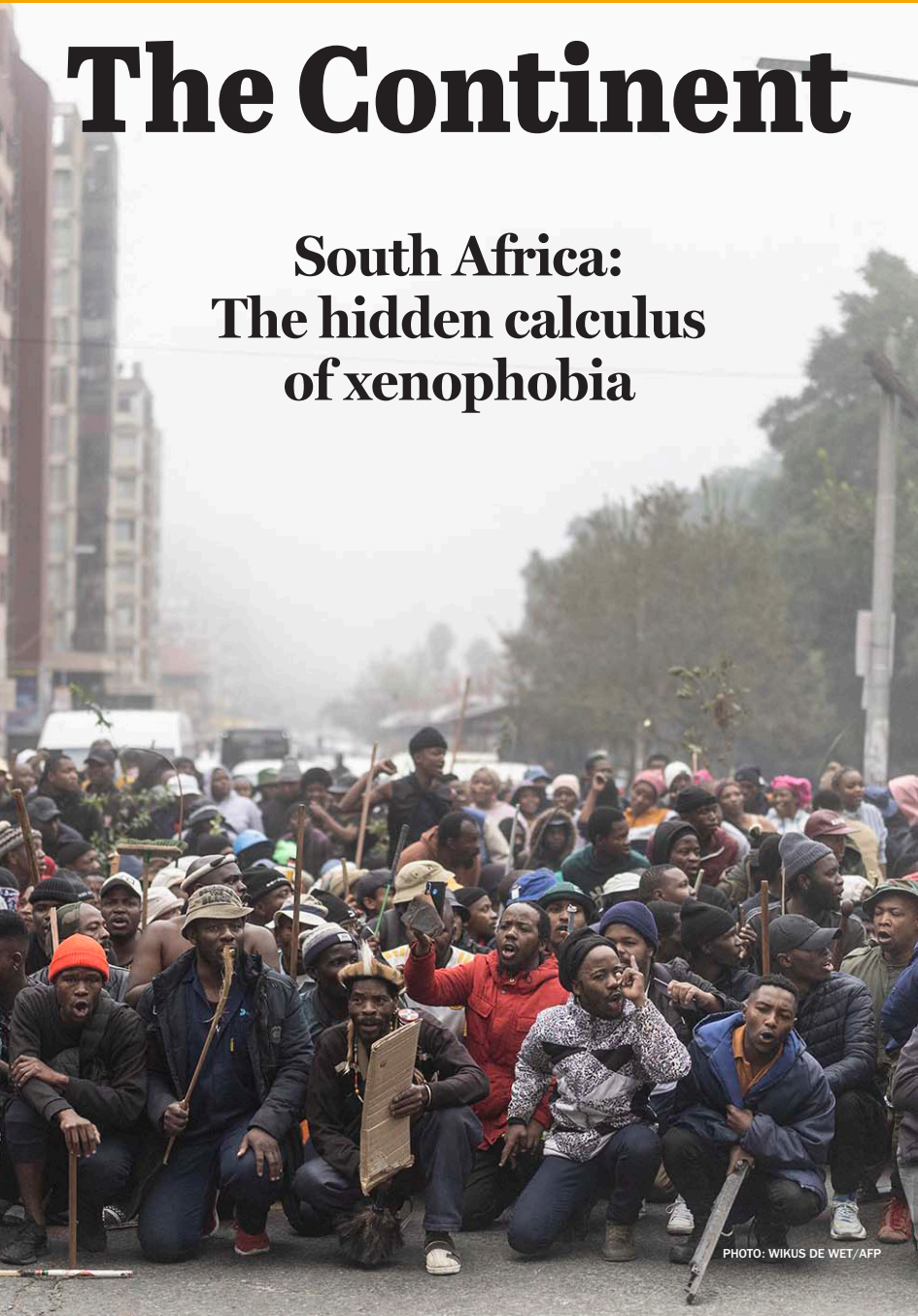


The Continent

South Africa: The hidden calculus of xenophobia





COVER: The conventional explanation for South Africa’s waves of xenophobic violence is familiar: a stagnant economy, high unemployment, and migrants cast as useful scapegoats. But that’s not the whole story. Researchers say violent protests in South Africa — including xenophobic ones — are closely tied to factional, internal battles within the African National Congress. During Jacob Zuma’s state capture years, when factions were accommodated with preferential access to jobs, contracts and state resources, violent demonstrations were relatively rare. In times of less blatant corruption, factions often mobilise violent protests to negotiate for power. Migrants might be on the banners – but those behind the protests appear more interested in harnessing public ire for their power games than in changing immigration policy (p15)

Inside

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LET’S CELEBRATE!

You know our cover art is iconic. The Society for News Design agrees. We scooped up two Awards of Excellence in this year’s global competition for the covers of editions 202 and 210. We are in the global big leagues because you recognise high-quality African journalism by reading and sharing it. If you would like to support this award-winning team with cash too, click on the [link](#).

THE WEEK IN BRIEF



PHOTO: MOSES SAMASAWA/AP

Safety first: A health worker treats an Mpox patient in Kamituga, eastern Congo.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Scientists nabbed for Mpox smuggling

Two scientists at a United States government laboratory have been charged with allegedly smuggling vials of deactivated Mpox into the US from the Republic of the Congo. Authorities say the researchers, who work at a federal laboratory in Montana, failed to declare the samples or obtain the required permits when they arrived at a Michigan airport in January, *AP* reports. Prosecutors say the case raises concerns about compliance with biosecurity rules, although there is no suggestion the samples posed a public health threat.

SOMALIA

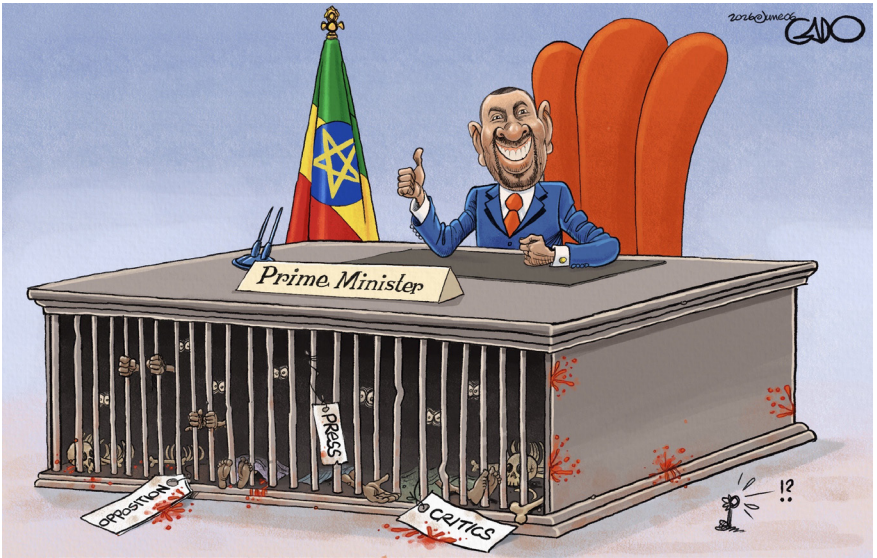
Mogadishu erupts ahead of protests

Armed clashes broke out between security forces and supporters of opposition leaders ahead of an anti-government protest in Mogadishu. Residents reported heavy gunfire and explosions as fighting spread, *AP* reports. The opposition accuses President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of illegally extending his time in office, which the government denies. International observers called for restraint and dialogue, warning further unrest could threaten Somalia's stability as it continues its fight against al-Shabab militants.

WORLD CUP

Yes to waste!

Fifa has scored an own goal with sustainability campaigners after banning reusable water bottles from 2026 World Cup stadiums, *The Athletic* reports. Fans attending matches in the United States, Canada, and Mexico are barred from using refillable bottles, despite concerns about extreme heat and the environment. The footballing body says the ban is for safety reasons, to prevent the risk of injury to players if these bottles are thrown.



DRC

Two militia leaders sanctioned

The United States has imposed sanctions on alleged intelligence leaders of the March 23 Movement (M23) and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The sanctions target John Imani Nzenze, alleged M23 intelligence chief, and Gustave Kubwayo, an alleged FDLR commander, *TRT* reports. The move comes amid renewed fighting in North Kivu province and a worsening humanitarian crisis. The US said it remains committed to helping to restore peace in eastern DRC, where armed groups are competing for control of territory and resources.

ZIMBABWE

Mnangagwa stay-put scheme gathers steam

Ziyambi Ziyambi, Zimbabwe's justice minister, has introduced a bill that would extend President Emmerson Mnangagwa's tenure, *AP* reports. The proposal also pushes elections due in 2028 to 2030, extending the 83-year-old's term by two years. MPs, councillors, and mayors are invited to the party as the bill seeks to increase their terms of office from five to seven years. It would also allow MPs to choose the head of state, replacing a direct vote for president by the electorate. The proposal has heightened political tension and awaits a constitutional-court ruling.

GHANA

Value-added MPs outlaw queerness

Ghana's parliament has passed a bill imposing prison sentences of up to 10 years for "promoting or funding" LGBTQI+ activities and up to three years for same-sex sexual acts, the *BBC* reports. The legislation, expected to be signed by President John Mahama, revives another bill approved in 2024 that was not passed by then president Nana Akufo-Addo. At the time, the country's finance ministry warned it could jeopardise Ghana's access to international-development



PHOTO: LEFTY SHIVAM BU/GALLO

Point of Pride: Treatment Action Campaign activists rally against the anti-LGBTQI+ bill.

funding. The bill is framed as defending Ghanaian values – but at the seemingly acceptable cost of basic human rights.

SENEGAL

Sonko pulls his party out of Faye's reach

Former prime minister Ousmane Sonko says his Pastef party will stay out of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's new government, *France 24* reports. Speaking on social media, Sonko said when he met Faye on Monday, there were "points of disagreement" about the future role of the party. The split between the pair comes amid Senegal's debt crisis and planned talks with the International Monetary Fund. Sonko may be out of cabinet, but as parliament speaker with strong backing from MPs, he is well placed to make life difficult for the president.

MADAGASCAR

Top court nixes bid to impeach Randrianirina

Madagascar's constitutional court has rejected an attempt by opposition MP Antoine Rajerison to remove President Michael Randrianirina from office, *Anadolu* reports. According to the court, the case did not meet the legal requirements for impeachment. Randrianirina took power in 2025 after protests forced his predecessor into exile. Madagascar is preparing to hold a referendum and presidential elections in 2027. This removal attempt pales in comparison to the two assassination attempts Randrianirina survived earlier this year.

EBOLA

Potential vaccines join the race against time

Three experimental vaccines for the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola may begin trials within months, the *BBC* reports. Bundibugyo has killed nearly 250 people, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Scientists at the International Aids Vaccine Initiative, the University of Oxford, and Moderna are racing to produce the vaccines. Experts say the outbreak could rival West Africa's devastating 2014-16 Ebola epidemic. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations says "every day counts" as Ebola continues to spread through conflict-affected areas.

RWANDA

Kigali keeps calling, but London won't pick up

Rwanda's bid for a \$134-million payment from Britain as compensation for its abandoned migrant-deportation scheme has hit a brick wall, *AP* reports. International arbitrators ruled against Rwanda after United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer scrapped the policy, which would have sent people seeking asylum in the UK to Rwanda instead. Courts said the policy was unlawful as Rwanda is not a safe third country for migrants. With Rwanda left empty-handed, it's a costly reminder that not every migration deal comes with a guaranteed return ticket.

NIGERIA

Shell vows to go all in on not shelling out

Documents disclosed in a British court case suggest fossil-fuel giant Shell continued operating a major oil pipeline in Nigeria, despite internal company warnings about theft, spills, and infrastructure failures. The *BBC* reports executives raised concerns in 2008 about the risks posed by the Nembe Creek Trunk Line in the Niger Delta. Communities affected by more than 100 oil leaks between 2011 and 2013 are seeking \$1-billion in compensation and clean-up costs.



PHOTO: SUNDAY ALAMBA/AP

Toxic stocks: Field workers test the waters at an oil spill in the Niger Delta in Ogboinbiri.

Shell argues most spills were caused by oil theft and sabotage and says it will vigorously defend the case at trial.

NEWS

US - AFRICA

Shifty goalposts now on fire, too

People from 34 African states now have to travel to another country to apply for a US visa.

YUSUF OMOTAYO IN LAGOS

THE UNITED States is reducing the number of visa-processing embassies and consulates in Africa from 50 to 20. That means nearly half the continent's population will need to travel to another country to obtain a US visa.

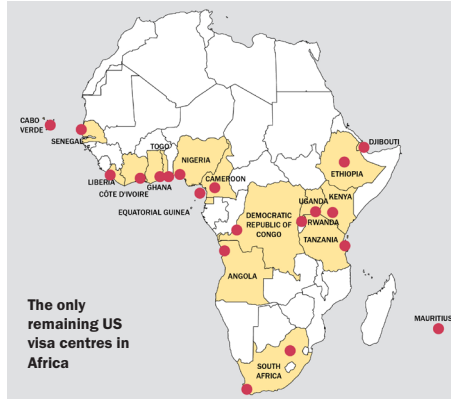
In places stripped of their processing capacity, embassies will only provide bare-bones services, such as US passport renewals and diplomatic credentials.

The move is in keeping with the growing hostility of the US to people wanting to cross the Atlantic.

Two months ago, the administration said nationals of 30 African countries must pay visa bonds of up to \$15,000 for business and tourism visa applications.

In practice, according to Loren Landau, professor of migration and development at the University of Oxford, the six-to-eight-month waits for visa appointments at embassies have already effectively closed off travel to the US.

Ahead of the Fifa World Cup, which



begins next week, the US made a small concession in waiving visa bonds for fans with valid tickets from five African countries. The US is one of the three hosts, along with Canada and Mexico.

No North African country is listed among the approved visa-processing hubs. This means Algeria and Tunisia find themselves in a peculiar predicament: World Cup qualification means their citizens no longer face steep visa bonds, but their local processing centres are being closed.

This might be a move to stem broader migration from North Africa. Landau noted that people can use the visa centres to apply for asylum. "It may also be an attempt to deny access to displaced people who have sought to leave the continent by travelling across the Atlantic or Mediterranean." ■

NIGERIA

Between the devil and the thin blue line

First step in finding a missing loved one: Pay off the police.

ABDULLAHI JIMOH IN IWO

NIGERIA is in the grip of a kidnapping crisis, but abductions are not the only issue to worry about. When families of victims turn to the police for help, they face extortion by police officers.

In January, Modinat Ayoka's 24-year-old son, Toliat Abdul-Rahmon, went missing for two days in Iwo, Osun State. She went to her local police station and was asked to pay 2,000 naira (about \$1.50) before filing a report.

However, shortly after paying the "fee," she discovered that her son was already in police custody.

"They brought him out after checking our statement. They said he had been arrested after someone accused him of burglary," Ayoka told *The Continent*.

Before Abdul-Rahmon was released, the family still had to pay another 15,000 naira in bail.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, nearly

24,000 people were recorded as missing in Nigeria in 2025. Many disappearances are blamed on kidnapping for ransom, rituals, and terrorism.

Authorities insist that there are no fees for filing complaints or granting bail. Yet unsanctioned extortion remains common.

Police officers receive more than a third of all bribes paid in Nigeria, the highest of any public sector, data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime shows.

Part of the problem is that Nigeria's security institutions are chronically underfunded, said Akintola Abduljalal, a legal expert based in Ibadan.

"The law will remain toothless when enforcement agencies are weakened by inadequate funding, poor remuneration, and the absence of effective community policing," said Abduljalal, adding that institutional reforms were necessary to improve public safety. ■

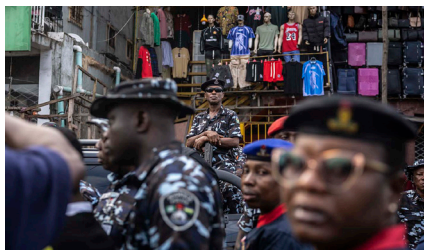


PHOTO: OLYMPIA DE MAISSMONT/AFP

Crime doesn't pay? Police receive more than a third of all bribes paid in Nigeria, UN data shows.

Your favourite newspaper IRL

The Continent is teaming up with Nairobi's Drunken Lectures to bring people together to argue in good faith.

LISA MUCHANGI

JOURNALISM should travel beyond the page and into the rooms where people sit with the questions that shape their lives. And if that means our journalists joining you for a pint, then so be it!

We began on Monday at the Beer District in Nairobi's Westlands, co-hosting with Drunken Lectures. This series has quickly become a favourite fixture in the city, curating spaces in which people come to learn and share, guided by a guest lecturer.

In this edition, we invited Professor Wandia Njoya to unpack the history of education in Kenya and the disconnect between the dream of a system meant to set people free ... and the reality.

These are the kinds of conversations *The Continent* team wants to rope more Africans into. We will come bearing gifts – like framed copies of our iconic cover art – if you invite us to the cookout. ■



Lisa Muchangi is *The Continent's* communities lead

Reading is resistance



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KENYA

‘We’re not your pathogen containment colony’

Plans for a US-funded Ebola quarantine centre are on ice after fierce criticism and deadly protests in Nanyuki.



PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP

Not in our backyard: Plainclothes police arrest an activist at a protest against the quarantine centre at Laikipia Air Base. Critics say Kenya should not shoulder health risks out of deference to Western allies.

MWANGI NDIRANGU IN NANYUKI

KENYA'S high court on Tuesday temporarily blocked plans to establish a United States-funded Ebola quarantine facility in central Kenya, a day after violent protests against the plan left one person dead and two others hospitalised.

The 50-bed facility, planned for the Laikipia Air Base in Nanyuki – about 200km northeast of Nairobi – was intended to isolate US nationals exposed to Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where an outbreak was reported last month.

Kenya has yet to report any cases

of Ebola, but President William Ruto admitted his administration's role in commissioning the quarantine site.

The president insists that the \$13-million centre is part of a standard health co-operation agreement with the United States.

The disease has so far claimed 49 lives, mostly in the DRC, with a few cases in neighbouring Uganda.

But local leaders in Kenya, human rights defenders, and ordinary citizens have strongly opposed the project, wondering why their country should host a quarantine facility exclusively for Americans.

Protests in Nanyuki town on Monday were violently broken up by police, who fired tear gas and live bullets into the crowd.

Critics see it as another example of the Ruto administration's deference to Western interests. The government describes it as a necessary public-health preparedness measure.

The country's doctors' union threatened a strike if the facility went ahead. "We will not sit back and watch Kenya be treated as a containment colony for a lethal pathogen that we did not generate ... Kenya is a sovereign republic, not a geopolitical isolation ward," the union said in a statement.

Kenya's high court has now directed the government to provide full transparency by releasing comprehensive health and biosafety evaluations, regulatory clearances, and specific protocols governing the facility's operation.

The disease is spread through direct

contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person or animal.

In Nanyuki, Laikipia county, residents fear health risks and economic consequences.

"The concerns we are raising should not be interpreted as opposition to public-health preparedness or international co-operation," said Laikipia Governor Joshua Irungu.

He told *The Continent* decisions of this magnitude must be handled with exceptional sensitivity to their social, economic, and psychological impact, noting that local health facilities are ill-equipped to manage any potential spillover.

Irungu also warned that Laikipia's tourism-dependent economy would be devastated by the mere perception of Ebola's presence in the region.

Charity Kagwiria, a parent at Laikipia Air Base Day Secondary School, located next to the site of the quarantine facility, says she is traumatised and considering moving her children out of school.

"My interaction with the children will no longer be normal when Ebola patients are brought in," Kagwiria said. "I will always imagine that my children are already exposed to the virus, putting us at a great risk."

Beyond a brief address to protesters earlier this week, officials at the Laikipia Air Base have not been forthcoming about the status of the facility's construction.

The case will be next heard in court on 23 June. ■

BOTSWANA

When Russian recruiters came to campus

A year-long Interpol investigation found that recruitment drives for Russia's war were held at the University of Botswana.

KELETSO THOBEGA IN GABORONE

AN INTERPOL Botswana investigation has linked recruitment drives held at the University of Botswana and other tertiary institutions last year to Russia's war in Ukraine.

According to Interpol Botswana senior superintendent Selebatso Mokgosi, the recruitment drive took place openly at the university's campus after pamphlets circulated inviting students to meetings about lucrative work opportunities in Russia.

Refilwe Moeti, 22, was present at one of these meetings in April 2025. She says about 100 students attended. Attendees were invited to sign contracts, some of which were in Russian.

Moeti told *The Continent* she was initially excited at the prospect of going abroad and earning up to \$1,000 a month as advertised. She backed out of the offer after her brother warned it would be risky to travel to Russia considering its ongoing war with Ukraine.

Kesego Tau also attended one of the meetings.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Age: 18-22 years old females

Education: at least Grade 10

Valid international passport: if there is no PASSPORT yet you can apply for it during application period so it is ready by the time you enter the **ALABUGA START PROGRAMME**

No serious chronic diseases
Programme participants pass a complete medical examination on arrival. The participant will not be allowed to work if a chronic disease is detected.

\$44

ACCOMMODATION
IN HOSTEL 🏠



See the world, they said: An Alabuga Start pamphlet used to recruit young African women.

"The recruitment people got uncomfortable when someone asked too many questions," she said, adding it all sounded "too good to be true".

The University of Botswana opened a Russian language centre in 2023.

Vice-Chancellor Professor David Norris told *The Continent* its dealings with Russia were part of the institution's interest in forming "strategic partnerships".

The university has now distanced itself from the recruitment drives.

The Russian embassy in the capital Gaborone told *The Continent* the opportunities were legitimate.

But Botswana immigration authorities warned participants through a public statement that they travelled at their own risk, urging them to verify the offers advertised through local authorities.

Interpol concluded that people recruited for hospitality work were drafted into drone assembly.

As part of a year-long investigation, Interpol investigators looked into one such "opportunity", advertised in Botswana as Alabuga Start, a Russian work-study programme offering roles in hospitality. They concluded the recruits were instead drafted into the assembly of Shahed drones.

That investigation began after a family sought help from Interpol about their relative, 33-year-old Kabo Ntesang, who didn't return from Russia in December as expected.

Investigators say Ntesang had become involved in recruiting other young people through universities and online platforms before leaving Botswana, where he had been surviving

on odd jobs in Gaborone.

His family believes he was drawn in by promises of a \$2,000 monthly salary. In November 2025, he disappeared from home and later sent relatives a WhatsApp voice note saying he had arrived in Russia for military training.

A few days later, he stopped communicating.

Ntesang failed to board a return flight scheduled for 12 December 2025, which had been booked on his behalf.

His family does not know whether he is dead or alive. They have approached multiple authorities seeking answers.

Two other young men are missing.

The 19-year-old son of popular music DJ Zibanani "Oneal" Madumo went to Russia with a friend for what they believed was short-term "military training" in August 2025. Both are still missing.

Madumo has said he was not aware the boys would be sent into active combat, adding that he would "never knowingly expose his own child to that kind of danger".

The Botswana government recently offered counselling services to relatives of the missing men, a move that has only deepened fears that the outcome may already be known.

Alabuga Start recruits endured harsh conditions, including gruelling labour, wages that were lower than promised, pervasive surveillance, and work contracts that made it almost impossible to leave, according to investigations by the *Associated Press* and the independent Russian outlet *Protokol*. ■

ANALYSIS



Xenophobia is as much about elite power as it is about poverty

Anti-immigration protests in South Africa are elite 'politics by other means', researchers say.

KIRI RUIAH

XENOPHOBIC violence in South Africa has claimed close to 700 lives since 1994 when the country held its first democratic elections. It has also displaced nearly 129,000 people. That's according to the African Centre for Migration & Society. The worst incidents and resulting deaths occurred in 2008, 2019, and 2022.

Now anti-immigrant protests, which have surged in recent months, are becoming increasingly volatile, prompting countries like Ghana and Malawi to offer their citizens repatriation from South Africa.

Vigilantes have attacked businesses owned by foreign nationals and driven people from their homes. Two people have been killed in the unrest in the Western Cape.

For casual observers, the causes seem obvious. South Africa's economy is stagnant. More than 40% of residents eligible for employment are out of work. Municipalities are delivering poorer service and crime is rising.

The anti-immigration protests are presumed to be the result of frustrated citizens scapegoating foreign nationals for crumbling infrastructure and the state of the economy, about which they are understandably angry.

But that's not the whole story, according to studies by a growing number of researchers.

In a recent research paper, political scientists Ivor Chipkin and Jelena Vidojević suggest South Africa's violent protest waves have followed the rhythms of power struggles inside the African National Congress itself.



Targeted hate: Police detain a Nigerian man harrassed by protesters in Pretoria. PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP



Spot check: Police examine a migrant's passport in Diepsloot, Gauteng in 2022.

PHOTO: LUCA SOLA/AFP

If they are correct, the current surge in anti-immigrant mobilisation could reveal as much about South Africa's relationship with the ANC as it does about living conditions in the country.

Chipkin and Vidojević analysed protest data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, the South African Police Service, and the Institute for Security Studies.

They found demonstrations increased sharply from the mid-2000s and reached extraordinary levels by 2011. Then, somewhat unexpectedly, they declined and stabilised between 2013 and 2017.

During that time, conditions on the ground were not improving. Municipal governance deteriorated. Unemployment stayed high. Inequality barely shifted. If anything, many indicators suggested life was becoming more difficult for many South Africans.

The period of relative "calm" coincided with Jacob Zuma's presidency and the state capture years. Most South Africans

understand state capture as large-scale corruption: politically connected individuals using public institutions to enrich themselves.

Chipkin and Vidojević do not dispute that. But they argue that state capture also served another purpose: it was Zuma's way of managing competition inside the governing party. Rival factions could be rewarded, accommodated, or neutralised.

The result was a degree of stability within the party. With more people among the political elite getting a chance to "eat", internal ANC competition was contained and protest mobilisation and activity eased.

That containment ended when Cyril Ramaphosa narrowly defeated Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for the ANC presidency in 2017.

As the party's elite networks became disgruntled and fractured further, protest activity surged. In July 2021, South Africa experienced the worst outbreak

of protest violence since the end of apartheid in 1994.

‘Protest brokers’

Through that lens, the current anti-immigrant protests take on a different significance. Migration may be the issue on the banners, but it may not be the only force driving mobilisation, given how violent protest has often served to renegotiate power within the ANC.

The Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria echoes this analysis, saying surges in xenophobic violence correlate with election and campaign periods.

Another researcher, Sarah Lockwood, points to another major driver: local “protest brokers” – influential intermediaries who can mobilise communities.

The March and March movement has emerged as one of the most visible forces behind the recent anti-immigration demonstrations. This has earned the organisers the attention of some of South Africa’s most aggressive political actors. Parties like the Inkatha Freedom Party, the Patriotic Alliance, ActionSA, and Zuma’s MK Party have publicly expressed support for March and March. The group has given migrants a 30 June deadline to leave South Africa or it will shut down the country.

As early as 2017, researcher Jean Pierre Misago came to the conclusion that “xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa is primarily ‘politics by other means’”.

He argues the tendency to interpret

it as solely about the “material deprivation and competition between poor South Africans and foreigners” is understandable but reductionist. It fails to explain why not all poor communities mobilise against foreign nationals.

Understanding the link between violent demonstrations and elite competition is particularly important now because South Africa is entering a new political era.

The March and March movement has given migrants a 30 June deadline to leave or it will shut down the country.

The ANC no longer dominates the political landscape. Coalition politics has arrived at a national level. That means that competition for influence may increasingly move outside formal institutions – and onto the street.

Recent amendments to the Public Service Act aim to reduce political influence over public-sector appointments and strengthen professional recruitment processes.

If politicians have less control over jobs and contracts, the argument goes, there is less incentive for factional battles over access to the state. That means less incentive to mobilise protests, including anti-immigration ones, in the service of personal political gain.

Whether that reform succeeds – and defuses South Africa’s elite contests – remains uncertain. ■

Kiri Rupiah is a reporter with *The Continent*

PHOTO ESSAY

Beacons in the dark

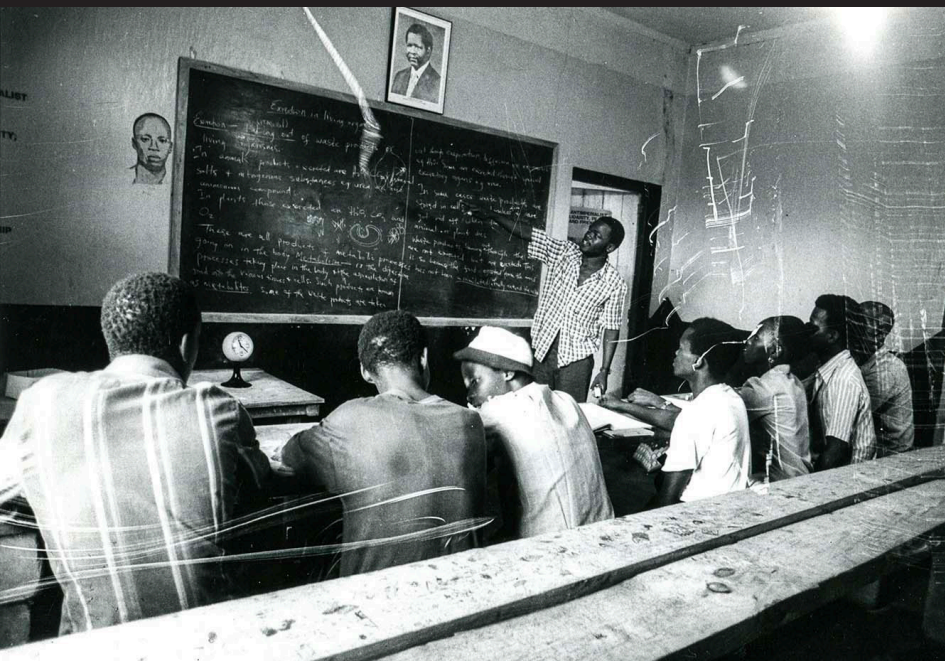
YOU wouldn't know it from the recurring xenophobic violence in South Africa, but other Africans were vital to liberating the country from its first capture by discriminatory politics.

Many anti-apartheid struggle leaders lived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, receiving stipends from the government to cover their living expenses.

Tanzania also hosted military training

camps for fighters in the military wing of the African National Congress, uMkhonto we Sizwe. At least one of those camps, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Mazimbu, also provided formal education to exiled South Africans.

South Africa's neighbours Angola, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana all provided



Students learn their ANC's at a class at the uMkhonto we Sizwe camp in Mazimbu, Tanzania in 1979.

PHOTO: ELI WEINBERG. ANTI-APARTHEIDS BEWEGING NEDERLAND PHOTO COLLECTION

safe havens, hosted underground operatives, and provided military and logistical support to the anti-apartheid struggle. The ANC's official headquarters were in Zambia.

These countries paid a high price for this support for black liberation in South Africa. Because of their proximity, they

were frequent targets of cross-border raids and deadly airstrikes by South African security forces.

In this week's photo essay, *The Continent's* photo editor, **Paul Botes**, curates a visual history of those times when pan-African solidarity was South Africa's beacon in the dark. ■



Exiles at Mazimbu train for a marathon, not a sprint. January 1984.

PHOTO: ELI WEINBERG.
ANTI-APARTHEIDS BEWEGING
NEDERLAND PHOTO COLLECTION



A mock coffin bearing the name of apartheid-SA president PW Botha is set on fire in Mazimbu in 1983.

PHOTO: ELI WEINBERG.
ANTI-APARTHEIDS BEWEGING
NEDERLAND PHOTO
COLLECTION



Children of uMkhonto we Sizwe members play in Mazimbu. August 1983.

PHOTO: ELI WEINBERG. ANTI-APARTHEIDS BEWEGING NEDERLAND PHOTO COLLECTION



Inscription: "To president Oliver Tambo from his 'red-haired' Cuban friend. Angel Dalmau, Best wishes, Quibax, North of Angola, 1979"

PHOTO: ANC ARCHIVES



Umkhonto we Sizwe formed work brigades at the ANC Development Centre in Dakawa, Tanzania.

PHOTO: DAVID MAX BROWN/ELI WEINBERG PHOTOLAB. AUGUST 1983



ANC president (1967-1991) Oliver Reginald Kaizana Tambo goes swimming while in exile.

PHOTO: ANC ARCHIVES



ANC secretary-general Alfred Nzo (front row, right) and then-president Julius Nyerere of Tanzania tour the training camp in Mazimbu in August 1989.

PHOTO: ELI WEINBERG PHOTOLAB



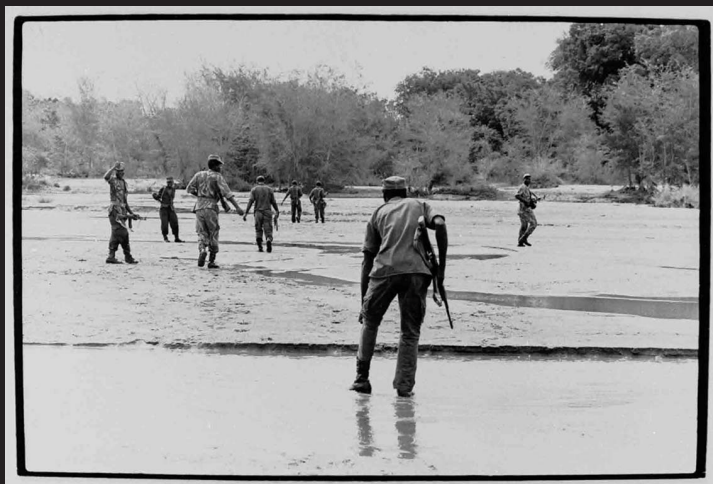
Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers learn tactics and strategy beneath a baobab tree at one of the training camps that were set up in different regions of Angola during the 1970s.

PHOTO: ANC ARCHIVES



Tanzanians join ANC members in a demonstration calling for the release of Nelson Mandela and other South African political prisoners in Morogoro, Tanzania. 11 October 1983.

PHOTO: ELI WEINBERG PHOTOLAB



The Luthuli Detachment – a unit of uMkhonto we Sizwe and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army soldiers – cross the Zambezi as part of a plan to establish a covert route back into South Africa in July 1967.

PHOTO: UWC ROBBERN ISLAND/MAYIBUYE ARCHIVES



South African Congress of Trade Unions president Stephen Dlamini (centre) speaks at the funeral of victims of a South African raid by commandos in Matola, Mozambique on 30 January 1981.

PHOTO: TEMPO



Staff of Zambia's Radio Freedom use their new studio equipment sent over from The Netherlands. Lusaka, May 1984.

PHOTO: PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL HISTORY COLLECTION

FEATURE

‘It’s like we just dumped them’

Last year’s US aid cuts left Malawian health workers unable to help some of their patients. Now infections are rising again and, with broken trust, even a miracle drug might not be enough to finally bring an end to HIV and Aids.

JOSEPHINE CHINELE IN BLANTYRE

OVER the course of two decades, Pakachere Institute for Health and Development Communication became a pillar of Malawi’s HIV and Aids response in four districts.

At 12 “drop-in” centres, it welcomed sex workers and young people, serving them without the stigma they often face in more general hospital settings.

By 2025, its clients included 23,000 women sex workers, many of whom came in regularly for injectable pre-exposure prophylaxis (Prep) provided through a grant from the United States.

That funding also allowed it to do 16 outreach clinics a week, going to places regarded as “hotspots” for HIV transmission.

Then, in early 2025, the US issued a stop-work order to all USAid-funded programmes. Last June, it officially closed the aid agency, having terminated 80% of its programmes and transferred the rest to the US state department. A year on, countries like Malawi are measuring the cost of that decision in lives.

“I tested HIV-positive. I had syphilis

a month before,” said a 25-year-old woman in Blantyre who was among the first sex workers to enrol in Pakachere’s Prep programme. After the funding withdrawal, Pakachere was forced to scale back its outreach to just 10 clinics, severing the lifeline that women like her had come to rely on.

When they turn to more general health facilities, they find the stigma still exists.

“Health workers say they don’t have ‘our’ condoms or Prep,” said Zinenani Majawa, who heads the Female Sex Workers’ Association. “They give us only three [free] condoms, which aren’t enough for a sex worker.”

It’s not as if Malawi is out of condoms. UNAids says condoms may be languishing in warehouses, as the community-based channels that delivered them to the people at highest risk have vanished.

“Community mobilisation by peer cadres remains a big gap,” Pakachere director Simon Sikwese told *The Continent*. “We are trying to source funding to get them back.”

The aid cuts left a 70% hole in the organisation’s budget.



First, do more arms:

A health worker assists a patient at a Pakachere Institute for Health and Development Communication's facility in Lilongwe.

PHOTO: PAKACHERE

Sexually transmitted infections have risen by as much as 56% in some places, preliminary data suggests.

In 2024, Pakachere's three drop-in centres in Blantyre recorded an average of 165 sexually transmitted infections a month. This year, they recorded 282 in January, 273 in February, and 189 in March. Such surges threaten to roll back an outstanding public-health success: HIV infections in Malawi fell 80% between 2010 and 2015, according to data from its health ministry.

Health authorities say they recognise the problem and are working to rectify it.

"Allowing this group to fall outside the reach of structured care risks creating a high-risk transmission reservoir that could fuel a rebound in new infections across the general population," said Dr Beatrice Matanje, who heads Malawi's National Aids Commission.

Dr Linley Chewere, who heads HIV work at the health ministry, said mainstream health workers were now being trained to serve groups such as sex workers with professional sensitivity.

The latter's infection rates remain

high, despite a decline in the general population.

Men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, trans and non-binary people, fishing communities, incarcerated people, and girls living in poverty are also considered to be at risk.

At Pakachere, district co-ordinator Melia Kamtimaleka is afraid last year's cuts did lasting damage to how those at risk relate to the health system.

"The funding cuts came on disturbingly short notice and destroyed the trust that female sex workers had built with us. It's like we just dumped them," she said. "We are still trying to rebuild it slowly."

These setbacks are particularly frustrating because medical innovations like Lenacapavir, a drug that prevents most HIV infections, have made ending Aids a real possibility.

"The science of HIV prevention has reached a historic peak," said Mitchell Warren of US-based health non-profit Avac. "But the infrastructure required to deliver that science is being systematically dismantled." ■

FEATURE

Triage in a post-aid world

Health NGOs are pivoting to commerce, depleting their reserves or simply shutting down as wealthy governments retreat.

MOUTTASEM ALBARODI

DOCTORS Without Borders (MSF) does not solicit government funding. Last year's United States aid cuts should not have affected it. And yet, they did.

"We now find ourselves having to redirect money that would previously have gone directly to patient care towards transportation and logistics," MSF Ubuntu operations director Andrew Mews told *The Continent*.

Mews said MSF and other humanitarian organisations rely on the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service to transport workers and vital supplies to remote locations. The service has traditionally been funded primarily by the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the US. All three have reduced their funding.

"This increases the cost of some of our projects, such as those in northern Nigeria, by almost 100,000 euros a month – an extra 1.2-million euros a year – just to do the same work we were doing a year ago," Mews said.

MSF is running into similarly new infrastructure gaps across the continent. Africa lost nearly a quarter of international assistance for health over the past year, leading over 80 NGOs to

shut down or close at least one office.

MSF has responded by digging deeper into its reserves, but warned earlier this year it "cannot permanently replace the health authorities or the humanitarian and development partners who are gradually withdrawing".

MSF's warning came after the World Bank ended its support for a nutrition project that served mothers and babies in 500 health facilities in South Kivu in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The cut arrived at a particularly bad time – during a cholera outbreak.

Learning to sell

Without MSF's level of reserves, other organisations are leaning into the market. Amref Health Africa has sharpened its focus on commercial ventures. The Nairobi-based organisation runs a private university and operates Amref Flying Doctors, a medical-evacuation service that began decades ago as free emergency transport.

The service has been rebuilt as a commercial venture whose revenues will be reinvested into nonprofit work, says director Boniface Mbutia.

Pathfinder International has moved in a similar direction. In 2025, it launched Women&Co, to invest in women-led



PHOTO: NAMI FOHOTE

Up in the air: Amref Flying Doctors, a medivac service, hopes commercial revenue will keep it aloft.

health enterprises and local service providers. Its first venture, Femvive, operates in Kenya, with others planned for Nigeria, Egypt, and Pakistan.

Constantly getting caught in the vicissitudes of US domestic politics had long nudged the organisation towards that shift “from a delivery vehicle for donor priorities toward infrastructure for locally driven change”, said Dr Amina Dorayi, regional portfolio director for West Africa at Pathfinder.

For decades, under an anti-abortion law that came to be known as the “global gag rule,” reproductive health organisations like Pathfinder lost US funding each time a Republican took the presidency. Pathfinder lost six US-funded programmes, spanning Burkina Faso, Egypt, Mozambique, and Uganda.

“The events of early 2025 accelerated a transition we had already begun and, in many ways, clarified the urgency of completing it,” Dorayi said.

Today, Pathfinder is focused on “not how to replace what was lost, but how to build something that does not require replacing in the first place”.

It is opening new conversations with impact investors and philanthropic coalitions that want to back models built for long-term viability rather than project cycles, Dorayi said.

The shift spreads beyond the largest players. According to the Oak Foundation, which works with 20 African civil society organisations across 14 countries, 89% of its partners have established diversified income streams, including fee-for-service arms and social enterprises.

But commerce has its limits. Charging for services, even modestly, tends to push out the poorest people. In Kenya, a deworming programme’s uptake dropped 80% when it began charging an average of 30 US cents a child instead of offering free treatment. ■

DATA

Supernatural disasters?

CLIMATE change is supercharging natural disasters around the planet. This World Environment Day (5 June), we look at Africans’ experiences of natural disasters.

About half of survey respondents say droughts (51%) and crop failure (51%) have grown “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe” in their region over the past decade. Smaller shares report worsening flooding (35%), soil erosion (34%), and landslides (28%).

Rural residents are more likely than city folks to report worsening crop failure (59% vs 43%) and droughts (57% vs 46%) – possibly due to more direct exposure to the elements – but other natural disasters evoke similar

responses across the urban-rural divide.

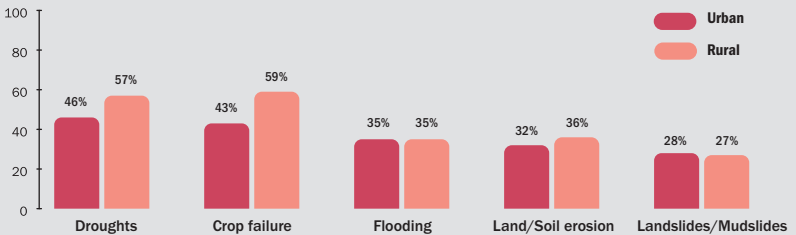
Experiences vary dramatically across the continent.

Virtually all Zimbabweans (95%) report worsening crop failure, as do Basotho for drought (91%) and Mauritians for flooding (90%).

This doesn’t mean that other impacts of climate change are not being felt, however: nearly all Zimbabweans (94%) report more severe droughts, with Basotho seeing more crop failure (87%) and soil erosion (69%).

A few lucky countries are less affected: less than a third of survey respondents in Seychelles, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone say any of these five disasters are becoming worse. ■

Increasing severity of natural disasters | by urban-rural location | 38 African countries* | 2024/2025

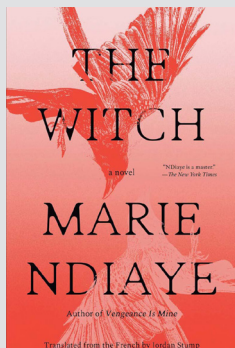


*Fewer countries were asked about land/soil erosion (26) and landslides/mudslides (22)



TC BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



Swift, sharp and surreal

That witch doesn't
kill you, makes
you stronger.

IN MARIE NDIAYE'S *The Witch*, Lucie is a descendant of witches, but has never really come into her power.

In her own words, her ability as a witch is "slight, apparently just strong enough to keep the gift going to pass it along". Her inherited gift, feeble as it is, allows her to see the past and the future.

Lucie's twin daughters master their

birthright with ease. When they come of age at 12, they quickly outgrow their need for her, and soon fly away. Literally.

This, then, is a story that is partly about motherhood and letting go of your children, even as you want them to both succeed and exceed you.

But this is also an absurdist tale. Characters constantly reappear out of the blue, often at ridiculous points in the story.

Others come and go, serving the narrative's fantastical elements. For example: Lucie's parents, her slightly deranged but affectionate mother-in-law, and a kind of Greek chorus of unhappy teachers, among others.

The Witch is an examination of the autonomy and agency – or the conspicuous absence thereof – that women and girls have to navigate across a variety of social contexts.

It feels truthful: not all of the women in the story overcome their challenges or figure their lives out. Not all of them are good, or even nice; they don't necessarily escape their situations.

NDiaye's wry, tongue-in-cheek prose is never didactic, but she does make salient points about the multifarious nature of women's circumstances.

It's an enjoyable and quick read; often darkly funny and very memorable – completely deserving of its inclusion on 2026's International Booker Prize short list. ■

The Quiz

- 1 In which country is the Larabanga Ancient Mosque (pictured) found?
- 2 Who is Tanzania's president?
- 3 True or false: Blantyre is the capital of Malawi.
- 4 The African National Congress is which country's ruling party?
- 5 Botswana has the highest population of which animals?
- 6 In which year did Nigeria gain independence from Britain?
- 7 What is the capital of the Central African Republic?
- 8 How many colours appear on Mali's national flag?
- 9 Which 2010 hit song was inspired by the 1986 Cameroonian makossa song *Zangaléwa*?
- 10 How many teams will Africa have at the Fifa World Cup?



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've never seen a coalition partner call itself the ruling party then you ANC nothin' yet."

Big Pic

Making waves: An olive ridley sea turtle hatchling scrambles into the surf near Libreville. Gabon hosts four turtle species along its 900km coast during the October to April nesting season: green, olive ridley, hawksbill and leatherback.

PHOTO: CYRIL VILLEMAIN/AFP



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