

AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

www.africa-confidential.com

25 July 2025 - Vol 66 - N° 15 - online edition

BLUE LINES

Portugal's decision to support Morocco's autonomy plan for the disputed territory of Western Sahara sees Lisbon joins a lengthening list led by the US, France, Spain and Britain as well as several African countries, including Ghana and Kenya. Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel described Morocco's plan as a 'serious and credible basis' for Western Sahara's future, following a meeting with Nasser Bourita in Rabat, echoing the message of France and Spain. Publicly, Germany and the European Commission have so far maintained their neutrality. In private, the Commission views Morocco as its most reliable partner in North Africa and has repeatedly flouted European Court of Justice rulings that its trade deals with Morocco must not encompass Western Sahara. Morocco's diplomatic ascendancy is as much a reverse for Algeria as the Polisario Front. As well as strengthening its trade and diplomatic links with Europe and negotiating a formal pact with the EU on migration, Morocco has wooed the Sahelian military juntas on its southern border in recent months. Relations between Algiers and Mali cooled after the junta in Bamako unilaterally abrogated the Algiers agreement with the Tuareg. Diplomatic relations between Brussels and Algiers are close to zero. Algeria is the only country in the region with which the EU does not have a migration cooperation arrangement - and doesn't seem to want one.

KENYA

Ruto shifts from populism to authoritarianism

The president's pledge to end elite capture and patronage has been dropped for the ethnic identity politics which dominated the old one-party state

President William Ruto's falling out with his core Mount Kenya constituency - followed by the impeachment of his former deputy, Rigathi Gachagua - has become the defining crisis of his presidency (AC Vol 65 Nos 20, 21 & 22). With two years until the August 2027 elections, his legitimacy rests on a fragile alliance with his Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) rival, Raila Odinga. Ruto now appears intent on turning the Mount Kenya fallout into a wedge issue and central plank of his re-election campaign. Many fear that, 20 years after the calamitous 2007 polls, 2027 could mark another Kenyan *annus horribilis*.

The first sign of the government's crackdown came with the invocation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) against 71 protestors following the 25 June protests against police killings and the 7 July *Saba Saba* ('Seven Seven') demonstrations (AC Vol 66 Nos 13 & 14). Charges stemmed from arson attacks on two police stations, a courthouse and other government buildings in Matuu (Machakos County) and Kikuyu (Kiambu County) - both bordering Nairobi and sites of intensified protest after the CBD was sealed off by police. In Homa Bay County, Western Kenya on 3 July, protestors torched the Mawego Police Station, where Albert Ojwang - the blogger and teacher murdered in a Nairobi police cell in June - had been held (Dispatches 16/6/25). Eight were arrested, transferred to Nairobi and charged with terrorism.

The POTA, passed in 2014 after the Westgate terror attack, was designed to

counter *Al Shabaab* insurgents (AC Vol 54 No 20 & Vol 55 No 19). Rights groups warned its sweeping powers could be used to silence critics - a concern now realised. Among those charged is activist Boniface Mwangi, accused of illegal arms possession though the Directorate of Criminal Investigations has dropped terrorism charges against him (AC Vol 65 No 14). In December 2014, he protested POTA's passage outside parliament. A decade later, the law has come full circle.

COMPLICIT

Civil society groups have condemned what they see as a coordinated effort to suppress dissent. After Mwangi was released on an unusually high bail, Law Society of Kenya President Faith Odhiambo criticised both the Director of Public Prosecutions, Renson Ingonga, and Chief Justice Martha Koome for perceived judicial complicity. Koome had labelled the Kikuyu courthouse arson an act of terrorism. Ingonga has faced backlash for issuing terrorism charges where lesser offences might have sufficed.

The government's terrorism narrative has been carefully constructed. Following the arsons, Security Minister Kipchumba Murkomen authorised police to shoot to kill if protestors attacked installations or officers. Ruto later softened the directive - instructing police to 'shoot them in the leg' - before blaming Gen Z parents for raising their offspring badly, and warning them that their children would now be 'taught by the world'.

The police station attacks were used to

KENYA	2	NIGERIA	4	SOUTH AFRICA	7	SOUTH AFRICA	9	ETHIOPIA/ERITREA	10
Gen Z vies with old politics		Tinubu's slowing bandwagon		Police chief blows the whistle		A 750-million-rand gamble		UGANDA, AFRICA/DEBT/UN, CAR/CHAD, US/AFRICA/IMMIGRATION, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, DISPATCHES, POINTERS	11-20
Veteran figures are top contenders to lead the campaign against beleaguered President		Peter Obi and Atiku Abubakar sense a new chance but the odds are still stacked against them		After explosive claims, Ramaphosa launches inquiry but risks losing control of the coalition		Ramaphosa says dialogue forum will produce a social compact for jobs, power and security			

AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street
London, W1S 4JL, UK
Tel: +44 20 7831 3511

Editor: Patrick Smith
Deputy Editor: Andrew Weir
Website Editor: Juliet Amisshah
Published fortnightly since 1960

25 issues per year

www.africa-confidential.com

Proprietors: Asempa Ltd. ISSN 0044-6483

All material is copyright Africa Confidential

reframe the 25 June and 7 July protests as coup attempts. Opposition leaders counter that government-backed thugs were behind the vandalism – a claim supported by citizen journalists and mainstream media, who have documented the hiring of *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) gangs to infiltrate and disrupt Gen Z protests.

Security officials believe Gachagua sponsored elements of the Gen Z movement, including the attempted torching of Parliament, the Supreme Court and Nairobi County offices. Other Mount Kenya elites are suspected of funding online anti-government campaigns. In this view, any coup attempt is being orchestrated by Kikuyu leaders using the protests as cover.

Isolating and targeting the Kikuyu risks reigniting the ethnic tensions of 2007-2008. It also underscores the collapse of Ruto's relationship with the constituency that delivered 63% of his 2022 vote – 4.5 million of his 7.1m total. His legitimacy now hinges on a tenuous

pact with Odinga and a patchwork of ethnic alliances.

Regime insiders resist acknowledging that State House's tone-deaf rollout of a harsh International Monetary Fund austerity programme triggered the sharp decline in Ruto's and *Kenya Kwanza's* popularity. Instead, the more palatable narrative of 'Kikuyu buyer's remorse' has dominated since the early days of his presidency. Fuelled by the purge of Uhuru Kenyatta-era appointees from the civil service, parastatals and security sector, the mass dismissals stirred ethnic grievance – particularly among Gachagua's allies. Yet the resentment is misplaced: over a third of Ruto's cabinet and a sizeable share of principal secretaries hail from the 13 Mount Kenya-affiliated counties.

OLD FORMULA

In 2022, Ruto's 'Hustlers vs Dynasties' narrative introduced a class dimension into Kenya's traditionally ethnicised politics. He has since reverted to a formulaic ethnic calculus, now relying on regional powerbrokers to deliver votes: Prime Cabinet Secretary **Musalia Mudavadi** and National Assembly Speaker **Moses Wetang'ula** to mobilise the Western Kenya vote; Senate Speaker **Amason Jeffa Kingi** and Youth Affairs Cabinet Secretary **Salim Mvurya** – formerly Kwale governor – for the Coast; and Health Cabinet Secretary **Aden Duale** for the northern vote.

Odinga's co-option followed the 25 June crisis, but his support in 2027 is far from assured. ODM Secretary-General

and Nairobi Senator **Edwin Sifuna** leads a populist faction urging Odinga to sever ties with Ruto over police killings and abductions. An ethnic Luhya, his stance resonates with Western youth – particularly those backing Trans-Nzoia Governor **George Ntembeya's Tawe** movement. In Nairobi – with its significant Luhya population – Sifuna poses a growing challenge to ODM conservatives.

More troubling is Ruto's policy of granting Somali immigrants carte blanche. Ntembeya and others warn of serious security risks. But it was Wajir County Women's Representative **Fatuma Abdi's** remark – that Somali voters would rig the 2027 election for Ruto – that raised alarm. Her comment followed Nandi Senator **Samson Cherargei's** push to extend elected terms from five to seven years, and statements by Ruto allies Kapseret MP **Oscar Sudi** and aide **Farouk Kibet** that they would 'do whatever it takes' – widely interpreted as a nod to vote-rigging. Abdi's remarks deepened concerns of a replay of 2007, when President **Mwai Kibaki's** insiders rigged the election and pushed the country to the precipice.

Unlike in 2007, when African Union and western diplomats helped avert disaster, today's weakened multilateral system offers fewer safeguards. With the Gen Z movement now branded an enemy of the state, the space for dialogue – including Odinga's proposed 'national conclave' – is shrinking. And this time, Kenya's neighbours and traditional western patrons are distracted. ●

KENYA

Gen Z protestors vie with old politics

Former Chief Justice Maraga and veteran politician Musyoka are top contenders to lead the campaign against beleaguered President Ruto

With personal ratings stuck between 10 and 15%, few dispute that President **William Ruto** is toxically unpopular – especially among young Kenyans. Yet most expect him to be re-elected in August 2027. The contradiction stems from the failure of the Gen Z protest movement – and the opposition more broadly – to answer the question of who could represent them and defeat Ruto. Without a convincing candidate, he is likely to win again, most likely on a very low turnout.

Public support and the judicial system appear to be on the side of Gen Z. Kenya's two mass-market papers – the *Daily Nation* and, particularly,

The Standard – have been consistently supportive of the protests. Though neither paper has attacked Ruto personally, they have accused senior ministers such as Interior Cabinet Secretary **Kipchumba Murkomen** of criminality and **Eliud Lagat**, Deputy Inspector General of Police, of murder (Dispatches 16/6/25).

The Standard was censured by the government after publishing a headline calling Communications Authority (CA) CEO **David Mugonyi**, an 'enemy of the press', following his directive that all TV and radio stations stop broadcasting the protests live on 25 June – a move he claimed contravened two articles of the

constitution. Government authorities are also starving newspapers, particularly *The Standard*, of state advertising.

A case by the Law Society of Kenya was quickly filed to strike down Mugonyi's order and succeeded, while the High Court has since extended orders barring the CA from repeating the directive.

The conventional wisdom is that Wiper party leader **Kalonzo Musyoka**, who leads what remains of **Raila Odinga's** pre-2022 coalition, will stand. Prior to last June's protest, Musyoka was still confident of Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) swinging behind him. But aside from his limited appeal outside his Kamba base in three counties, the 71-year-old Musyoka is no less of an establishment figure than Odinga, Ruto or former President **Uhuru Kenyatta** – and a defeated candidate at multiple presidential polls. A three-way split between Ruto, Musyoka and another candidate would probably hand victory to Ruto similar to **Daniel arap**

Moi's wins in 1992 and 1997.

The opposition unveiled a proposed line-up on 21 July, with Kalonzo named as its presidential candidate. He emerged as the preferred choice across three different permutations of the coalition's leadership structure.

Although the Gen Z movement is not as cohesive as a year ago, its more politically savvy leaders say that to oust Ruto they will need to find politicians and big-name civic leaders as part of a broad coalition.

Former Chief Justice **David Maraga**, whose court earned plaudits after voiding the August 2017 election of Kenyatta, is the latest big name to be touted as a contender (AC Vol 58 No 18). Maraga has seen his public profile grow steadily in recent months. He marched with Gen Z activists on 25 June and says that members of his security detail were ordered to report for a training day and that his entire detail has since been reassigned. He says that he is discussing a possible presidential run in 2027.

Maraga has national name recognition and is untainted by party politics. By standing up to the Kenyatta machine, Maraga – a Kisii – struck a blow against tribalism in 2017, in tune with the anti-tribalist message of the Gen Z movement. What he lacks is the political machine and funding to support it. This was underscored when a fundraising website launched on 18 July received around 500,000 shillings (US\$4,000) in its first 48 hours, according to Maraga's team – a paltry sum compared with the tens of millions of dollars Ruto will be able to spend.

Maraga has been informally paired with Busia Senator **Okiya Omtatah Okoiti**, a civic figure whose solo legal petitions against regime abuses – including his fight against public debt – have earned national recognition. Widely seen as a symbol of moral resistance, Omtatah's social media popularity has surged. The two have discussed a possible alliance, though it's unclear whether a formal ticket is on the table. With both hailing from Western Kenya, regional dynamics may yet undermine the pairing's moral appeal.

YET MORE CHAMPIONS

Former Deputy President **Rigathi Gachagua**, meanwhile, has also tried to position himself as a Gen Z champion. That has involved some selective rewriting of history, particularly the events surrounding last June's protests. Gachagua insists – though there is little evidence to back it up – that he supported the Gen Z movement in 2024. His impeachment legally bars him from standing in 2027 and he remains a divisive figure with little influence

COMMISSION IN A HURRY

Sworn in on 11 July, the new seven-member Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) faces a race against time to fill key administrative posts and clear a two-year backlog of by-elections, recall petitions and voter registration delays (Dispatches 14/7/25).

The IEBC, now chaired by **Erastus Etheke**, had been dormant since the retirement of **Wafula Chebukati** in January 2023. In that time, 23 seats in the Senate, National Assembly and County Assemblies have fallen vacant – the result of deaths, court rulings and resignations. Etheke has confirmed that by-elections are the commission's first priority. He also acknowledged four petitions to recall MPs, though without naming the constituencies involved.

The commission itself remains understaffed. Of its nine directorates and 24 departments, only three and 15 respectively have full-time office holders – most vacancies date back to the collapse of the Chebukati-led commission. Filling these posts is expected to take months and will be critical to restoring operational capacity ahead of the 2027 elections.

Etheke's appointment has raised questions about his independence, given his previous role as Turkana County Attorney under **Josphat Nanok**, now Deputy Chief of Staff to President **William Ruto**. During vetting, Etheke denied any political or familial ties and pledged impartiality in overseeing the next polls.

Meanwhile, **Ann Nderitu's** appointment as an IEBC commissioner leaves the Registrar of Political Parties post vacant – another key role ahead of 2027. Nderitu faced accusations of bias towards Ruto during her confirmation hearings (AC Vol 61 No 11). With Kenyan politics being famously transactional, new parties are likely to emerge before the polls. Five years ago, Ruto's United Democratic Alliance did not exist.

The IEBC has 23 by-elections pending – one Senate seat, six parliamentary seats and 16 ward-level vacancies – and is two years behind the constitutional deadline for a boundaries review. Article 89 requires that any delimitation be completed at least 12 months before a general election. The last review was in 2012. With barely two years to go, the commission must urgently audit the voter roll, procure new election technology and resume registration, which has been suspended since early 2023. The 2008 Krieger Commission warned that a fair election becomes impossible if the electoral body is reconstituted too close to polling day.

Like the IEBC, the Registrar's office has seen its budget slashed – from 1.4 billion shillings in 2022/23 to KSh608.3 million in 2023/24 – and currently has just 66 staff, despite needing 235. It regulates and registers political parties and allocates state funding. A non-functioning office benefits incumbents.

Voter registration will be crucial to the 2027 polls – and to whether Gen Z and their political sponsors can mount a credible challenge to Ruto. The IEBC has promised to gazette a timeline for its resumption in August. ●

beyond central Kenya. His presence also bolsters the government's narrative that the new wave of protests is sponsored by Kikuyu oligarchs. Yet he could bring major financial resources and is sufficiently embittered by his treatment under Ruto to emerge as a leading figure in the 'Anyone But Ruto' camp (AC Vol 66 No 5).

Fred Matiang'i – also a Kisii and a senior minister under Kenyatta – has been touted as a contender. He has the endorsement of the rump Jubilee Party, founded by Kenyatta and Ruto ahead of the 2013 elections, and is thought to have Kenyatta's personal support, which reportedly funded a \$250,000 retainer for veteran Africa lobbyist **Ari Ben-Menashe** (AC Vol 65 No 17). However, critics such as independent Jubilee MP **Yusuf Hassan Abdi** have pointed to Matiang'i's role in extra-judicial crackdowns on opposition figures

during Kenyatta's second term.

Opposition to Ruto is likely to hinge on how much of Odinga's ODM can be peeled off.

The protests last June and July were a genuinely nationwide phenomenon. This year, however, they have been concentrated in Nairobi and its satellite towns, such as Kiambu and Kitangela. Most striking is Gen Z's lack of traction in Western Kenya – particularly Kisumu – and along the Coast, both long-time Odinga fiefdoms. This underscores Odinga's continued importance to Ruto's prospects in 2027.

The ODM is still split between its youthful wing – led by party Secretary-General and Nairobi Senator, **Edwin Sifuna**, who bitterly opposes Ruto – and the older guard happy to take government jobs and patronage. After Ruto urged the police to shoot protesters in the legs, Sifuna cited the remarks as evidence that

Kenya had 'totally lost' its way.

In a bid to keep his coalition with Ruto and unhappy ODM supporters inside, Odinga has proposed a national

dialogue process referred to as an 'Intergenerational National Conclave'. 'When there's a crisis, people must find a solution. If you don't, you get

anarchy,' said Odinga on 20 July. With a rising death toll and shoot-to-disable directives coming from the president, it may be too late for dialogue. ●

NIGERIA

Buhari's legacy and opposition alliance slow Tinubu's bandwagon

Peter Obi and Atiku Abubakar sense a new chance but the odds are still stacked against them

Strategists in the ruling All Progressives Congress and sundry opposition parties are scurrying to adapt to the changing political conditions after the demise of Muhammadu Buhari at 82 in London on 13 July and the emergence of an opposition alliance in the African Democratic Congress (ADC). Both developments could slow if not derail what appeared a month ago

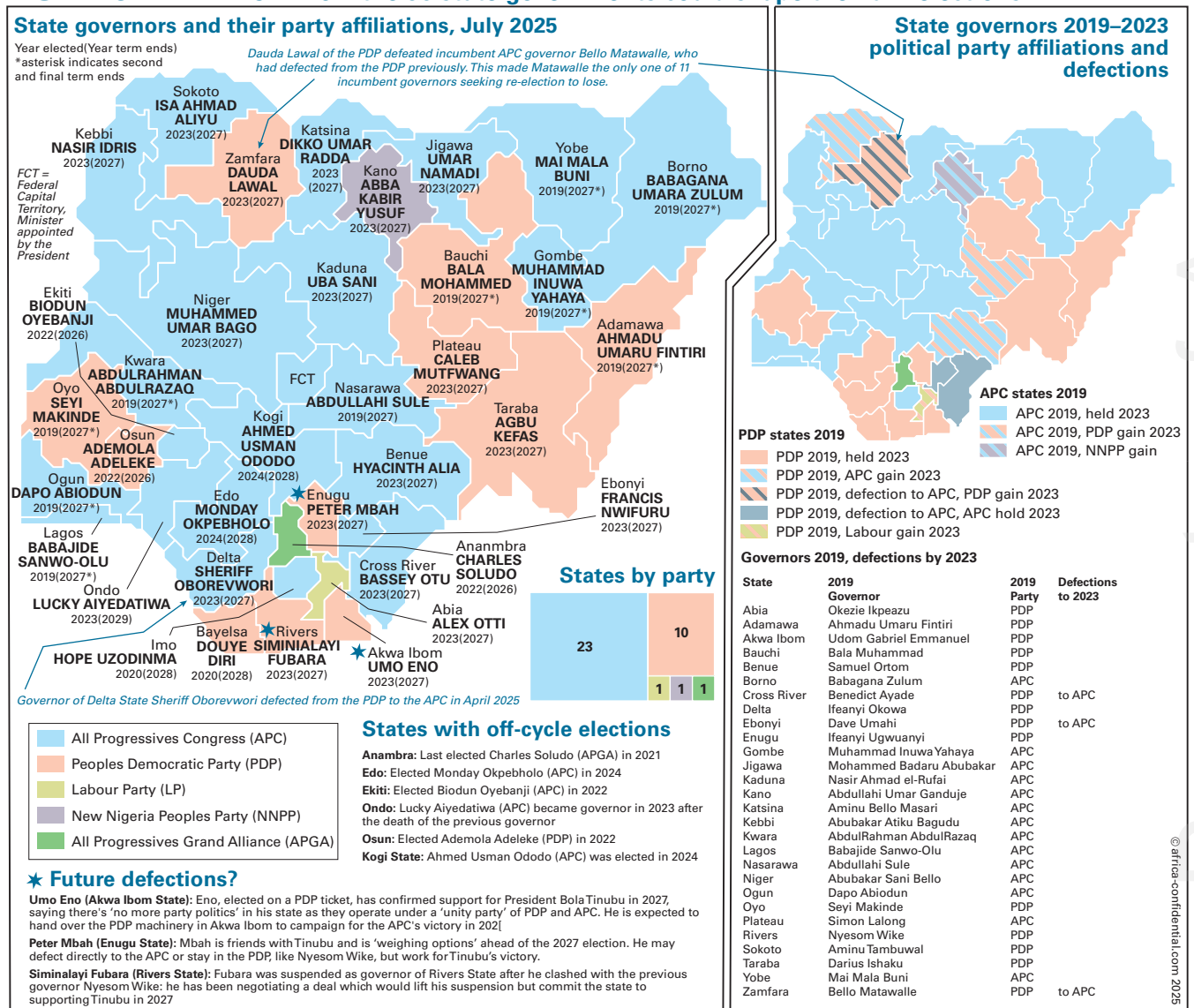
to be incumbent President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's almost certain victory in the 2027 elections.

The two developments are related. Buhari's political relationship with Tinubu was symbiotic. Neither could win national power before they teamed up for the 2015 elections. Buhari went into those elections with his 12-million-strong vote base in the north as the presidential

candidate of the All Progressives Congress, the newly formed opposition alliance to which Tinubu brought his voter base from the south-west.

Buhari won a by a landslide, ousting incumbent Goodluck Jonathan on the People's Democratic Party ticket. The same APC alliance with Tinubu swept Buhari to victory again in 2019. It was above all about political expedience.

NIGERIA'S FEDERATION: How the 36 state governments could shape the 2027 elections



THE STATE OF NIGERIA'S 36 STATES

ABIA STATE (south-east)

Former Managing Director of the defunct Diamond Bank, **Alex Otti** has been Governor since 2023 and will be seeking re-election in 2027. He's the sole Labour Party governor and an ally of **Peter Obi**. But he has been suspended by a faction of the Labour Party forcing him to seek a new platform. He is being courted by the All Progressives Congress (APC) to break with Obi. The APC has never won a south-eastern state in a presidential election.

ADAMAWA STATE (north-east)

Governor **Ahmadu Fintiri** is serving his second term. A member of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Fintiri broke with its former leader **Atiku Abubakar**, and has forged ties with his rival, **Nyesom Wike**, the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory who maintains his PDP membership but is fully aligned with the APC and President **Bola Ahmed Tinubu**. Fintiri is likely to defect to the APC soon.

AKWA IBOM (south-south)

Akwa Ibom in the Niger Delta has been ruled by the PDP since 1999 electing four governors from the party. Then the incumbent Governor, Pastor **Umo Eno**, dropped the PDP for the APC to 'save his political future'. A few of his appointees resigned in protest. Umo Eno wants to run for a second term in 2027, this time for the APC.

ANAMBRA STATE (south-east)

Governor **Chukwuma Soludo** is running for re-election in November. The sole governor of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), he has a strategic partnership with President Tinubu which gives him tacit support in the state in exchange of backing the president's re-election in 2027. Anambra is also the stronghold of opposition politician, Peter Obi, who will sweep the state again should he run for the presidency in 2027.

BORNO STATE (north-east)

Governor **Babagana Zulum** is one of the most highly rated politicians in the region. Targeted by insurgents and a stronghold of the APC, Borno is also the home state of Vice President **Kashim Shettima**. Reports suggest that Tinubu may drop Shettima from the ticket in 2027, replacing him with **Rabiu Kwankwaso** from Kano or **Nuhu Ribadu** from Adamawa. But they have been strongly denied by Abuja.

BAUCHI STATE (north-east)

Governor **Bala Mohammed** doubles as the chairman of the PDP governors' forum and his second term ends in 2027. He has presidential ambitions and is one of the few governors to openly criticise President Tinubu.

BENUE STATE (north-central)

Governor **Hyacinth Alia**, a member of the ruling APC, is running for re-election in 2027 but is feuding with **George Akume**, Secretary to the Federal Government. Some APC officials are trying to drop Alia and he may defect to an opposition party.

CROSS RIVER (south-south)

Governor Bassey Otu, an APC loyalist, is up for re-election in 2027 and will also back Tinubu in the presidentials.

DELTA STATE (south-south)

A PDP stronghold for 26 years until Governor **Sheriff Oborevwo** defected to the APC this year. He took all

elected officials including his predecessor, **Ifeanyi Okowa**, who was the PDP's vice-presidential candidate in the 2023 elections. The probe into Okowa, facing investigations over the mismanagement of US \$1billion in public funds has gone quiet. **James Ibori**, convicted in a London court for diverting \$75m of state funds while he was governor of Delta State, is in Tinubu's political family. Under Okowa, Delta will back Tinubu in the 2027 presidential but there are ructions within the APC caucus which could undermine the campaign.

EBONYI STATE (south-east)

Governor **Peter Nwifuru** of the APC is up for re-election in 2027. He is a protégé of **Dave Umahi** who holds the powerful portfolio of works minister and controls one of the largest federal budgets. They are likely to deliver the state to the APC in the presidential election in 2027 if the opposition picks a northerner as candidate.

EDO STATE (south-south)

Governor **Monday Okpebholo** of the APC was inaugurated six months ago after a public row over his qualifications. With APC leader in the state, **Adams Oshiomhole**, Okpebholo has consolidated the party's grip by suspending elected PDP officials in the state, forcing some of them to defect to the APC. Okpebholo has also said he could not be responsible for the security of Peter Obi should the opposition leader visit Edo. This was interpreted as an open threat.

EKITI STATE (south-west)

Governor **Abiodun Oyeibanji** of the APC is up for re-election in 2026 and is likely to win. The south-west remains a stronghold for Tinubu.

ENUGU STATE (south-east)

Governor **Emeka Mba**, former Chief Executive of Pinnacle Oil, is up for re-election on the PDP ticket in 2027. With his investments mostly in Lagos, Mba will quietly support Tinubu in the presidentials.

GOMBE STATE (north-east)

Governor **Inuwa Yahaya's** tenure ends in 2027. He is a member of the APC and will be expected to deliver the state for Tinubu in the presidential election.

IMO STATE (south-east)

Governor **Hope Uzodinma** chairs the APC Governors Forum. His tenure ends in 2028 and he is expected to lead President Tinubu's presidential campaign in the south-east in 2027.

JIGAWA STATE (north-east)

Governor **Umar Namadi** is seeking re-election in 2027. He's a member of the APC and will support President Tinubu. But the dynamics could change if the opposition picks a northerner as presidential candidate.

KADUNA STATE (north-east)

Governor **Uba Sani**, an APC loyalist, is running for a second term in office in 2027 and has pushed his mentor, **Nasir el Rufai**, out of the ruling party. Tinubu wants to win Kaduna State convincingly and has been courting the Christian communities there.

(continued over page)

KANO STATE (north-west)

Governor **Abba Yusuf** is seeking a second term in 2027 on the ticket of the New Nigeria Peoples Party. The NNPP is led by former Kano Governor **Rabiu Kwankwaso**, a presidential contender, who has been negotiating a political deal with Tinubu and the APC. Kano is also the home state of former APC chairman, **Abdullahi Ganduje**, filmed accepting cash bribes in US dollars. To facilitate negotiations with Kwankwaso, Ganduje was eased out of his party position by Tinubu.

KATSINA STATE (north-west)

Governor **Dikko Radda** will seek re-election in 2027 on the APC ticket.

KEBBI STATE (north-west)

Governor **Nasir Idris**, an APC member, will be seeking re-election in 2027.

KOGI STATE (north-central)

Governor **Usman Ododo** will be running for re-election in 2027. The leader of the APC in the state is ex-Governor Yahaya Bello, currently facing a corruption trial. There are negotiations to drop the charges against him to buy his total support for Tinubu in the 2027 presidentials.

KWARA STATE (north-central)

A stronghold of President Tinubu and the APC. Governor **Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq**, current chairman of the governors' forum, ends his second term in 2027.

LAGOS STATE (south-west)

President Tinubu's home state is led by Governor **Babajide Sanwo-Olu**, who ends his second term in 2027. Tinubu lost Lagos to Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate, in the presidential vote in 2023. A huge effort is being made to ensure that such an upset doesn't happen again. Tinubu appears to be supporting his son, Seyi, for Governor in 2027.

NASARAWA STATE (north-central)

Governor **Abdullahi Sule** of the APC will be ending his second term in 2027. Nasarawa is ethnically and religiously diverse and is a key swing state.

NIGER STATE (north-central)

APC Governor **Mohammed Bago** is up for re-election in 2027. Niger has voted for the APC since 2015 and is expected to back Tinubu again in 2027.

OGUN (south-west)

Dapo Abiodun of the APC is currently in his second term. Tinubu has already picked Senate Appropriations Chairman **Solomon Adeola** as the APC candidate and probably the next governor.

ONDO STATE (south-west)

Governor **Lucky Aiyedatiwa** is serving his first term and will

not be eligible to contest again in 2028 because he completed the tenure of his late predecessor. He's a member of the APC and is expected to deliver the state to Tinubu in 2027.

OSUN STATE (south-west)

Governor **Ademola Adeleke** is up for re-election next year. A member of the PDP but he is talking to Tinubu about a quid pro quo: under which Tinubu supports him for a second term as governor and he supports Tinubu for President in 2027.

OYO STATE (south-west)

Governor **Seyi Makinde** of the PDP supported Tinubu in 2023 but says he will run for the presidency in 2027. Not everyone is convinced and some think he will eventually make an agreement with Tinubu.

PLATEAU STATE (north-central)

Plateau is one of Nigeria's most politically complicated states. It was a PDP state in 2023, but a court order sacked all the PDP members except Governor **Caleb Mutfwang** after a protracted dispute. Mutfwang is negotiating with the APC and may either defect or stay in the PDP and support President Tinubu anyway.

RIVERS STATE (south-south)

Elected on a PDP ticket and questioning federal government actions, Governor **Siminalayi Fubara** was suspended by the High Court in a bitterly disputed decision orchestrated by his predecessor Nyesom Wike. Fubara may return to the governorship but would have to make a pledge of loyalty to Tinubu for the 2027 elections. The volatile Wike has stayed in the PDP as a wrecking ball and has become a key enforcer for Tinubu. It's likely that both Fubara and Wike will back Tinubu for the presidency in 2027.

SOKOTO STATE (north-west)

Governor **Ahmed Aliyu Sokoto** is up for re-election in 2027 on the APC ticket. But he may not be able to help Tinubu much in the presidential elections: the state has never supported a southern candidate for the presidency.

TARABA STATE (north-east)

A godson of General **Theophilus Danjuma**, Governor **Abu Kefas** of the PDP will run for re-election in 2027 and remains one of the most loyal PDP members. But his plans may be upended by the prolonged political crisis in the state.

YOBE STATE (north-east)

Governor **Mai Mala Buni** of the APC is on his second term but his loyalty to Tinubu has been questioned. Some at the Aso Rock Presidential Villa see him as a political outsider.

ZAMFARA STATE (north-west)

Governor **Dauda Lawal** of the PDP is up for re-election in 2027 and is one of the few governors that is consistently loyal to the opposition party. ●

Never natural allies, the ascetic Buhari and flamboyant billionaire Tinubu combined forces in a calculated trade off. It worked again in the 2023 elections, when Tinubu picked up enough of Buhari's northern support to win 36.6% of the national votes, the first candidate to win the presidency on a minority.

But Tinubu's allies in the APC have

been haunted since by the spectre of the two leading opposition candidates, **Atiku Abubakar**, 78, of the PDP (who got 29.1% in 2023) and **Peter Obi**, 63, of the Labour Party (25.4%) joining forces against him in the next national election in 2027.

And that was exactly what they are doing in the revitalised ADC. But many of the details are yet to be worked out. After serial ructions in both the PDP and the

Labour Party, thought to be prompted by outsiders, Atiku has cast his lot with the ADC, investing heavily in its branches to boost its campaigning capacity. Obi is talking about cooperating with Atiku but remains a member of the Labour Party.

The two have never publicly quarrelled but the presidential nomination could stop them cooperating.

One idea is for Atiku to run at the top of the ticket as a one-term president with Obi as running mate. Such promises have been made elsewhere but rarely kept. Atiku's supporters claim he can't run for the vice presidency – even if he wanted to – as he's done the job twice already under President **Olusegun Obasanjo**.

Another option would be for the ADC to hold competitive primaries which could settle the question if they were organised credibly. But they could also prove highly divisive. And there are also a raft of other highly ambitious politicians in the ADC such as ex-Senate President **David Mark**, ex-Transport Minister **Rotimi Amaechi** and ex-governor of Kaduna state **Nasir el Rufai** – all determined to vie for the presidential nomination.

For now, it seems personal ambition and a distaste for Tinubu's APC government are the motors driving the new leaders of the ADC alliance. There is no hint of an ideological debate: both Atiku and Obi are pro-market and concur with Tinubu's floating of the naira and ending fuel subsidies but differ on the implementation (AC Vol 66 No 11).

LOOKING NORTH

The key psephological question facing both the Tinubu and the Atiku-Obi camp is who can pick up Buhari's 12 million votes in the north. Few expect one contender to scoop up all the votes but some are more likely to benefit than others.

Tinubu's northern network led by his Vice President **Kashim Shettima**

will help. **Shettima**, former governor of Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria, travelled to London to oversee the return of Buhari's corpse to Nigeria but was never particularly close to the man or his family.

A few months back there were reports that Tinubu was planning to drop **Shettima** from the ticket in 2027, replacing him either with National Security Advisor **Nuhu Ribadu** or former governor of Kano, **Rabiu Kwankwaso**. But with his own political vehicle, the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) and a substantial base in Kano, the state with six million votes at stake and the highest voter turn out in the federation, Kwankwaso is proving difficult to woo.

Buhari's demise appears to have convinced him that he will be the main inheritor of the former president's vote base, in Kano and in the core northern states. These factors may make him still less willing to cut a political deal with Tinubu for 2027 – but it could make him a more valuable ally than the current Vice President. **Ribadu**, a trusted ally to Tinubu for more than a decade, could also pick up some of Buhari's support in the north but has not had much success in retail politics so far.

For the Atiku-Obi camp, the Buhari vote could be the game changer. It drove Atiku to Daura to commiserate with Buhari's family and test the water at the same time. Just days after Buhari passed away, Atiku announced his departure from the PDP and his new affiliation with the ADC. Other contenders within the ADC such as **Amaechi** and **El Rufai**

could pick up some Buhari support but it's likely to be at negligible levels.

Even if Atiku picks up the lion's share of Buhari's support in the north he will still have to struggle, with or without Obi, to combine this into a winning candidacy – given Tinubu's and the APC's dominance of national politics.

With Rivers State under a state of emergency and the Plateau State House of Assembly under APC rule due to a controversial court judgment, the APC controls two-thirds of the state parliaments (AC Vol 66 No 7).

In the National Assembly, which has 360 seats, the opposition parties are faltering. In the House of Representatives where the opposition jointly outnumbered the APC at the inception in 2023, serial defections put the ruling party ahead with 199 seats, up from 175 two years ago.

It is similar in the 109-member Senate chamber, where the APC has 65 senators as opposed to the 59 it had on inauguration day. With seven more senators, the ruling party will have a two-thirds majority.

Tinubu has put the most effort into winning over state governments (AC Vol 66 No 9). The state governors are the main source of finance for political parties. And the APC has been piling pressure on opposition governors to defect. Those governors who decline may be reminded that they could be investigated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission once they leave office and the lose their immunity from prosecution. ●

SOUTH AFRICA

Unity government shaken as police chief blows the whistle

After explosive claims of cartel-backed infiltration, Ramaphosa suspended key officials and launched a judicial inquiry but risks losing control of the coalition

On 6 July, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) police commissioner Lieutenant-General **Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi** accused Police Minister **Senzo Mchunu** and Deputy National Police Commissioner **Shadrack Sibiya** of colluding with criminal elements to suppress 121 investigations led by a special unit probing political killings. Both men have since been placed on special leave with full pay – and African National Congress (ANC) veteran **Firoz Cachalia** has been appointed acting Minister of Police.

Facing mounting pressure over alleged criminal syndicate ties within law enforcement and the judiciary,

President **Cyril Ramaphosa** has moved to contain the fallout. He has appointed a judicial commission of inquiry, removed **Mchunu**, fired Higher Education and Training Minister **Nobuhle Nkabane**, and suspended **Andrew Chauke** – a senior official in the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) – amid suspicion that he shielded senior ANC members charged with corruption.

Although led by Ramaphosa appointee **Shamila Batohi** – a prosecutor who has worked with the International Criminal Court – the NPA has consistently failed to prosecute the ringleaders of corruption. The NPA and its Investigating Directorate Against

Corruption have prosecutions pending against at least 20 senior South African Police Service officers at the rank of brigadier and above. The problem lies in persistent delays, rooted in the long-standing separation of investigation and prosecution – a structural flaw the Scorpions had overcome before President **Jacob Zuma** dismantled them.

Batohi formally advised the president to remove **Chauke**, the NPA's South Gauteng director, 14 months ago. Around the same time, **Cachalia** – then chair of the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council – submitted a report to the president. It later emerged that neither received a response.

PATRICE MOTSEPE – RISING STAR IN LEADERSHIP STAKES

Analysts say President **Cyril Ramaphosa's** response to Lieutenant-General **Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi's** allegations and the removal of Police Minister **Senzo Mchunu** could reshape the ANC's leadership race ahead of its December 2027 elective conference. Deputy President **Paul Mashatile** is seen as the frontrunner – despite facing corruption allegations and leaning towards populist factions.

Ramaphosa's backers favour his billionaire brother-in-law **Patrice Motsepe**, with Mchunu previously viewed as a potential running mate – a prospect now unlikely.

ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula – though loyal to Ramaphosa – is widely regarded as over-zealous and an unconvincing leadership contender. Some insiders have floated Mkhwanazi – who is soon to retire – as a possible running mate should a Motsepe bid materialise. International Relations Minister **Ronald Lamola**, once backed by Ramaphosa, is said to have underwhelmed. *Africa Confidential* understands that Motsepe already has a campaign team in the provinces.

Ramaphosa has promised that the commission will leave no stone unturned in getting to the bottom of the Mkhwanazi allegations – with interim reports due in three and six months and a final report next year.

Mchunu and Deputy National Police Commissioner **Shadrack Sibiya** were swiftly recalled, but Ramaphosa did not act against Mkhwanazi for going public without authorisation – raising questions about the limits of his authority. Both Mchunu and Sibiya have denied the allegations against them. ●

Nkabane's dismissal followed pressure from the Democratic Alliance (DA), the ANC's junior coalition partner, which had demanded her resignation over the irregular appointment of ANC officials to education agencies – and for allegedly lying to Parliament to conceal it. The move came just ahead of a crucial appropriations vote and was widely seen as a concession to secure DA backing and avert a budget crisis.

Ramaphosa's decision to launch a new judicial investigation – this time

led by Acting Deputy Chief Justice **Mbuyiseli Madlanga** – has drawn mixed reactions. Critics argue it is a costly delaying tactic, while others say a thorough investigation could further damage the ANC.

The Crime Intelligence Division – long plagued by corruption, factionalism and institutional decay – is a particular focus. Madlanga warned that unsubstantiated claims were 'extremely damaging to public confidence in the independence of our courts'.

Public scepticism remains high, with many questioning whether another commission of inquiry will deliver results – especially in light of frustrations stemming from the Zondo Commission into state capture, which exposed the ANC under former President **Jacob Zuma** as an 'organised criminal enterprise' that 'knew what was going on but did nothing about it' (AC Vol 63 Nos 1, 10, 14, Dispatches 22/5/22 & Vol 64 No 14). But this culture of impunity did not begin with Zuma. A clear pattern has emerged over decades in which recommendations from commissions of inquiry are routinely ignored without explanation – from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under **Thabo Mbeki** to more recent anti-corruption reports under Ramaphosa. The politics of avoidance and selective implementation have become hallmarks of ANC governance.

The DA faces its own dilemma – whether to remain in the increasingly fractious Government of National Unity (GNU) or return to the opposition benches.

DA police spokesperson **Ian Cameron** said the force had been hollowed out and called for institutional reform and for the Crime Intelligence Division to be rebuilt from scratch. Following the arrest of its senior leadership, Cameron backed calls – led by the South African Policing Union – for a formal commission of inquiry to restore credibility and address entrenched misconduct within the division.

Helen Zille, head of the DA's federal executive, is reportedly preparing a bid to run for Mayor of Johannesburg at next year's local elections.

DA leader **John Steenhuisen** has been leading efforts to pressure Ramaphosa to dismiss three ANC cabinet ministers embroiled in corruption scandals – along with a deputy minister linked to the era of President Zuma. The officials named are: **Thembi Simelane**, currently serving as Minister of Human Settlements; **Nkabane**, who has been replaced by her deputy **Buti Manamela**; and **David Mahlobo** – Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation (Dispatches 7/7/25). They are easy targets for Ramaphosa to show he's serious about government discipline. Critics are also asking, often rhetorically, why Ramaphosa has failed to act against **Angie Motshekga** or **Gwede Mantashe**. Both are long-serving ministers and close Ramaphosa allies whose continued presence, despite serious allegations ranging from Bosasa-linked bribery to irregular appointments, raises uncomfortable questions about political protection and selective accountability.

Subscribing to Africa Confidential

The price of an **individual annual subscription** for a print copy (including subscriber's online access) is **£1019/US\$1429**. Reduced prices are available for academic institutions, NGOs/charities and students.

The price for an **individual, single-user online-only annual subscription** is **£876/US\$1226**. Basic, online individual subscriptions for shorter periods are also available. Alternatively, provide direct online access for all your offices and staff via the IP Multi-Site Licence.

IP Multi-User and Multi-Site Licences: Online access via IP recognition provides access for all your staff wherever they may be located in the world. The cost is determined by how many people you want to be able to access the site at

the same time. Prices start at **£2567/US\$3594** for 2 concurrent users.

FREE for all annual subscribers
All annual subscribers have full access to the searchable archive of *Africa Confidential* issues dating back to 1996.

Annual subscribers can enjoy additional articles that are only published online.

Subscriptions contact

Charlotte Bryan
Asempa Limited, Vine House,
Fair Green, Reach
Cambridge CB25 0JD, UK
Tel: +44(0)1638 743633
subscriptions@africa-confidential.com

or purchase online at:

www.africa-confidential.com

Africa Confidential understands that before the latest scandal, around 20% of DA members were opposed to remaining in the GNU. For Ramaphosa, the stakes are higher. He faces pressure from both anti-GNU factions within the ANC and his own supporters, who are angered by the sidelining of Mchunu – a close ally who led Ramaphosa's presidential

campaign in KZN in 2017, a province largely hostile to his presidency. In the circumstances, Mkhwanazi is far more popular in KZN than Mchunu, further complicating Ramaphosa's efforts to consolidate support in the region.

Ramaphosa's credibility on corruption is further compromised by the unresolved Phala Phala scandal, in

which US\$4 million was stolen from a couch at his private game farm north of Johannesburg in February 2020 (AC Vol 63 Nos 13, 16 & 24). Although spared prosecution by two investigations, he has never explained his role. Some commentators believe he will face renewed scrutiny once he leaves office. ●

SOUTH AFRICA

The ANC's 750-million-rand gamble

Ramaphosa says the dialogue forum will produce a social compact for jobs, power and security – critics dismiss it as political theatre

As accusations about top politicians' colluding with people traffickers and drug dealers dominate public debate in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa has been trying to refocus attention on his legacy project – a National Dialogue to win broad agreement on a 30-year policy framework. Initially, civic activists had called for a national conversation to address South Africa's shortcomings on governance and economy – but they wanted it to be independent of government management. ANC leaders saw that as a threat and quickly took over the project which has been lambasted for its design and cost, an initial budget of 750 million rand (US\$42.4m).

Arguing that criticism of his plan showed 'South Africans care about the country and were invested in its future,' Ramaphosa held his first meeting on 11 July with the Eminent Persons Group, who are meant to steer the dialogue. A week earlier, John Steenhuisen, leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the second biggest party in the Government of National Unity (GNU), pulled out of the dialogue branding it a crass misallocation of resources. For once, the centre-right DA and the populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are on the same page; the EFF described the initiative with its 750m rand budget as 'outrageous and wasteful'.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), erstwhile allies of the politically dominant African National Congress, are also deeply sceptical. Such responses will complicate if not sideline the dialogue. The Labour Party has gone further, launching a High Court application to interdict the process as 'unconstitutional, irrational and fiscally irresponsible.'

Yet the dialogue has won

wholehearted endorsement from the ANC's former foe, the Inkatha Freedom Party whose leader Velenkosini Hlabisa said on 22 July that it represented 'a key to healing South Africa.' Hlabisa and Inkatha see a way to use the dialogue to secure more recognition for King Misuzulu Sinqobile kaZwelithini and other traditional leaders in the country.

Several prominent South Africans – including a Springbok rugby captain, the coach of the national women's football team, a top actor, a former apartheid minister and constitutional negotiator, a trade unionist, and a former Constitutional Court judge – have joined the dialogue, reinforcing critiques of 'elite capture'.

NEXT CHAPTER

Ramaphosa is due to step down as ANC president in 2029 and wants the dialogue 'to shape the next chapter of our democracy'. So far, he has failed to convince critics, across the political spectrum, many of whom see it as carefully crafted public relations aimed at giving the ANC an electoral boost ahead of its National General Council at the end of 2025 and the 2026 local government elections. Support for the party has hit an historic low following its loss of an electoral majority last year (AC Vol 65 No 12).

ANC leaders welcome the dialogue as a moment of 'reckoning and rebirth', some see it as an extension of the GNU initiative, the ten-party coalition agreed a year ago (AC Vol 65 No 13). They hark back to the ANC's lead role in the fall of apartheid 30 years ago, before many of the current electorate were born.

Many civic activists told *Africa Confidential* that they had been waiting for months for the Presidency to name the leaders of the dialogue. 'The process was chaotic, and some people were contacted at the last minute to be part of

the eminent persons group and are now awaiting how the process will unfold,' an ANC insider told *Africa Confidential*.

A national convention is scheduled for 15 August to set the agenda and pave the way for the broader dialogue, expected to begin next year. The process will be led by an inter-ministerial committee chaired by Deputy President Paul Mashatile, whose support is waning amid reports linking him to negotiations over the multi-million rand lottery licence.

NO SHORTAGE OF COMMISSIONS

Since 2018, at least 23 presidential commissions, councils and panels have been established – including the Presidential Economic Advisory Council, the Presidential Climate Commission, Infrastructure South Africa, and the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council. Yet these bodies with highly qualified consultants have delivered few tangible outcomes (AC Vol 60 No 20, Vol 64 No 20 & Vol 53 No 4).

The National Planning Commission, which spearheaded the National Development Plan: Vision 2030, was meant to be groundbreaking with ambitious goals and wide consultation but failed to achieve many of its targets.

Ramaphosa who led the constitutional negotiations, alongside Roelf Meyer, that ended apartheid, argued: 'having dialogues is part of our DNA as a nation. At every important moment, we have come together as a nation to forge a path into the future in dialogue with one another,' he said.

He referred to efforts such as the ANC-apartheid government negotiations and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to the State Capture Commission (AC Vol 63 No 10). Yet more than 1 billion rand has been spent on the State Capture Commission but no high-profile politicians have been prosecuted.

Opposition parties, including Mmusi Maimane's Build One SA (BOSA) argue that, a year after the ANC's electoral defeat and the formation of the GNU, there has been no accountability and no consequences for wrongdoing. This has fuelled public frustration and intensified calls for transparency and justice.

The South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU), led by Zwelinzima Vavi, contends that the dialogue plan suggests political desperation. ActionSA's Herman Mashaba says the 750m rand budget points to a 'carefully choreographed

process to fool South Africans yet again'.

The Dialogue Task Team is chaired by Nkosinathi Biko, executive trustee of the Steve Biko Foundation. The Eminent Persons Group includes: former mining executive Bobby Godsell; ANC stalwart Barbara Masekela; former

Democratic Alliance leader Lindiwe Mazibuko; constitutional negotiator Meyer; business leader Gloria Serobe; humanitarian and founder of the Gift of the Givers Foundation, Imtiaz Sooliman; and award-winning rocket scientist Siyabulela Xuza. ●

ERITREA/ETHIOPIA

Former enemies unite to take on Abiy

Published online 22 July

Eritrea and the ruling party in Tigray forge an unlikely alliance against Addis Ababa

Never short of self-belief, Ethiopia's Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** faces the most serious challenge yet to his balancing of regional and national interests – Eritrean and Tigrayan leaders, bitter foes since the

1990s, are uniting against him (AC Vol 66 No 11). Hostilities between Eritrea and Tigray, whose joint border runs for 1,033 kilometres, reached a peak during Ethiopia's devastating two-year civil war. Since that conflict ended with an

unstable peace accord in Pretoria in October 2022, national and regional alignments have been shifting.

At the root of a nascent alliance, so far mostly at cross-border community and activist level, are two power struggles: within the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the party that has controlled Tigray for half a century, and between Abiy and his Eritrean counterpart, President **Issayas Afewerki**, rivals for the role of regional caudillo.

Abiy and Issayas fell out when Ethiopia's leader buried the hatchet with the TPLF in November 2022; Issayas had wanted to put a nail in the coffin of Tigray's ruling party. As Abiy's government stepped up its push for a coastal foothold, Eritrea – an Ethiopian province until its independence in 1993, which made Ethiopia landlocked – felt threatened by its larger neighbour. That led Asmara to soften its stance towards the TPLF faction that opposed Abiy.

After the 2022 peace agreement, Tigray's leaders were relying on Addis Ababa's goodwill. At the forefront was a senior TPLF figure **Getachew Reda**, the head of a Tigray Interim Regional Administration governing at Abiy's invitation. Getachew was, however, unable to implement the peace deal in Tigray's favour. Large areas of Tigray remained controlled by Amhara region's militias and administrators: that meant hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans could not return home; and Eritrea's army patrolled northern areas fought over in the 2000–2002 Ethiopia-Eritrea war.

TPLF in-fighting ensued over whether the party should be reinstated as part of the Pretoria settlement or would have to re-register with the National Election Board. Getachew lost. Pro-Addis figures were sidelined and the TPLF dominated a reshaped interim administration with the backing of the region's powerful military apparatus. New interim president Lieutenant General **Tadesse Werede** signed a document affirming federal terms, yet a TPLF-aligned cabinet showed where the authority lies (AC Vol 66 No 6).

An emboldened TPLF, trying to secure better terms out of the Pretoria accord with the federal government, is re-evaluating relations with Eritrea. Most notable have been the openings

AN ADDIS-ASMARA CLASH THREATENS REGIONAL TIES

A new Ethiopia-Eritrea war centred on Tigray could unpick a web of alliances and rivalries around the Red Sea, encompassing **Egypt**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Turkey** and the **United Arab Emirates**.

Abiy's bonds with UAE President **Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahayan** are strong, meaning Addis would get at least tacit support from Abu Dhabi if his rivalry with former ally Eritrea's President **Issayas Afewerki** exploded into conflict.

Depending on how the war played out, the UAE may hope to establish a base on the Red Sea. Riyadh would probably side with Issayas (AC Vol 65 No 19).

Those proxy dynamics have driven the war in Sudan, with Cairo heavily involved. Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) Commander General **Abdel Fattah al Burhan** has Saudi and Egyptian support, as well as Issayas's backing, and is still locked in conflict with the UAE-backed Rapid Support Forces.

A similarly disastrous proxy conflict could play should Abiy escalate hostilities in Tigray and Eritrea. **Somalia** and **Djibouti** would feel compelled to oppose or try to isolate Ethiopia. Egypt, wary of Ethiopia's maritime ambitions due to their rivalry over the Nile, would oppose Addis Ababa.

Cairo's strengthened ties with Djibouti, underscored by President **Abdel Fattah el Sisi** visiting in April, signals an alignment to control Red Sea and Gulf of Aden access. Their joint declaration asserting regional governance over these waterways challenges Ethiopia's coastal aspirations.

Reports of increased military-logistics flights from Burgas, **Bulgaria**, to Djibouti around Sisi's visit suggest Egypt is building a logistical foothold, which could enforce an informal arms embargo against Ethiopia. Such a move would wreck Ethiopia's resupply capabilities, using Djibouti as Ethiopia's primary trade gateway to exert economic and military pressure. Egypt's pro-west role in Middle East, particularly in Gaza and the Red Sea, has ensured **United States** support until now. Should that change, Washington might pivot to Ethiopia, especially if Addis Ababa bolsters counter-terrorism efforts against the *Al Shabaab*-Houthi axis. The US could further complicate the picture by recognising Somaliland, escalating tensions with Somalia.

Somalia's delicate position is shaped by *Al Shabaab*'s resurgence, strengthened by its Houthi alliance. Somali President **Hassan Sheikh Mohamud** also has to consider **Turkey's** pressure through an oil exploration deal and mediation efforts in the Somalia-Ethiopia dispute over Addis Ababa's Somaliland port plans.

Mogadishu's counter-offer of port access to Ethiopia, including naval rights, aims to counter *Al Shabaab*'s momentum and align it with Turkey to deter backlash from Egypt and Eritrea, both opposed to Ethiopia-Somalia rapprochement.

Turkey's Red Sea ambitions risk escalating tensions with Egypt, but US involvement via Mogadishu's port access offer could dampen this rivalry. ●

along the Tigray-Eritrea border and peace events in June that had the blessing of authorities. A video of a meeting between TPLF and Eritrean activists was hyped to show reconciliation.

It served as a warning to Addis Ababa and tested public sentiment. Resentment over Eritrean atrocities in the war remains high but frustration over federal delays drives a minority of Tigrayans closer to Asmara.

This month, as it denied all links with Issayas's regime, the TPLF accused Abiy's government of 'siege' tactics and 'other provocative acts [that] pose a threat to the already fragile peace'. They were responding to comments by Abiy in parliament days earlier when he warned of war but insisted he wanted to avoid it.

TPLF accusations against Addis Ababa mirrored those made by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 20 June when it said Asmara's 'infringements on Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity... further exacerbate the fragile peace and security situation in the Horn of Africa'. As it

has for decades, Asmara's Information Ministry proclaimed Eritrea as an innocent victim of foreign aggression.

PORT GAMBIT

Focusing on Abiy's obsession with Ethiopia becoming a Red Sea power, Eritrea sees Tigray's military strength as a means to check Addis Ababa.

An Eritrea-Tigray alliance would complicate any attempt by Addis Ababa to seize the port in Assab; it lies on a strip of Eritrea that runs down the coast to Djibouti and which the United Arab Emirates used as a base to bomb Yemen. The adjacent Ethiopian region is the arid Afar, and Eritrea has already built relationships with sympathetic politicians there.

Addis has economic and legal weapons at its disposal, but it may not want to escalate, at least not directly, and not yet. Instead, with Eritrea backing armed elements in Tigray, Afar and Amhara, where anti-government insurgency rages, Ethiopia's government is reciprocating in kind.

Brigade Nhamedu, Eritrean oppositionists based in Addis, plans to wage armed struggle against Issayas. And dissident TPLF fighters have regrouped in Afar, with blessing from Addis Ababa, and have made incursions into south-eastern Tigray. In recent months, Abiy has repositioned military assets through Afar to Eritrean border areas.

To the west, the TPLF is intensifying pressure on Addis Ababa to restore Western Tigray (known in Amhara as Welkait), with part of the threat coming from Tigray forces stationed in Sudan. To bolster its position, Addis Ababa could regain Amhara support by handing it Welkait.

Yet Addis's rationale for controlling the area is now more tenuous. With Eritrea offering the TPLF territory to operate from, as well as the Tigrayan forces in Sudan, Addis may calculate that containing the TPLF has less strategic value. Maintaining the status quo reinforces Tigrayan perceptions that negotiation with Abiy is futile, pushing all three sides closer to war. ●

UGANDA

President's oil dream is in foreign hands

Museveni's beloved pipeline and refinery project rides on uncertain finance from UAE and questions about China's priorities

Uganda's planned oil refinery at Hoima hinges its joint venture partner Alpha MBM Investments, a little-known United Arab Emirates company chaired by a minor member of the Dubai royal family, Sheikh Mohammed bin Maktoum bin Juma Al Maktoum, posing questions about his ability to raise billions in finance for a project with a spotty history to date (AC Vol 66 No 10).

Meanwhile, the future of the refinery's twin, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project, lies in the hands of Chinese development banks and export credit agencies.

Serious issues have dogged both investments over the last 20 years, the refinery especially. Both Tullow Oil and TotalEnergies had previously declared a refinery for the Lake Albert oil as unviable, and a contract with a Russian company to build it fell through in 2015. All the refinery projects to date have been negotiated personally by President Yoweri Museveni, whom insiders say has spent hundreds of hours poring over the details.

The estimated US\$4 billion refinery, as announced in early 2024, is a 60/40

joint venture, meaning Alpha MBM must come up with billions in finance, which some analysts have called 'ambitious'.

The firm has no track record of major projects and only Hoima among its major current investments, leading to speculation that more powerful interests in Abu Dhabi may be backing the project as part of the UAE's massive influence-building and capital investment programme throughout sub-Saharan Africa (AC Vol 65 No 8, and see box).

The refinery joint venture is run by a steering committee of eight, four from each side, although the committee had yet to meet at the time of writing. One of its members told *Africa Confidential*, 'The race to synchronise the two projects, the pipeline and the refinery is now on but it's a construction matter now depending on if Alpha MBM can raise the capital – approximately \$400-600m every year for the [three-year] construction period.' The official added that they expected crude oil exports to commence by the end of 2026.

Museveni is adamant about delivering both the refinery and the pipeline within his next presidential

term, which begins when he wins – as most expect – the election in January 2026.

The financial pact behind EACOP concluded in March 2025 refers to approximately \$2bn in equity. The company now has access to a billion dollars. The rest of the equity funds are expected from China's Export Credit Agency (the Export-Import Bank of China) guaranteed by the China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation, also known as Sinosure, but there have been hiccups.

Officials say China has been dragging its feet. Uganda sent Energy Minister Ruth Nankabirwa to China and other high officials in June on a charm offensive to free the logjam but there's been no news of a breakthrough.

'The strategy we thought would work was to get the Chinese on board after the partial financial close,' said one official who was worried that the Chinese had still not committed themselves months afterwards. The official said, 'One of the concerns that the ECA has expressed is with the insurer Sinosure following its "overexposure" in Tanzania and Ethiopia.'

In Tanzania Sinosure is backing the \$450m Standard Gauge Railway project and one Ugandan official source says ECA has traditionally been cool on midstream oil and gas projects.

'The challenge is on the Chinese side because of internal issues regarding Sinosure's performance. Even if we receive a green light from the Chinese government, having the funds ready

THE EMIRATI BEHIND THE REFINERY

The main partner in the Hoima refinery project, Alpha MBM's owner, **Mohammed bin Maktoum bin Juma Al Maktoum**, is usually referred to a 'junior' member of Dubai's ruling Al Maktoum royal family. The 41-year-old chairs the MBM Group, parent company of Alpha MBM, and the East Africa Investment Group and Thumbay Healthcare.

EAIG is said to have invested in Uganda across a wide variety of sectors, including a national ID card scheme. EAIG and Alpha MBM share a CEO, **Luke Sellwood**, a **British-born Emirati**.

The wealth of Mohammed bin Maktoum is assumed in the **United Arab Emirates** to derive from his status as a royal, although his branch is not in line to the throne. MBM Group was formed by Mohammed bin Maktoum with close cousins in the form of a 'family office' with highly diverse investments and interests.

Public records are scant but on paper the Ugandan refinery exceeds in scale any other business venture by the Alpha MBM chair by a colossal margin.

Mohammed bin Maktoum is said to operate jointly with other Dubai royals and with the IHC Group in Abu Dhabi of Sheikh **Tahnoon bin Zayed**, the UAE's National Security Advisor, and a much larger figure in Gulf business and in African interests than his cousin **Mohammed bin Maktoum**.

Last year a Sheikh Tahnoon company was reported to have bought Ras El Hikma, a 170-million square metre peninsula on **Egypt's** Mediterranean coast, for US\$35 billion, which was widely seen as a subsidy to the Egyptian regime (AC Vol 65 No 7).

Sheikh Tahnoon also has extensive agribusiness interests in **Sudan** and IHC last year also made a massive investment in **Zambian** copper (AC Vol 66 No 4).

At about the same time Mohammed bin Maktoum was announced as partnering in the Hoima refinery he made an investment in an Abu Dhabi company called Venom Blockchain which aims to launch digital currencies across Africa, especially in Uganda, **Somalia** and the **Central African Republic**.

Another cousin, Sheikh **Ahmed Dalmook Juma Al Maktoum**, also invests in Africa, including a gas-fired power plant in **Ghana**. He has also been hoovering up carbon credit deals on the continent, using his company Blue Carbon, some of which have attracted criticism, according to *Gulf States Newsletter*.

Mohammed Bin Maktoum's junior status within the Dubai royal family together with the apparent small scale of all his projects except for the Hoima refinery is what has prompted speculation that a much bigger player in the Emirati business and state firmament may lie behind Alpha MBM. ●

when EACOP needs it shall be a challenge,' said one negotiator. Further complicating Chinese participation, it is understood, are the ECA condition that the bulk of the labour and equipment for the EACOP project be sourced from Chinese companies.

'They expect 60% of the labour to

come from China,' the negotiator added. They added that total E&P (exploration and production) shall be exposed to sourcing weighted heavily in favour of Chinese firms, limiting the range of motion of Ugandan negotiators who are desperate to lock in Chinese investment in light of the financing problems that

EACOP has faced.

'We are also aware that the upstream projects are not progressing as fast as desired (Tilenga and Kingfisher oilfields) which means loan negotiations downstream have to factor in the risk of crude default [if the pipeline is ready but there is no crude to transport] as the viability of the project is based on the fees charged for transporting the crude to the coast.

GREEN BILL

EACOP has long been challenged by environmentalists and a global campaign led to a financial boycott by leading western banks such as HSBC, Barclays and Deutsche Bank.

Design additions meant to address some of the environmental concerns include electrical and fibre optic wrap on the pipeline's entire 1,443-kilometre length. This is for heating the specially designed 24-inch-wide carbon steel pipe which has extra coating added at a new factory in Tanzania.

Additional funds will be spent on renewable energy solutions for heating the pipeline including an 80-megawatt solar farm and hydropower.

'This added approximately \$200m to the cost of the pipeline but has eased the burden of attracting non-Chinese funding,' an official said. The pipeline is being manufactured by the China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company with some components completed in Tanzania.

The non-ECA banks that have provided the current funding round are majority UAE banks. They include Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector. Others are the African-Import Bank, Standard Bank of South Africa (Isle of Man Branch), the Qatar National Bank (QPSC Paris Branch) KCB Bank Uganda, NMB Bank and Uganda Development Bank. ●

AFRICA/DEBT/UNITED NATIONS

High hopes, little change

After yet another UN summit, African governments see sparse progress on debt relief or global financial reform

The familiar sound of empty promises rang around Seville at the close of the latest UN summit on international financial reforms. Few delegates from developing nations trusted commitments to tackle debt, boost transfers or rewire the global economic architecture. Pledges from

rich-country delegates at the 30 June to 3 July conference included creating a 'debt swaps for development hub', converting a portion of African sovereign debt into investments, installing 'debt pause' clauses for when crises hit, and launching a Seville Forum on Debt for borrower collaboration.

But despite these measures at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, developing economies, including heavily indebted Africa states, still face a hostile financing system. The financing gap is ballooning and African finance ministries rail against mounting debt servicing costs, arguing they are unfairly treated by global ratings agencies.

Following pre-conference efforts by **Britain** and the European Union to dilute pledges on debt reform, civil society groups and key sovereign borrowers were set to be disappointed – and they were right to be (AC Vol 66 No 13). Among other things, there was no credible move towards a UN-hosted

debt restructuring mechanism. Instead, the Forum on Debt is being pushed as a step towards creating a Paris Club-like group of borrowers – an idea unlikely to have any meaningful impact.

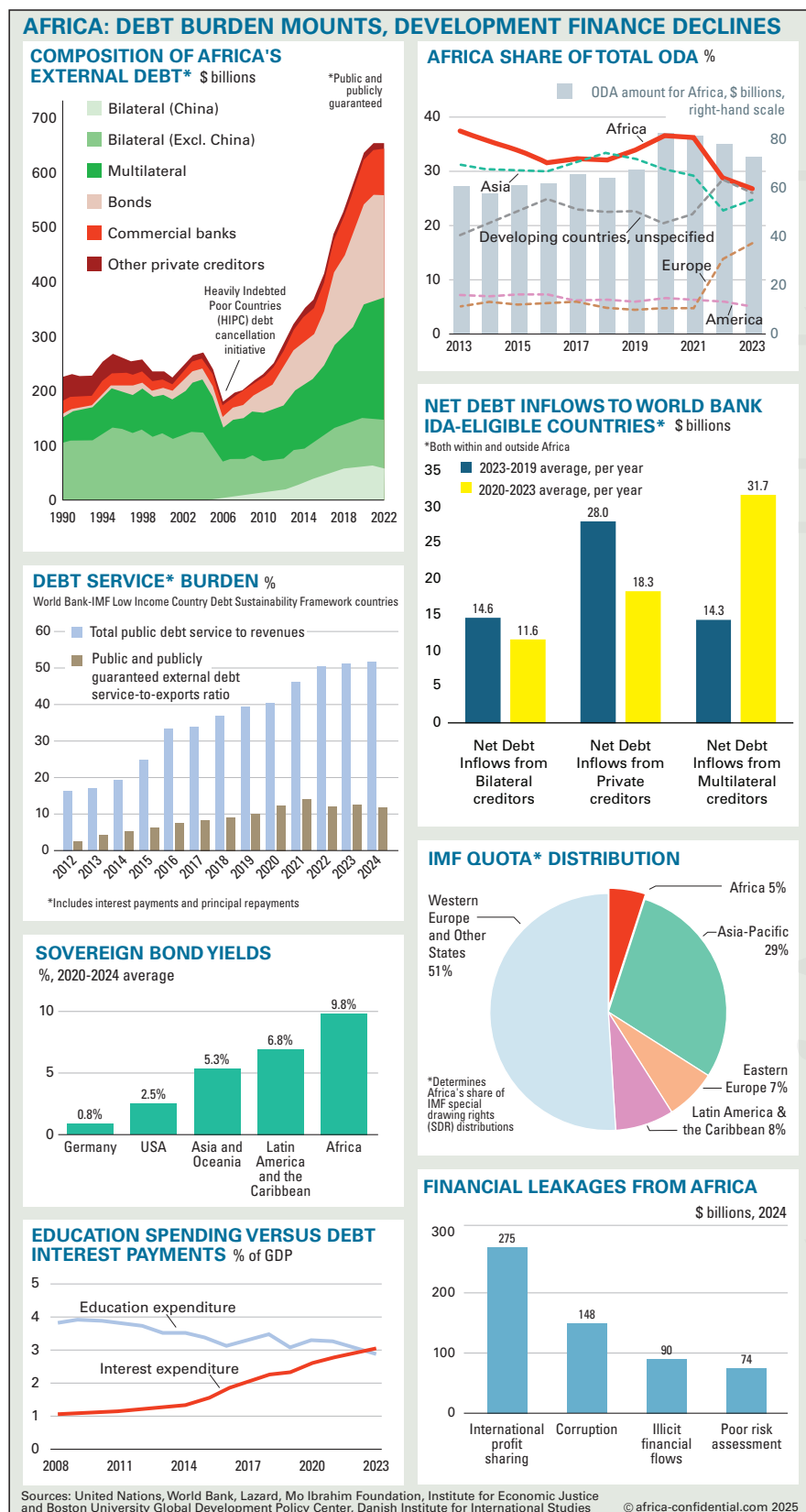
Notable by its absence was a United States delegation. This was hardly a surprise, given Washington's slashing of USAID programmes, imposition of tariffs, threats to withdraw funding from the African Development Bank (AfDB) and likely efforts to reduce support for the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) – moves that drive up the cost of capital for African governments (Dispatches 22/4/25). Even with greater private investment, this will likely mean more commercial borrowing, whether externally – often at high rates due to the perceived risk – or on shallow domestic capital markets.

The share of African domestic revenues taken up by interest payments is perilously high and, according to estimates by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, now exceeds sub-Saharan Africa's education spending (A New Debt Deal for Africa: Breaking the Vicious Cycle, 3 February 2025). The debt problems were supposed to be addressed by the G20 Common Framework for restructuring but only four African nations – Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana and Zambia – have elected to use it. This followed borrower reticence to take advantage of the Covid-19 Debt Service Suspension Initiative for fear of prompting ratings downgrades and because it did not offer a sustainable remedy.

Sceptical Africa finance ministries and civil society groups accuse the IMF of using debt sustainability analyses that overestimate future economic performance and so underestimate the size of creditor concessions required. Critics include Nobel-prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and members of the Pope Francis-appointed Jubilee Commission, whose debt report was released last month (AC Vol 66 No 13 & Dispatches 30/6/25).

In addition to calling for 'growth rather than austerity' following restructuring, so that the borrower country's long-term development is prioritised, the report advocates a 'sovereign debt crisis resolution mechanism', an international bankruptcy court, a fund to repurchase distressed debts, a 'global climate fund', provision of official 'bridge' financing, greater use of debt haircuts – perhaps to the extent of another round of writing off the debt of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries – and legal reforms to constrain 'vulture funds' that undermine debt restructurings.

The commission also reiterated calls



to reform of multilateral institutions, including more equitable distribution of the IMF special drawing rights reserve currency, which are currently distributed in proportion to countries' respective IMF quotas. There is little reason to think these calls will be heeded by wealthier nations, including China, which in recent

years has cut its lending to Africa and is mostly averse to write-offs.

May's Declaration of the African Union Conference on Debt, which reiterated calls for a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt, proposed changes to the Common Framework such as more definitive standards for

COMMON FAILINGS ON THE WORKOUT DEALS

More than four years since **Chad** became the first to request participation in the Common Framework – followed by **Zambia** and **Ethiopia** in 2021 and **Ghana** in January 2023, the drawn-out restructuring process seems to have deterred other sovereigns (AC Vol 63 No 21 & Vol 65 No12). Ghana has now completed domestic debt and Eurobond restructuring and is finalising paperwork after signing a deal with bilateral creditors in January (AC Vol 66 No 7). Yet no country has fully completed a comprehensive debt restructuring under the Common Framework.

Ghana is expected to conclude bilateral agreements shortly but progress is slower on external commercial debt – notably due to a dispute over the treatment of Afreximbank loans. Accra argues Afreximbank should be classed as a commercial lender rather than benefit from preferred creditor status. Even if resolved, reaching agreement with dispersed commercial creditors will take time. Zambia holds a similar view on Afreximbank. It has restructured its US\$3 billion bondholder debt and Finance Minister **Situmbeko Musokotwane** said in April that agreements with Zambia's bilateral creditors should be concluded by the third quarter of 2025. Negotiations included a clash over whether the Eurobond deal breached comparability rules.

On 2 July, Ethiopia struck a Memorandum of Understanding with its Official Creditor Commission, following an agreement-in-principle in March (AC Vol 66 No 8). The Finance Ministry estimates the deal could yield over \$3.5bn in debt relief. Further concessions may come from talks with **Kuwait**, **Poland** and the **United Arab Emirates** – all outside the OCC.

Ethiopia has yet to reach agreement with bondholders on its \$1bn Eurobond, whose restructuring is complicated by resistance to principal haircuts. As with Zambia and Ghana, the deal must meet bilateral comparability standards and satisfy the IMF, which is disbursing funds under a \$3.4bn facility subject to periodic review. ●

'comparability of treatment' between creditor groups (typically bilateral and commercial) and allowing bilateral lenders to be more generous than 'comparability' requires if they so wish.

Treatment of domestic debt restructuring – and debts owed to smaller multilaterals like Afreximbank – remain key issues on which Seville and the Jubilee Report are relatively silent (AC Vol 66 Nos 12 & 13). The former is a balancing act, where reducing the burden on external creditors in the event of domestic debt restructuring coexists with the economic risks if local holders of government bonds take a hit. On the latter, the AU and AfDB oppose the position of **Ghana** and **Zambia's** finance ministries that Afreximbank should not have IMF-like preferred lender status, making its loans exempt from restructuring.

Many bilateral lenders – and a China already resentful of the IMF and World Bank's status – believe Afreximbank should participate in debt restructuring concessions, a stance the IMF continues to resist, although it shows signs of softening. Experts question whether Afreximbank and other global south lenders merit an intermediate status. ●

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC/CHAD

Militias agree peace but risks stay high

A historic deal to agree peace between Bangui and all the rebel groups is announced, but at what cost and for how long?

On 4 July, Chad announced that a peace agreement had been reached between the Central African Republic government and the two main armed groups, which are mostly made up of Peulh (or Fulani) fighters: *Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation* (3R), led by **Oumar Kader**, also known as General **Bobo Sembé**, and the *Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique* (UPC), led by **Ali Darassa** (AC Vol 66 No 10).

A third group, the *Mouvement Patriotique Centrafricain* (MPC), led by **Mahamat Al Khatim**, initiated the talks in 2024 and is expected to sign once he has gathered enough fighters. The *Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique*, led by **Nourreddin Adam**, which is barred from Chad, is the only group not to have taken part in the talks (AC Vol 59 No 11).

The terms of the agreement are vague. Rehabilitation of fighters and involvement in public life are mentioned but not jobs for the militia leaders and

their acolytes. Details are so vague, those experienced in the history of such events insist, that money must be the basis of the deals, and that the extent of the peace may depend on the amount of money the commanders can pass down to their footsoldiers.

Within days, UPC fighters had gathered on the outskirts of Bambari expecting a camp which could handle their demobilisation. But no one was yet ready and neither the local administration nor the UN peacekeepers of Minusca had the resources or instructions to face the problem. Not a good start for the peace deal.

President **Faustin-Archange Touadéra** has been under pressure to resume talks with the armed groups, especially as election day approaches – it is scheduled for December. Although the armed groups do not threaten Bangui, they are a big problem in the north, making voter registration and voting much more difficult, if not impossible.

By securing a peace deal, the CAR

government improves its standing with **Angola** and **Rwanda**, both of which advocated re-engaging with the armed groups and were frustrated by Touadéra's failure to do so.

Touadéra may have had another motive. If security improves significantly in northern CAR, the Wagner mercenaries operating there will no longer be needed, which would increase his autonomy vis-à-vis the **Russians**.

That's important, given that he is currently negotiating significant loans with the IMF and **France**, as well as funding for an ambitious five-year development plan and needs to convince them he is not under the Russian thumb.

It was no accident that Chadian President **Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno 'Kaka'**, made the announcement about the peace deal. He pressured the armed groups, which operate as much in Chad as in CAR, to reach agreement.

His motives are both strategic and opportunistic. On the one hand, he needed to restore his image after attracting criticism over his blatantly rigged election in May last year and rebuild his credibility in the region and beyond (AC Vol 65 No 12). On the other hand, he needs to pacify his southern border, fearing armed groups could use the sparsely populated areas of northern CAR and **Sudan** as rear bases

for assaults on his power in Ndjamena (AC Vol 66 No 2).

DIVERTED BRIBES

The latest peace agreement was at least partly necessary because the previous deal mediated by Angola in September 2021 failed. Chad agreed to host numerous leaders of CAR's armed groups, and Luanda provided substantial funding, which would be distributed by Chad's *Agence Nationale de la Sécurité de l'Etat* (ANSE), the key domestic intelligence organisation.

But after an initial payment, no more money came to the armed groups, whose leaders publicly criticised Chad's top securocrats. The funds had gone to pay for Mahamat Kaka's election campaign, which upset Angola. The detention of former prime minister and opposition

figure **Succès Masra** since mid-May has also alienated the Chadian president's supporters in the region.

Public expenditure on local government in rural Chad is suffering the same fate as the Danegeld earmarked for the militias. The money stays in Ndjamena and is often used for private purposes by members of the elite.

Meanwhile, 'communal incidents' – i.e. armed confrontations between herders (often Peulh) and settled farmers – are increasing in number and claiming more lives.

The Chadian government wants to contain these increasingly serious incidents within national borders and avoid cross-border solidarity from countries it cannot operate in.

It is also concerned about the potential for new armed opposition

groups made up of radicalised young southerners and groups of armed oppositionists based originally near the northern and eastern borders, even though there is currently no hard evidence that such a threat exists. Nor does he want the Wagner Group, for which he has no affection, to hinder his control of lucrative cross-border activities.

General elections in CAR are still scheduled for December, though funding is lacking. President Touadéra is hoping that peace will prevail until the general elections are over, but the situation could quickly become more unpredictable, as new tensions could arise from the presence of **Emiratis** in north-eastern CAR and Moscow's desire to discipline the Wagner Group and replace it with its Africa Corps. ●

UNITED STATES/AFRICA/MIGRATION

Trump 'cash for migrants' playbook hits roadblocks in Africa

Published online 18 July

As the EU spends over US\$9 billion on migration deals with African states, Washington is pushing its own plan

Opposition is mounting to efforts by US President **Donald Trump's** administration to persuade African states to accept third-country deportees. Some governments such as **Nigeria** have openly rejected the scheme, others are turning it down more discreetly to avoid riling Trump officials. A minority such as **Eswatini** and **Rwanda** see a tactical advantage – for trade and investment – in buying into such schemes.

Rwanda has tried to negotiate similar deals with European states. It concluded a US\$500 million deal with **Britain** which was abandoned by the Prime Minister **Keir Starmer's** newly elected government a year ago. Now it is negotiating such an arrangement with the US (Dispatches 29/5/24).

More criticism of the arrangements and their security implications erupted after Washington's latest deal with Eswatini: the deportation of five individuals described by US officials as 'uniquely barbaric' to the Southern Africa kingdom and flown there on US Air Force jets. The five, from **Vietnam**, **Jamaica**, **Laos**, **Yemen**, and **Cuba**, were convicted of crimes ranging from child rape to murder, said **Tricia McLaughlin** of the US Homeland Security Department.

On 16 July, the Eswatini government, the last absolute monarchy in Africa, reluctantly admitted the presence of the deportees in the country but insisted

that it hadn't agreed to keep them in the country. 'The deportees are on transit and will be repatriated to their respective countries,' said Eswatini's acting government spokesman **Thabile Mdluli**.

The acceptance of the third-country deportees from the US clearly breaches Eswatini and international law according to legal experts from the Southern African Litigation Centre. They called on the Eswatini government to explain the legal and factual basis on which the deportees were accepted, that the national commission on human rights, and international bodies, be given access to them to assess conditions and legal rights. Security conditions are key: many voiced fears that the deportees would escape and may quickly cross into **South Africa**.

King **Mswati III's** government in Eswatini, the last country in Africa to maintain recognition of Taiwan, sees a wider advantages in courting the west such as boosting its sugar exports to the US. It may also calculate that cutting migration deals may insulate itself from western criticism of Mswati's repression of opposition activists.

That migration control – along with securing critical minerals – has become one of the main planks of the Trump administration's Africa policy was made clear by its invitation to the leaders of **Gabon**, **Guinea-Bissau**, **Liberia**, **Mauritania** and **Senegal** for the 9-12

July summit in Washington DC.

Mauritania and Senegal are key to the regional fight against jihadi insurgents but, more importantly for Trump and European leaders, they are frontline departure countries for migrants to the west.

Like the EU, the US is pressuring African states to take back their citizens whose asylum claims have been rejected and would like partner states to host other deportees from the US, regardless of their nationality.

The Trump administration is following the EU's 'cash for migrant control' playbook under which Brussels has brokered deals worth over \$9 billion with **Egypt**, **Mauritania** and **Tunisia**. The EU has also been talking to Senegal on a similar arrangement following a spike in migrants crossing the Atlantic Ocean to the Spanish Canary Islands. About 20,000 people left Mauritania for the US between 2023 and 2025. Liberia is also a favoured departure point for migrants risking a dangerous ocean crossing.

Guinea-Bissau's President **Umaro Sissoco Embaló**, who after meeting Trump at Notre Dame in Paris in December led the push for the Washington summit, said on 10 July that Trump had raised the issue of countries hosting third country deportees but without asking which countries would accept them. Some reports prior to the summit suggested that Embaló might

consider taking in such deportees but he then told **Julian Pecquet** of the Paris-based *The Africa Report* that his government's 'policy doesn't accept that.'

JUBA RESET

In South Sudan, where Republican lobbyist **Joe Szlavik** of Scribe Strategies has a \$500,000 contract to rebuild relations with the Trump administration, a top concern was responding to the US revoking visas for all South Sudan nationals citing Juba's refusal to take back over 20 people whose asylum claims had been rejected (AC Vol 66 No 11).

'The Sudanese had an epiphany that they need to get friendly,' Szlavik told *Africa Confidential*, and are 'trying to get a reset' of relations, adding there are 'a lot of complications'. After lengthy talks, over 20 people were repatriated, several facing serious charges, said Szlavik.

Juba has gone further than those mainly North African states which have negotiated payments from the

EU to control migration and host migrants. It is offering to host third country deportees; the first group of nine people deported by the US to **Djibouti** arrived in Juba in late May. The offer was made after a phone call between Trump's special advisor on Africa, **Massad Fares Boulos** and South Sudan's President **Salva Kiir Mayardit**, we hear (AC Vol 66 No 8).

The threat of Trump shuttering the US embassy in Juba lingers, but Salva's help on hosting deportees has been well-received in Washington. Promises of minerals access also help (AC Vol 66 No 8).

Szlavik is also on retainer with President **Félix Tshisekedi** in **Congo-Kinshasa**, who has offered the US access to his country's minerals as part of the fragile peace deal with Rwanda brokered by the US to end M23's military incursions in eastern Congo-K (AC Vol 66 No 14).

Salva Kiir is warming to the idea, offering sweetheart deals to US firms to invest in the country's oil and gas,

the infrastructure for which has been damaged by fighting in neighbouring **Sudan**.

The last significant deal with a US firm in South Sudan was the \$3bn investment agreed with Caltech Investment in September 2023 to purchase the oil and gas assets of **Malaysian** state firm **Petronas**.

After the mini-summit for the five African leaders on 9-12 July offered 'incredible' opportunities to strike deals with US firms according to the White House, its officials said they are planning more such meetings over the next few months.

They would focus on the 'commercial diplomacy' highlighted in the six-point trade plan set out by Washington's outgoing Assistant Secretary for African Affairs **Troy Fitrell** in May. Trump is also due to host a business-focused African leaders' summit in New York following the UN General Assembly. As well as mineral rights, migration control is likely to be well up the agenda. ●

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Unity on stage – but what happens after Ouattara?

Published online 16 July

Behind the spectacle and strength of the ruling party is its dependence on one man and an opposition in retreat

Leadership succession and regional stability were set to dominate the informal talks between Côte d'Ivoire's President **Alassane Dramane Ouattara** and his French counterpart **Emmanuel Macron** in Paris on 16 July. Ouattara took a break in France, where he and his wife **Dominique Ouattara** own property, following his triumphal appearance at the congress of the ruling *Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix* (RHDP).

Under pressure from his party, Ouattara, 82, is yet to say whether he will run for a fourth presidential term in the elections due on 25 October but his party has no doubts that he should.

European policymakers and businesses with interests in Côte d'Ivoire are warning that a disputed election – most of the main opposition contenders have been excluded – could worsen instability in the country and beyond. Macron's advisors share these concerns but they may carry little weight with Ouattara ahead of his announcement. There is no sign of an alternative ruling party candidate emerging at this stage, certainly no one who could manage the fractious organisation.

President Ouattara was the

uncontested hero of the congress last month.

'Folklore', 'Political theatre', 'A show of force' – were some of the popular verdicts of the RDHP congress – a meticulously choreographed spectacle staged across two gleaming new venues in Abidjan.

The venues were symbolic. The new *Parc des Expositions* hosted the main conference on 21 June, near the airport named after the country's first president, **Félix Houphouët-Boigny**. The rally on the following day staged in the new Ebimpé Stadium – officially renamed after President Ouattara, who often casts himself in Houphouët's image. The only vanity project missing was the still-unfinished 420-metre *Tour F*, built by Côte d'Ivoire's PFO Africa and **Belgium's** Besix, for which the initial budget was 250 billion CFA (US\$400 million) but may rise as much as a third. It has become a focal point for critics of Ouattara's grandiosity (AC Vol 66 No 9).

Ministers were enlisted to support the RHDP congress president **Patrick Achi** – a special advisor to Ouattara – in streamlining proceedings. Minister of National Education and Literacy

Mariatou Koné was the rapporteur; Economy, Planning and Development Minister **Nialé Kaba** chaired the commission on general policy; and Minister of Mines, Petroleum and Energy **Mamadou Sangafowa Coulibaly** led the commission on party structures. Other senior figures filled out the Congress Bureau.

These included Minister of the Civil Service and Modernisation of the Administration **Anne Désirée Ouloto**; Minister of Transport **Amadou Koné**; Minister of Defence **Téné Birahima Ouattara** (known as 'Photocopie') the president's younger brother; and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development **Kobenan Kouassi Adjoumani**. Like Coulibaly, Adjoumani is considered a rising star in the RHDP constellation.

It was Adjoumani who was dispatched to Nouakchott in January for the annual Africa Peace Conference and collect the African Prize for the Promotion of Peace, awarded to Ouattara by the **Mauritanian** government and the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum, underscoring the president's well cultivated international image.

'This whole RHDP congress was about loyalty,' a seasoned pundit told

Africa Confidential. 'Everyone had been sent to their districts to mobilise. Your rallies and the number of people you could persuade to come to the congress were signifiers of your loyalty.'

For months, pro-RHDP newspapers ran a steady stream of headlines about 'huge crowds' and 'massive turnout' from across the country.

RHDP officials boasted of the best-organised congress by the country's largest and most disciplined party. Yet beneath the triumphalism was unease – what happens when he's gone?

At 83, Ouattara is being urged to lead the party into the next election. Achi pleaded: 'Do not abandon us.' But Ouattara again declined to say whether he would run, even after agreeing to remain party leader. He quoted French President **Charles de Gaulle's** ambiguous line in 1958 – '*Je vous ai compris*' ('I have understood') – a flourish that only deepened the uncertainty (AC Vol 65 No 11 & Vol 66 No 3). His non-committal stance baffled commentators. 'He's had five years to reflect,' one said. 'If he intended to run, he could have said so.'

His silence has fuelled speculation that he may nominate a successor at the last minute. One name circulating is Vice-President **Tiémoko Meyliet Koné**. Would Ouattara then retain influence – in a Togolese-style arrangement à la **Faure Gnassingbé**, or a dual leadership model like **Senegal's** President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** and Prime Minister **Ousmane Sonko** (AC Vol 65 No 7)? No one knows.

Electoral strategy isn't the main issue. 'This is about safeguarding the Ouattara clan and its interests,' said a critic. 'The system is built around one man. When he goes, so do the sinecures and perks enjoyed by loyalists since 2011.'

A successor is likely to audit the bureaucracies the RHDP controls and the party risks splintering into fiefdoms run by the same grandees now professing loyalty to Ouattara. Some foresee the managed decline of the party as the Ouattaras try to retain their business empire. The key figure is not the president himself but his younger brother, 'Photocopie', who controls national security and the intelligence services and holds files on most of the country's ambitious politicians and businesspeople.

Cracks are showing. On 18 June, former human rights minister and party spokesman **Joël N'Guessan** was arrested. Once a hardliner, he had broken ranks and committed two cardinal sins: accusing the RHDP government of widespread corruption and accused judges of stoking unrest – after they removed most senior opposition figures

MAKING THE OUATTARAS GREAT AGAIN

A sign that President **Alassane Dramane Ouattara** is planning to run for a fourth term in the October elections is his hiring of veteran Republican lobbyist **Joseph Szlavik**, whose Washington DC-based Scribe Strategies also works for **Congo-Kinshasa** and **South Sudan**.

One of the busiest figures on K Street, Szlavik has close links to senior Trump administration officials. His agreement with the government of Côte d'Ivoire was filed with the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) on 9 July: the US \$600,000 a year contract commits in Trumpian style to 'make the US-THE IVORY COAST RELATIONSHIP GREAT AGAIN'.

Immigration, trade policy and security will top Scribe's talking points. In recent weeks African states such as **Guinea-Bissau** and **Rwanda** have agreed to take back irregular migrants and host deportees from other countries. The quid pro quo is that this will warm up commercial ties between US firms and Africa's economies.

Adama Coulibaly, the Finance and Economy Minister and ex-director of the World Bank who signed the contract with Scribe, and **Sidi Tiémoko Touré**, Minister of Animal and Fisheries Resources, are due in Washington in July to discuss trade issues, including Trump's planned tariffs on cocoa and coffee imports.

More discreetly, we hear that Touré will try to counter the message from presidential contender and former Chief Executive of Credit Suisse, **Tidjane Thiam**, that Ouattara has resorted to judicial interference and 'electoral authoritarianism' to exclude, on spurious grounds, the most front-running opposition candidates from October's election.

Along with Thiam, former President **Laurent Gbagbo**, his ally **Charles Blé Goudé** and former Prime Minister **Guillaume Soro** have been barred from running for the Presidency. Thiam is asking the UN Human Rights Committee to review his case and create maximum embarrassment for the pro-west Ouattara government. In a hard-hitting tribune for Project Syndicate on 4 July, Thiam warned that Côte d'Ivoire was on a dangerous path, reminding readers the disputed election in 2010 plunged the country into civil war, claiming the lives of over 3,000 people.

Along with the risk of electoral violence, Côte d'Ivoire faces incursions from insurgents in the Sahelian states to the north. Scribe's contract says it will assist the government 'in relations to combating terrorism in particularly in northern Ivory Coast to counter the spread of *Al Qaida* and the Islamic State group.'

Côte d'Ivoire was a notable absence from the five countries – **Senegal**, **Mauritania**, **Guinea-Bissau**, **Liberia** and **Gabon** – invited to lunch with President **Donald Trump** on 9 July. US State Department officials said this reflected concerns over the presidential elections, Ouattara's bid for a fourth term the exclusion of opposition candidates from the election. ●

from the electoral register. Charged with discrediting the judiciary, he is awaiting trial.

Yet the opposition is fracturing. Just three months after 25 parties formed the *Coalition pour l'alternance pacifique en Côte d'Ivoire* (CAP-CI), its largest member – the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), led by **Tidjane Thiam** – has entered a separate alliance with the one major opposition party excluded from the coalition: the *Parti des Peuples Africains – Côte d'Ivoire* (PPA-CI), led by former president **Laurent Gbagbo**. Both men have been barred from running in the October election – Thiam after a court struck him from the electoral register, and Gbagbo due to a past conviction (AC Vol 66 No 9).

The alliance was signed on 19 June. 'An alliance of convenience and blatant opportunism by two weakened parties,' was the scathing assessment of an

Abidjan newspaper.

As CAP-CI's leader, Thiam would have known the coalition includes two of Gbagbo's fiercest rivals: his former youth minister **Charles Blé Goudé** – also struck from the register – and his ex-wife **Simone Ehivet Gbagbo**, now CAP-CI's principal spokeswoman. Simone was humiliated by Gbagbo upon his return from the International Criminal Court in the Netherlands and exile in Belgium (AC Vol 62 No 13).

Her terse communiqué stating that CAP-CI 'takes note' of the new alliance barely concealed her anger at being drawn into the same camp as her former husband – and his current wife, **Nady Bamba**, who stars at PPA-CI rallies and hosts her own political events.

Bamba has repeatedly demanded that Simone stop using the Gbagbo name – a demand Simone has refused. 'We may speak with the same voice, even

though it does not have to be one voice,' she said attempting diplomacy. But the

reality is clear: the PDCI's departure from CAP-CI was the only way to

prevent the coalition from becoming a stage for a family feud. ●

DISPATCHES

ETHIOPIA

MSF implies Ethiopian troops killed aid workers, piling pressure on Abiy

21 July

Charity's probe made public after Addis Ababa failed to investigate

Médecins Sans Frontières' conclusion that in 2021 Ethiopian troops 'executed' three of the medical charity's employees during the fierce fighting in the northern Tigray province is likely to lead to more international condemnation of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

María Hernández Matas, a Spanish national, and Ethiopians Yohannes Halefom Reda and Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael were in marked humanitarian vehicles and MSF said that the team's travel route had been shared in advance with belligerents.

Its internal review concluded that the killings on 24 June 2021 were 'intentional and targeted'. It also established that a convoy of Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) was present at the time of the incident on the same road where the MSF personnel were killed.

MSF says that it was forced to publish its internal review after Ethiopian authorities refused to complete their own investigation or provide 'any credible answers', stating that it had a 'moral obligation' to 'shed light on a

brutal killing that must not be ignored or buried.' Addis Ababa had 'failed to fulfil its moral obligations to conclude an investigation into the attack'. Abiy's ministers have refused to meet with them or discuss their report, says MSF.

The findings are embarrassing for Abiy's government and underscore the war crimes committed by all sides in the Tigray war. Meanwhile, there are growing concerns that the Pretoria peace agreement of November 2022 that ended the conflict is fraying.

Factionalism in the Tigray People's Liberation Front, whose loyalists fought against the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies in the war, and growing rivalry between Abiy and Eritrean leader Issayas Afewerki have raised fears of a new conflict (AC Vol 66 Nos 6 & 11).

SOUTH AFRICA/G20

Two cheers for multilateralism

21 July

President Cyril Ramaphosa's G20 agenda was boosted by agreeing a consensus communique at Finance Ministers meeting in Durban on 18 July

The text itself is low on substance: its references to the importance of multilateral cooperation, the World Trade Organization and 'rules based' trade are hardly radical. Nor are the commitments to strengthen the G20 Common Framework on debt.

But getting agreement on any text in the absence of the United States, whose Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent boycotted the meeting for a second time, underlining the pariah status which Donald Trump's administration has given to Cyril Ramaphosa's government, must count as a significant success (Dispatches 18/2/25 & AC Vol 66 No 7).

Pretoria's hopes of using its G20 presidency – the first time an African nation has held it – to promote an African agenda by focusing on the high cost of capital and debt servicing, as well as funding for climate change action, has been somewhat derailed by the Trump administration's refusal to engage in the process (AC Vol 66 No 4). Even so, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana

says that progress has been made in the wider G20 group on issues such as debt restructuring for poorer African countries, and infrastructure funding. That was reflected in the Durban communiqué, though references to climate change were not included.

The organisation itself also faces something of an existential crisis. Most of the G20 are facing the potential costs of Trump's tariff war and wider ambivalence towards multilateralism, and its own frequent diplomatic run-ins with the US. But Ramaphosa is due to hand over the G20 presidency to Trump on behalf of the US in November.

MOROCCO/EU

Morocco to get EU cash under migrant control deal

21 July

Rabat is latest country to formalise arrangements with Brussels

European Union and Moroccan officials are working on a 'cash for migrant control' deal that would place border management at the heart of their relationship. At a press conference on 17 July unveiling the EU's Global Europe financing instrument, Dubravka Šuica, the Commissioner for Democracy and Demography, highlighted Morocco as a priority ally (AC Vol 66 No 2).

'We already have partnerships with many of them and are trying to strengthen them all. Currently, we are collaborating with Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan. We are working on deepening our partnership with Morocco and will also begin working with Lebanon,' Šuica said.

On 16 July, Rabat's Foreign Affairs Minister Nasser Bourita met the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja Kallas in Brussels. Though no timeline has been given for concluding an agreement, it is likely to be before the end of this year.

Similar EU migration deals with Egypt, Mauritania and Tunisia are worth over US\$9.2 billion (€8bn – AC Vol 65 No 7). But despite being a major recipient of EU funding for border and migration control, Morocco does not yet have a formal arrangement with Brussels.

Inbox email alerts

Get daily alerts for new articles and a snapshot of the latest issue each fortnight so that you're made aware of which issues we cover.

Subscriber?

Log in to enable or update e-alert preferences from within your subscription account.

Not subscribed?

Join the mailing list by visiting:

www.africa-confidential.com/create-my-account

The European Commission unveiled plans for a seven-year spending plan worth €2 trillion between 2028 and 2034, a hefty increase. That includes €215bn to Global Europe and a plan to double the funding for the Middle East and North Africa region to €42.5bn. Both figures also represent major increases. A group of 30 civil society organisations described the proposal as a ‘forward-looking vision for the EU’s role in the world’.

However, it is not clear how much extra spending will be allocated to migration control and whether the EU will increase development funding.

US/TRADE/AFRICA

Trump targets four countries with new tariff

14 July

Despite US pledges, plans for AGOA revamp are unclear

South Africa, Libya, Algeria and Tunisia were among a group of over 20 countries to be issued with tariff letters from United States President Donald Trump’s administration this week. The first three have been told that they face tariffs of 30% on their exports on 1 August if they fail to offer improved trade terms to US exporters. Tunisia, meanwhile, has been threatened with a 25% rate, less than the 28% originally proposed.

Last week, three months after his so-called ‘Liberation Day tariffs’ announcement, Trump pushed a 9 July deadline to 1 August, during which a 10% levy will remain in place.

Progress on new trade arrangements have been slow and the US President has shown little interest in talks going beyond the duties on goods to tackle services or procurement arrangements. Instead, he has made clear that Washington will impose a minimum 10% tariff on all imports to promote US manufacturing.

Where the new tariff notices sit alongside the prospect of a revamped Africa Growth and Opportunity Act – promised by US officials at a US-Africa business summit in Luanda in June – is unclear. The Trump administration has indicated that AGOA, which currently offers over 30 African countries tariff- and quota-free access to the US market, will not be scrapped outright when it expires in September. But its main provisions are at odds with the tariffs

and the policy motivation behind them (Dispatches 7/4/25).

MOZAMBIQUE

Total’s LNG project moves closer to restart

14 July

Plan to resume operations in July has backing of President Chapo

TotalEnergies’ US\$20 billion liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in northern Mozambique is eyeing a rapid resumption, with the French oil and gas major informing contractors to prepare for recommencing work this month.

In June, the company’s Chief Executive Officer Patrick Pouyanné said that the project in Cabo Delgado Province could resume in the coming months and vowed to produce LNG in Mozambique from 2029. Total has estimated an annual production capacity of 13 million tonnes of LNG. A boost for the project – which was delayed by Islamic insurgent attacks in 2021 after a final investment decision was made in 2019 – came in January when the US Exim bank, the United States’s export lender, approved a \$4.7bn loan (Dispatches 24/3/25 & AC Vol 66 No 1). However, it still needs to find most of the remaining \$15bn in financing.

Resumption has the support of Mozambique President Daniel Chapo who has promised help improve security and is hopeful that Total’s return will encourage other investors in major projects such as ExxonMobil (AC Vol 66 No 2).

KENYA

Electoral commission gets fresh board after two years of inertia

14 July

New chair with links to President Ruto may face battle over voter registration

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) finally has new leadership following more than two years of inertia after a court in Nairobi ruled against a petition challenging the appointment of a new six-person team and chairman.

Though the court did rule that

President William Ruto had unlawfully approved their appointments by doing so before the petition ruling, hours later on 10 July Ruto re-issued the confirmation notice.

A lawyer and former United Nations Development Programme official, Erastus Edung Etheke, has been appointed as IEBC chair (AC Vol 66 No 6). One of the lower profile candidates to apply for the job, Etheke has links to the President via former Turkana Governor Josaphat Nanok, now Ruto’s Deputy Chief of Staff, who he served as County Attorney between 2018 and 2024.

Etheke is joined by Ann Njeri Nderitu, Moses Alutalala Mukhwana, Mary Karen Sorobit, Hassan Noor Hassan, Francis Odhiambo Aduol and Fahima Araphat Abdallah, who have all been appointed as commissioners with six-year terms.

IEBC has been without a chair since Wafula Chebukati’s retirement in 2023. Chebukati played a decisive role in the 2022 elections, overruling a majority of IEBC commissioners to declare Ruto as the winner over Raila Odinga (AC Vol 63 No 17).

The IEBC’s reputation was battered by accusations of partisanship against both Chebukati and the rival pro-Odinga faction who were sacked by Ruto in 2023, and is in poor shape ahead of the next elections in August 2027. Attempts to reach a cross-party consensus on future audits of the IEBC and its composition have been rendered moot by Odinga’s decision to allow his Orange Democratic Movement to be co-opted into Ruto’s government (AC Vol 65 No 7).

Voter registration, in particular, is set to be the hottest topic challenging the IEBC and its public credibility. However, the commission has seen hefty budget cuts since 2022, leaving it without the resources to conduct registration or even to pay its legal bills from court cases that followed the 2022 polls.

Last week, reports circulated on social media claiming that the commission planned to remove over two million ghost voters from the register ahead of 2027. Though these have been dismissed as fake news by Etheke, they will carry weight among Kenyans.

Should the Gen Z protest movement seek to turn its popular support into votes, the registration of millions of young Kenyans will be crucial. Turnout among Kenyans aged 30 or below was the lowest among all demographics in 2022. There is, however, little incentive for the Ruto-Odinga government to fund voter registration that may result in them losing at the polls. ●

POINTERS

Gambia

DEMOCRACY, DEFERRED

■ Gambia has failed again to enact a new constitution after parliament rejected a draft bill on 7 July – a move that clears the way for President **Adama Barrow** to run for a third term in the December 2026 general election.

Barrow is serving his second term, having come to power in 2017 following the chaotic exit of long-time dictator President **Yahya Jammeh** (AC Vol 58 No 3). The draft was blocked at its second reading by 21 lawmakers – mainly from the opposition United Democratic Party, Barrow's former party. The bill failed to pass by just nine votes.

Reform of the 1997 constitution has been deemed essential: it was enacted under Jammeh and amended 52 times to entrench his rule. Efforts to replace it have been ongoing for five years.

A Constitutional Review Commission presented a draft in September 2020, which Barrow's allies later killed in parliament. That version introduced a two-term presidential limit and explicitly counted Barrow's current term – a safeguard against the common manoeuvre where sitting presidents argue their first term doesn't count. President **Edgar Lungu** of **Zambia** used this claim in 2017 (AC Vol 59 No 25).

The latest Gambian draft, a heavily amended version of the 2020 text, was again rejected. Lawmakers opposed clauses weakening checks and balances and scrapping parliamentary oversight of presidential appointments – provisions the government dismissed as 'cumbersome'.

EU/West Africa/migration

BORDERS WITHOUT BORDERS

■ Known primarily for operating patrol vessels in the Mediterranean and off the West Atlantic at key crossing points, the European Union's border control agency Frontex is expanding its surveillance operations across West Africa.

A new report by Statewatch, a Brussels-based analysis service, examines Frontex's operations in **Mali**, **Niger**, **Senegal** and **Mauritania**, concluding that much of its surveillance work predates its formal mandate. Frontex's mandate has become far more interventionist in line with the EU's focus on migration control. Its annual budget for 2024 exceeded €900 million (US\$1.05 billion).

NEWS MAKER: BUHARI'S CONTESTED LEGACY

From the tens of thousands of people who trekked to pay homage to the late military leader turned elected president to the digital warriors who fought over his reputation on social media, few Nigerians were indifferent to **Muhammadu Buhari**, who died at 82 in London on 13 July. That so many people sharply changed their opinion of him, some more than once, reflects the often-fickle political climate in Nigeria as much as Buhari's personal qualities.

The 23rd child of a local chief in Daura, in Nigeria's far north-west, Buhari attended Qur'anic school and helped rear cattle, later joining the military, and quickly rose through the ranks. Cultivating a reputation as ascetic and serious, he was appointed oil minister in the 1975-1979 military regime.

Emerging as head of the junta that seized power from **Shehu Shagari's** civilian government on 31 December 1983, General Buhari and his deputy Brigadier **Tunde Idiagbon** led a publicly tough anti-corruption regime, detaining politicians, local and foreign businessman as they probed corrupt contracts and illicit financial flows. The apogee of acclaim for the Buhari-Idiagbon duopoly was their attempt, aided by Mossad agents from **Israel**, to kidnap senior politician **Umaru Dikko** from exile in London. After that, Nigerians, especially in the south, started to tire of the regime's heavy-handed 'war against indiscipline' and its intrinsic double standards.

They also tried to crack down on the cocaine and heroin smuggling networks in West Africa, executing a group of young Nigerians and Ghanaians convicted by a military tribunal. But senior military officers were deeply involved in the drugs trade by then and played a key role in the palace coup that ousted Buhari and Idiagbon in August 1985.

Detained by the successor regime under Major Gen **Ibrahim Babangida**, Buhari's image as fearless corruption fighter was nurtured by his supporters in the north. His quiet demeanour and modest circumstances helped.

Even his appointment to run the Petroleum Trust Fund under the serially corrupt regime of Gen **Sani Abacha** (1993-1998), hardly dented Buhari's reputed integrity. After Abacha's mysterious death, Buhari declared he had become a born-again democrat and would run for the presidency. Buhari's calculus was based on his formidable support in the northern states – and the power vacuum there after Abacha had ordered the murder of **Shehu Musa Yar'Adua** in jail.

Electoral politics proved for Buhari to be just as treacherous. He told *Africa Confidential* in 2007 that then president, another former military leader, **Olusegun Obasanjo**, had promised him a clear run for the presidency only to renege on it. Losing again in 2011 despite an estimated bloc of 12 million voters in the north, Buhari then re-emerged as head of a broad coalition of dissident governors and ministers, the All Progressives Congress. He defeated the incumbent **Goodluck Jonathan** and the People's Democratic Party in 2015.

Great expectations greeted Buhari's second coming, this time as civilian head of state. Voters across the country were expecting a determined assault on the systemic corruption weighing down the economy and the reassertion of control over the military waging an expensive and counterproductive campaign against jihadist insurgents. But plagued by political infighting and recurring ill health, Buhari failed to deliver on both counts. His command economics policies staved off a sharp devaluation of the naira and the end of fuel subsidies but left a perilous financial legacy for his successor. ●

Alongside €8bn 'cash for migrant control' deals with **Tunisia**, Mauritania and **Egypt**, the European Commission is negotiating – or remains in talks with – several North and West African states over anti-smuggling and border control operations (Dispatches 24/9/24).

In West Africa, Frontex's work centres on capacity building, information exchange and direct involvement in ground-level border surveillance. It has also funded biometric ID systems, surveillance drones, wiretapping infrastructure and phone-tracking technology. Statewatch concludes: 'The agency's activities have received little

legal, political, or journalistic scrutiny, despite posing serious risks to human rights and local sovereignty.'

A particular focus is the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC), a platform of 31 African states through which Frontex coordinates surveillance, risk analysis and operational planning with national authorities (AC Vol 66 No 8). The Commission has pursued status agreements with Mauritania to grant Frontex full executive powers, including the right to carry weapons and immunity from prosecution – proposals resisted by officials in Nouakchott and Dakar.