

AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

June 2024



- South Africa forms a Government of National Unity (GNU)
- Kenya withdraws its controversial Financial Bill amid protests
- Senegalese President Bassirou Faye's visit to France
- Environmental activists protest Chinese financing of East African Crude Oil Pipeline
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South Africa forms a Government of National Unity (GNU)

On 29 May 2024, South Africa held its seventh General Elections in which support for the ruling African National Congress (ANC) declined significantly. Despite remaining the largest party, the ANC lost its parliamentary majority that it held since the inaugural post-apartheid elections in 1994. The Democratic Alliance (DA), a centrist party, came in second place with a slight increase in the number of seats won. The uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), a left-wing populist party founded six months prior to the elections and led by former President Jacob Zuma, came in third place. On 22 June 2024, the ANC, the DA, and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Patriotic Alliance (PA), [agreed to form](#) a national unity government, with Cyril Ramaphosa being re-elected as the President of South Africa. While the results of the election were historic, they did not represent any sudden rupture. Disillusionment with the ruling ANC has been growing for decades due to perceptions of endemic corruption, patronage, and diversion of state resources. In 2023, South Africa's unemployment rates reached 33 percent contributing to alarming crime rates, in addition to over 50 percent of youth unemployment. The country has also been gripped by debilitating power outages due to systemic graft and mismanagement at the power utility Eskom.

Governments of national unity built on power-sharing arrangements are common in Africa. However, overcoming the sharp divisions between elites is a difficult task. President Ramaphosa insists that fidelity to the rule of law and preservation of the Constitution are immutable requirements for a coalition government to work. Political actors and elites need to embrace

politics of collaboration built on trust and move away from any form of antagonistic posturing. Leaders need to prioritise consensus building over confrontation and exercise political maturity by avoiding divisive political rhetoric and language. What the South African election demonstrated is that navigating this pivotal moment and transition will require leaders and citizens to develop popular ownership and buy-in. This is indeed a milestone in South Africa's democratic journey but one that must strengthen the accountability of state institutions which provides necessary checks and balances.

Kenya withdraws its controversial Financial Bill amid protests

The Kenyan government in its proposed new [Financial Bill 2024](#) aimed to raise \$2.7 billion in additional taxes to reduce the budget deficit and state borrowing. For a long time, Kenya has been grappling with acute liquidity crisis and uncertainty over its ability to access capital from the financial markets. The IMF urged the Kenyan government to meet revenue targets in order to access more funding. This led to severe youth-led protests who demanded the government to abandon the planned tax hikes which included new levies on basic commodities like bread, vegetable oil, and sugar. Additionally, a motor vehicle circulation tax – pegged at 2.5 percent of the value of a car to be paid annually was also proposed along with increasing existing taxes on financial transactions. President Ruto's government tried to defend the tax measures as being necessary to fund development programmes and reduce public debt which currently amounts to 11.1 trillion Kenyan Shillings (\$82 billion) of which a lot of it is owed to China. Due to the protests, President Ruto agreed to scrap some of the new levies but that was considered

insufficient by the citizens. On 25 June, a nationwide protest was held and the following day, protestors breached the parliament barricade and entered the compound during which a fierce altercation with the police ensued. Reportedly, at least 23 people had been killed due to police violence during the protests. This eventually forced President Ruto to “concede” and [not sign](#) the 2024 Finance Bill.

Although it is important to understand the critical role taxes play in national development and enhancing public services, the proposed measures in this bill were viewed as regressive by Kenyan citizens. The proposed measures in the bill disproportionately impacted citizens already struggling with high cost of living and overlooked crucial issues like corruption, the increasing wage bill, and unsustainable debt service. At the core of the protests lied the belief that those with the greatest ability to pay taxes pay their fair share.

Senegalese President Bassirou Faye’s visit to France

On 20 June 2024, the newly elected Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye travelled to France on his maiden official visit outside of Africa. He took part in the [Global Forum for Vaccine Sovereignty and Innovation](#), which aims to give African nations more sovereignty to address the many health crisis it faces. The forum had two primary objectives – To launch the African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator (AVMA). Based on the lessons learned from the Covid pandemic, the mechanism represents an important step towards giving African countries health sovereignty. It aims to achieve this by working closely with the African Union to meet its goal of manufacturing at least 60

percent of the vaccine doses needed by Africa on the African continent by 2040. The second objective is to mark the start of GAVI alliances’ replenishment campaign for the period of 2026-2030. This initiative aims to secure financial commitments from donor governments, private sector, foundations, and other stakeholders to fund its vaccination program for a period of five years. The geopolitical context of the visit is also interesting given the difficulties and pushback France has faced in the Sahel region in recent years. France’s colonial past and its tactics of ‘military first’ interventions have drawn the ire of local population and leaders which has led to a significant downsizing of French military presence in the region. Only Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire remain France’s important partner in the region. Before visiting Paris, President Faye made trips to not just its neighbours but also to Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso, seemingly to [foster reconciliation](#) between the ECOWAS and its three members that formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES - Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger). Senegal could play a key role in advocating for increased counterterrorism support from ECOWAS for AES states and diplomatically ensure that its leaders are open to compromise in the interest of upholding regional peace and security.

Environmental activists protest Chinese financing of East African Crude Oil Pipeline

Climate change campaigners protested at Chinese embassies and financial institutions in 10 countries across Africa and Europe to urge China to withdraw its financial support for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). French energy giant TotalEnergies is looking to construct the Tilenga drilling project in Uganda and the 1,443km EACOP to transport its output to

the Tanzanian coast. Despite severe opposition from environmentalists, drilling began in mid-2023 and the production is slated for 2025. TotalEnergies, which is working with the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) is seeking to borrow \$3 billion to get the pipeline project off the ground. After various banks and insurance companies have ruled out support for the project, Chinese state-owned credit insurance company Sinosure and China EXIM Bank are considering financing the project. Local civil society groups and community-based organisations in Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Nigeria, and Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrated peacefully against the harmful consequences of the project. The development of oilfields and pipelines threaten pristine ecosystems, biodiversity hotspots, water resources and community land. Although the activists tried to deliver petitions signed by thousands of project-affected individuals, the Chinese embassies refused to accept the materials in most of the countries and several protestors were even arrested. Under the banner of the '[StopEACOP campaign](#)' the demands are clear – China must rule out support for the EACOP project. Rather than propping up any form of neo-colonial extraction, African partners must follow a developmental path underpinned by investment into decentralised and socially owned renewable energy systems for Africa.

Kenyan President William Ruto's visit to the USA

In late May, Kenyan President William Ruto visited the United States which was the first state visit by an African leader in sixteen years. The visit had implications for

not only US-Kenya bilateral relationship but also for US-Africa relations more broadly. Despite a long history of diplomatic, security, and development partnerships, the US is playing catch up in its engagement with African nations with the emergence of entrants like China, India, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia. Kenya is one of Americas leading strategic partner as reflected in President Biden designating Kenya as a '[Major Non-NATO Ally](#)' in sub-Saharan Africa during the visit. Both the countries also discussed options for the deployment of a multilateral mission in Somalia following the withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia by year-end. Kenya also agreed to deploy 1000 paramilitary police officers to help calm ongoing gang-fuelled mayhem in Haiti. For President Ruto and Kenya, the visit was critical for more economic than geopolitical reasons as the country continues to struggle with debt and balance of payment problems. They agreed to cooperate in building semi-conductors to diversify supply sources and vowed to accelerate negotiations for their Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership (STIP) by the end of the year. Both leaders launched the [Nairobi-Washington vision](#), which called for greater debt relief for developing countries. President Ruto's visits to the US offered a chance to reinforce Kenya's status as a key strategic interlocuter in a region where Ethiopia's internal struggles and Rwanda's entanglement in the Democratic Republic of Congo has created a leadership vacuum. In a way, the visit was a win-win since Ruto required Western embrace for economic and political reasons, while America needed a head of state who can champion its ideals.