability,” said Ahmed Zouari, the adviser on Cameroon’s gold at the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative.

He said systematic oversight would include strengthening traceability of minerals, improving transparency and oversight of Sonamines, and mandating that operators disclose their ultimate owners. ■

This story is published in collaboration with Finance Uncovered, a UK journalism organisation



Big dig energy: Environmental and health impacts of unchecked artisanal mining are largely unmonitored.

PHOTO ESSAY

Heads high, hijabis: You got game

PHOTOS: SODIQ ADELAKUN

WORDS: BENJAMIN EZEAMALU

IN NIGERIA's Kwara State, hijabis are playing a sport dominated by men, defying domestic and international attempts at sexist social control.

In Muslim-majority Kwara in North-Central Nigeria, women's participation

in public life is often constrained by religious tradition.

On the global stage, athletes wearing hijab have faced backlash for decades now. Fifa banned hijabs on the pitch in 2007, claiming they were unsafe, only to lift the ban seven years later.

The girls in Kwara are part of a proud tradition of women's football in Nigeria.



Grass be greener: A Muslim woman in Kwara, North-Central Nigeria, watches a men's match. Nigeria has a strong tradition of supporting women's football, but the support is focused mainly on the south.

Its women's football league is among Africa's strongest. The national women's team, the Super Falcons, has won the Women's Africa Cup of Nations 10 times.

Even within this tradition, the Kwara

girls represent a new frontier. The national league is dominated by southern clubs from cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt, which feature robust infrastructure and social support for women athletes. ■







FEATURE

As Ebola spreads, it amplifies mistrust

An artist sends dispatches from eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where communities and health authorities are responding to yet another Ebola outbreak – sometimes in sharply conflicting ways.

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATIONS: EDIZON MUSAVULI





Butembo, North Kivu: The city was one of several hit by the 2018-2020 outbreak, the second-worst Ebola outbreak on record. It also experienced flare-ups in 2021 and 2022. Health authorities quickly rolled out safety protocols and messages this time, but some residents remain sceptical about the threat. As is the case in other areas, residents who are vigilant about infection prevention sometimes find themselves harshly judged by those who believe the virus doesn't even exist.





Bunia, Ituri: This provincial capital is the epicentre of the current outbreak – and threat-assessment differences between experts and residents. In some cases, health workers are clashing with relatives of dead Ebola patients who insist on customary burials for their loved ones despite strict official protocols on body disposal.



Goma, North Kivu: This provincial capital is under the martial rule of March 23 Movement rebels, so its residents are caught between the virus and the gun.

DATA

Freedom of assembly required

IN ZIMBABWE and South Africa, once-banned parties have ruled for decades. How strongly do Africans feel about freedom of political association?

On average across 38 African countries, a healthy majority (64%) of citizens support the right to join any organisation of their choice. But half as many (32%) think the government should be able to ban any organisation that goes against its policies.

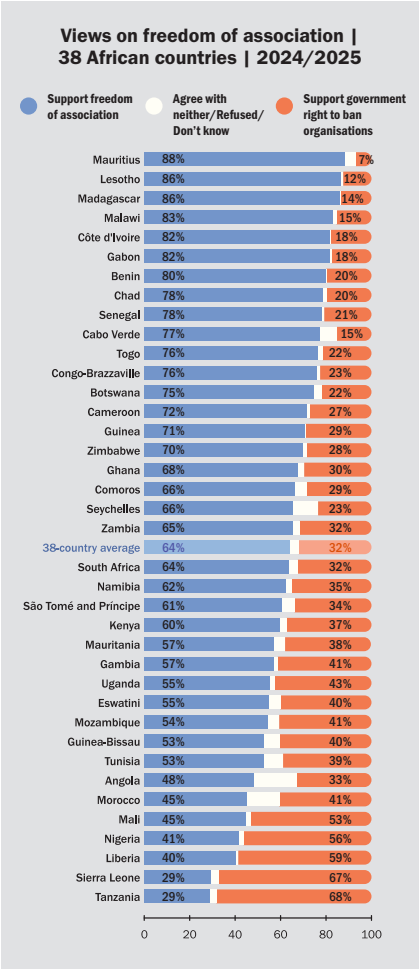
Support for freedom of association varies widely across the continent.

It ranges from more than eight in 10 in Mauritius (88%), Lesotho (86%), Madagascar (86%), Malawi (83%), Côte d’Ivoire (82%) and Gabon (82%), to fewer than three in 10 in Sierra Leone (29%) and Tanzania (29%).

South Africa matches the continental average (64%), whereas Zimbabwe places a bit higher (70%).

In practice, most Africans (77%) feel at least “somewhat free” to join any political organisation they like, including a majority (54%) who feel “completely free” to do so. (This average is based on 37 countries; we didn’t ask Eswatini.)

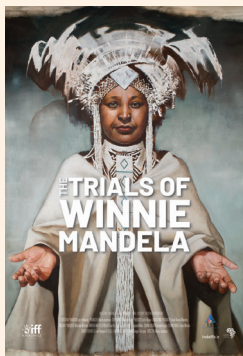
Only 46% of Comorians feel free to join any group they want to, the only country where this is a minority view. ■





FILM REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



One battle after another

Is a balanced
examination of Winnie
Madikizela-Mandela's
life even possible?

IN SOUTH African politics there may be no figure as grand – and as confounding – as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. In the public eye, she has cycled through personal suffering, adulation, tremendous influence, corruption scandals, and tumbles from grace.

Her legacy, inextricably tied yet wholly

divergent from her former husband Nelson Mandela's, has been contested, picked apart, litigated, judged, is now being cautiously re-evaluated.

The seven-part Netflix documentary, *The Trials of Winnie Mandela*, by the late Emmy-winning documentarian Mandy Jacobson, is perhaps the most comprehensive attempt yet at connecting the many faces of Madikizela-Mandela.

Jacobson comes at her protagonist through the eyes of two Mandela granddaughters, who have both an intimate knowledge of Madikizela-Mandela as a loving grandmother and the distance of two generations removed.

As stand-ins for the audience, they are oblivious to some of the episodes of her life and discover some tough things along the way. They also seem to be in awe of their grandmother and sometimes lack the skillset to get anything out of her other than defensive dismissals.

Jacobson's fine control of the rich research and archival material flags only in the final two episodes as the narrative becomes somewhat mawkish.

Jacobson valiantly attempts to get to the bottom of some of the ugly mysteries that still trail the former Mrs Mandela, before seeming to ask her audience to receive "the truth" as a refraction of multiple sides and perspectives.

If this feels like a cop-out elsewhere, it doesn't here, because Madikizela-Mandela was, genuinely, many things. ■



COMMENT

Winnie Mandela and the cost of resistance

A Ugandan feminist revisits the legacy of the revolutionary who declined to go quietly once the struggle was won.

< **Banished:** Winnie Mandela and her daughter Zindzi Mandela in Brandfort, South Africa in 1977. PHOTO: STEVE KAGAME

AIDA NAMUKOSE

MY EARLIEST introduction to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was through a narrow lens: as Nelson Mandela's wife and, notoriously, "the woman who had the little boy killed". Her complex legacy was reduced to two extremes – the "Mother of the Nation" or "Winnie the Witch" – obscuring the reality of her life.

It was only after watching the 2017 documentary *Winnie* that my understanding shifted. It marked one of my early feminist awakenings.

For the first time, I understood how deliberately her story had been rewritten to minimise her political leadership, intellect, and contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle.

Still, it would take years before I could grasp the full weight of what women like her endured.

Under apartheid's militarised racial regime, Winnie's refusal to shrink under brutal circumstances is what makes

her unforgettable as a woman, public intellectual, and freedom fighter. She was willing to be seen, disliked, and defiant.

As women – especially Black women – we are taught to be agreeable, quiet, and respectable. Do not disrupt. Do not take up space. Do not challenge men or the status quo.

Winnie rejected that script and wrote her own. Perhaps that is why she is called a witch.

Raised in rural South Africa, Winnie witnessed segregation and racial violence from a young age. At age 22, she married Nelson Mandela. Five years later, after he was sentenced to life imprisonment, she was thrust onto the front lines of the struggle.

While Mandela was in prison, Winnie endured decades of harassment, torture, imprisonment and 17 months in solitary confinement. Even during her eight-year banishment to the lonely town of Brandfort, she refused to disappear. Instead, she organised clinics and soup

kitchens, showing up for her neighbours despite the state's attempts to erase her.

Winnie openly endorsed militant resistance, drawing condemnation and intense media scrutiny. The Mandela United Football Club, her security detail, was linked to kidnapping, torture, necklacing, and the murder of 14-year-old Stompie Seipei in her Soweto home.

She was later convicted of kidnapping, and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission held her politically and morally accountable for abuses committed under her command.

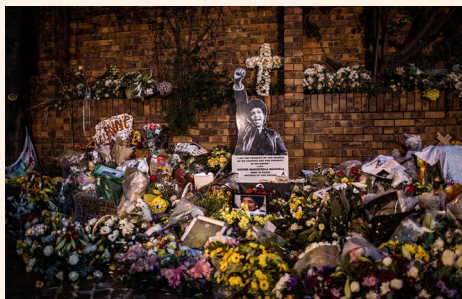
Although she apologised, many viewed it as reluctant, with Winnie maintaining that the conditions of the time had shaped her actions.

This is where nuance and solidarity feel most necessary to me. I struggle deeply with violence in all its forms, while recognising the impossible conditions that she was forced to live under.

It is easy, decades later, to analyse consequences from a distance. It is another thing to be tortured by a racist state, imprisoned and hunted for demanding basic rights.

Winnie herself admitted that although she began with peaceful intentions, years of violence and harassment hardened her. The lives lost and atrocities committed must be confronted honestly without collapsing into the caricature of "Winnie the Witch".

We must also interrogate the gendered double standards at play. History is filled with men celebrated for armed resistance and revolutionary violence. War is funded, normalised and often



Rest in power: Tributes at Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's home ahead of her funeral in 2018.

PHOTO: GULSHAN KHAN/AFP

justified when waged by men, but that same grace was not extended to Winnie.

After his release, Mandela divorced Winnie, citing infidelity and her public scandals. Despite her role in preserving his legacy during his imprisonment, she was sidelined at his inauguration and omitted from his will.

Her subsequent government career ended in dismissal for corruption, followed by a 2003 conviction for theft and fraud. Although she resigned, these controversies persisted until the end of her life.

And yet.

With all her flaws and contradictions, Winnie's life forces us to confront who is allowed complexity, grace and credibility. She was unruly, unforgiven, and unforgettable – and I honour her by holding all of her truths. ■

Aida Namukose is a pan-African eco-feminist and photographer from Jinja, Uganda. She is a Blueprints for a New Economy Fellow (2025)

The Quiz

- 1 Who is the president of Senegal?
- 2 What was Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve renamed?
- 3 Which country is former French president Nicolas Sarkozy accused of soliciting illegal financing from?
- 4 What is the official currency of Cameroon?
- 5 Which current top 10-ranked Canadian tennis player is of Congolese descent?
- 6 Who was Nelson Mandela's second wife?
- 7 Which Egyptian football player just played his last game for Liverpool FC?
- 8 Which ocean does Nigeria border?
- 9 How many colours are on Tunisia's flag?
- 10 Which country's independence monument is pictured below?



HOW DID I DO?

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

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 you want independence, you can't sit down and wait for colonialism to serve it up. You gotta order it to go."

Big Pic

Gooners gonna goon: Kenyan fans of Arsenal Football Club gather at a street festival in Nairobi with a replica trophy to celebrate the Gunners ending their 22-year drought by becoming Premier League champions last week.

PHOTO: TONY KARUMBA/AFP



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