

AFRICA DIGEST

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Kagame's continued electoral dominance in Rwanda

Rwandan President Paul Kagame's recent win in the country's general election by securing [99% of the vote share](#) has served to reinforce his stronghold and influence over the country. The scale of his victory raises some serious questions about how truly democratic the elections were. Kagame's supporters commend his leadership for steering the country's recovery from the 1994 genocide, which saw an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus killed. They credit him with fostering national unity and spearheading significant economic growth. Kigali, Rwanda's capital, is noted for its cleanliness, and the country boasts the highest proportion of female MPs globally. Kagame has also been praised for dismissing corrupt officials, contributing to Rwanda's reputation as one of Africa's least corrupt countries, according to [Transparency International](#).

However, critics argue that Rwanda's economic success is exaggerated and that the statistics are manipulated to maintain Kagame's image. Human rights groups and opposition figures [accuse](#) Kagame of authoritarian practices, including harassment, imprisonment, and assassinations of political opponents. Prominent opposition leaders like Victoire Ingabire, Bernard Ntaganda and Diane Rwigara were either barred from running for the elections or were disqualified. Despite these concerns, Kagame's administration continues to maintain strong ties with Western countries. The UK, for example, entered a [£240 million agreement with Rwanda to relocate asylum seekers](#), a deal recently rescinded by British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer.

Rwanda remains a key ally for Western nations, even as they urge Kigali to withdraw its alleged support, as indicated in a recent report by the [UN](#), for the M23 rebel group operating in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rwanda has not denied the allegation, instead opting to place the blame on DRC's leaders' for lacking the political will to resolve the ongoing crisis. Critics also claim that foreign aid to Rwanda is partly used to fund conflicts in neighbouring countries. Security experts are concerned about Rwanda's future stability, especially in a post-Kagame era. A 2015 constitutional change allows Kagame to run for a fourth and fifth term, potentially extending his rule until 2034. However, the erosion of democratic institutions under his leadership raises concerns about potential instability once Kagame eventually leaves office. Kagame's administration is a paradox: it is praised for economic progress and stability but criticised for suppressing political freedom and dissent. As Kagame begins his new term, Rwanda's future remains uncertain, defined by the tension between economic development and political repression.

Türkiye's growing appetite for conflict resolution in Africa

On July 1, 2024, Türkiye unveiled its latest diplomatic initiative in the continent under which Ankara aimed to mediate the ongoing conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia concerning Ethiopia's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland for access to the Red Sea. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's announcement underscores Türkiye's growing appetite to play a consequential role in conflict resolution across Africa.

The agreement, which seeks to grant Ethiopia access to the Red Sea in exchange for recognising Somaliland as an independent nation, has stirred considerable diplomatic unrest across the Horn of Africa region. Ethiopia, a landlocked country since Eritrea's secession in 1993, has long depended on the port in Djibouti for its maritime trade. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has emphasised the strategic necessity of direct sea access for furthering Ethiopia's economic development.

Somalia, which views Somaliland as an integral part of its territory, has vehemently opposed the agreement. The Somali government [perceives the agreement as a breach](#) of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, accusing Ethiopia of attempting to annex Somali territory—an allegation Addis Ababa has denied. The African Union, along with regional neighbours and international powers, has called for the preservation of Somalia's territorial integrity and urged both nations to resolve their differences through dialogue. Previous diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the situation have largely failed to produce lasting solutions.

In this context, Türkiye's mediation represents a strategic intervention aimed at breaking the deadlock. Hosting talks in Ankara, [Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan](#) brought his Ethiopian and Somali counterparts together to explore potential resolutions within a framework of mutual agreement. This exercise marks a notable step in Türkiye's ongoing efforts to foster peace and diplomacy in the region. The upcoming second round of talks, scheduled for 2 September 2024, in Ankara, is anticipated to be crucial for advancing toward a resolution. Despite the

complexities, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan remains optimistic about achieving a positive outcome, reaffirming Türkiye's role as a committed and influential global actor in peacebuilding efforts.

Could Senegal mediate with the Alliance of Sahelian States?

The 65th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was held on 7 July 2024 in Abuja, Nigeria during which Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu was re-elected as the Chairman of ECOWAS. The meeting also decided to appoint newly elected Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye as a mediator for the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in collaboration with Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé. The Senegalese government and AES states share a common perspective on Pan-Africanism and sovereignty, which could possibly facilitate progress in the mediation process. Additionally, significant concerns exist over the Senegalese-controlled Port of Dakar in Mali. Losing control of this vital port could have a severe impact on Senegal's balance of trade.

The announcement by AES members - Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso – to leave ECOWAS is a significant development which impacts the regional geopolitics of West Africa. These countries argue that ECOWAS has deviated from its founding principles and has failed to address the escalating Islamist insurgency which has consequently led to greater political instability. On 6 July 2024, the trio finalised the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a confederate mutual a defense pact. These countries' exit marks a severe setback for ECOWAS, as it loses

three key members, disrupting [forty-nine years](#) of regional development and cooperation.

One of the primary catalysts for this rupture was ECOWAS' decision to launch a military intervention in Niger to restore democracy following a coup that ousted its democratically elected government. Sanctions were imposed on the Military Junta of Mali and Burkina Faso, further straining relations. France, the erstwhile colonial power, supported ECOWAS' actions, which the military juntas in the Sahel perceived as external interference in regional matters of West African states.

ECOWAS plays a crucial role in the region by facilitating the free movement of people and goods among West African states, a notable achievement compared to other parts of Africa. However, the forthcoming six months are crucial for mediation efforts between AES and ECOWAS, since exiting the organisation takes effect only after twelve months of official notification unless it is withdrawn, offering a narrow scope for negotiations. The exit of these Sahelian countries threatens to reduce economic and cross-border movement of goods and services in the region. Tensions between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire; Mali and Senegal; and Niger and Nigeria if unresolved, could further reduce intra-regional economic trade and exacerbate instability.

ECOWAS may reconsider its stringent policies against military regimes and possibly extend transition timelines to foster a more inclusive dialogue. Reforms within ECOWAS could serve as a gesture to encourage cooperation. Some member states have already resisted reforms under the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which aims to prevent

unconstitutional extension of Presidential term-limits. The current situation in the Sahel is complicated and requires regional leaders and stakeholders to deftly navigate the unfolding situation through diplomatic means.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer abandons controversial Rwanda Deportation Plan

Keir Starmer, leading the centre-left Labour Party, assumed office on 5 Jul 2024 after achieving a historic parliamentary majority. On his first day in office, he decided to scrap the [Rwanda deportation scheme](#), a project initiated by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson in April 2022, as part of a broader strategy to manage the increasing number of people reaching the UK without authorisation. The plan intended to deter dangerous journeys across the English Channel by relocating asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Starmer criticised the scheme for being both ineffective and costly, asserting it failed to reduce irregular migration. The surge in the number of refugees underscores the challenges the UK faces in controlling irregular migration. The £370 million costing, five-year Rwanda plan aimed to send asylum seekers to Rwanda for processing. However, Starmer noted it would affect only 1 percent of asylum seekers, and most migrants would remain in the UK in government-funded accommodations for extended periods.

The Rwanda plan faced criticism for potentially violating international laws, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Critics argued it contravened the principle of non-refoulement, prohibiting the return of refugees to countries they might face

persecution. The Supreme Court noted Rwanda's poor human rights record, suggesting potential violations of the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (United Nations Convention Against Torture). Concerns were raised about potential violation of Article 13 (protection against arbitrary expulsion) of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Since the decision to do away with the scheme, Starmer has outlined his administration's approach to managing irregular migration, focusing on dismantling criminal networks responsible for smuggling of people. He proposed to employ specialist investigators and use counter-terrorism tactics to target these gangs. Starmer's strategy aims to address the root causes of irregular migration rather than relying on offshore processing schemes. However, the [Supreme Court ruled](#) that Rwanda was not a safe country for asylum seekers due to concerns about its asylum processing system and human rights record.

In response to the Supreme Court's ruling, the Conservative government negotiated a new treaty with Rwanda and passed the [Safety of Rwanda \(Asylum and Immigration\) Act, 2024](#). The treaty includes additional safeguards and expands the agreement to allow for broader categories of individuals to be relocated. Despite these efforts, legal and political challenges continue to persist which has subsequently led to significant public and political opposition.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's decision to scrap the Rwanda deportation plan represents a major policy shift in the UK's approach to managing irregular migration. By focusing on targeting criminal networks

and enhancing enforcement measures, Starmer aims to address the root causes of the issue. The move has been welcomed by rights groups and many in the public, who had long criticised the Rwanda plan for its legal, ethical, and financial shortcomings.

Iran and Sudan re-establish diplomatic ties

On 21 July 2024, Iran and Sudan re-established their diplomatic ties after an eight-year rupture in bilateral relations. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Sudan's de-facto ruler, received Iranian Ambassador Hassan Shah Hosseini and appointed Abdelaziz Hassan Saleh as Khartoum's ambassador to Tehran. Efforts to resume diplomatic ties between the two nations began in October 2023, as the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)-backed government is seeking allies for its ongoing war against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The SAF's decision to re-establish relations was primarily driven by its desire to obtain military assistance from Iran. This comes at a crucial time when the Sudanese army has experienced significant defeats against the RSF on various strategic fronts, such as in Nyala and Wad Madani, which are the second and third largest cities in Sudan after Khartoum.

In 2016, the Sudanese government severed its ties with Iran in support of Saudi Arabia after the attack launched in its embassy in Tehran, following the killing of a Shia cleric by Saudi authorities. In 2023, Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations with Iran whose negotiations were facilitated by China. Since then, Iran has looked to strengthen its relations with its neighbouring Arab countries.

Sudanese foreign minister Ali Al Sadiq made a diplomatic visit to Tehran in

February 2023, where he met the late Iran President Ebrahim Raisi and Iran's Foreign Affairs President Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. Iran declared unwavering support for the Sudanese government and the protection of its territorial integrity. From December 2023 until January 2024, Iran has provided the Sudanese military government and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) with [Mohajer-6](#) midrange reconnaissance and combat drones. Tehran sees this as an opportunity to expand its influence on the African subcontinent and also as an income for Iran's economy. Sudan procuring weaponry from the Iranian government might potentially strain its relationship with the United States, as the latter is advocating for negotiations between the two rival factions, and is against [supporting](#) any kind of external involvement especially from Iran. The diplomatic relations with Iran can also be seen as a result of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) providing support to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and having a complex crisis with Sudan's Armed Forces (SAF). Iran's involvement in Sudan can be viewed as a stepping stone for strengthening ties between the Arabian Peninsula and the African subcontinent.

African National Congress expels former President Jacob Zuma amid political turmoil

On 29 July 2024, the African National Congress (ANC) announced the expulsion of former President Jacob Zuma from the party. This decision comes after Zuma formed a rival political organisation and allegedly promoted rhetoric deemed dangerous by the ANC. Fikile Mbalula, the ANC's Secretary General, stated that Zuma's platform appeals to extremist instincts and risks [social unrest](#).

Jacob Zuma, a renowned anti-apartheid activist and former ANC president, has been at odds with the party since he was forced to resign in 2018 amid corruption scandals. His new party, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) campaigned on a populist platform focused on seizing white-owned land and overhauling South Africa's constitution. Notably, MK's significant performance in the national election contributed to the ANC's failure to secure an absolute majority for the first time since the end of apartheid. In response to these developments, Zuma's expulsion follows a national disciplinary committee finding him guilty of collaborating with an opposing political party, thereby damaging the ANC's integrity. Zuma has 21 days to appeal the decision, and MK criticised the process, calling it a "kangaroo court."

Furthermore, Zuma's political career has been marked by scandal, with his tenure as president characterised by accusations of corruption and state capture. Despite his contentious history, Zuma maintains a fervent following within the ANC, particularly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. His supporters believe the current government under President Cyril Ramaphosa has failed to address the economic struggles of Black South Africans.

Consequently, Zuma's return to politics is seen by many as an effort to undermine Ramaphosa, whom he accuses of corruption. It is possible that Zuma's expulsion might strengthen Ramaphosa's position, allowing him to appear more decisive and in control. Overall, Zuma's expulsion highlights the ongoing tensions within the ANC as it navigates internal conflicts and declining electoral support.