



FRONTLINE AFRICA
— ADVISORY —



**AFRICA RISK
REPORT
MAY
2026**

Executive Summary

- May's developments underscored Africa's ongoing navigation of "managed volatility," with incremental tactical adjustments layered atop persistent structural fragilities. While April's fragile US–Iran ceasefire continued to deliver modest energy–price relief, the month was defined by three interlocking dynamics: ceremonial continental governance rituals, fragile junta survival in the Sahel, and escalating intra–African economic friction.
- The Pan–African Parliament's orderly leadership transition, the Africa Forward summit's asymmetrical partnership theatre, Zimbabwe's selective farm restitutions, nostalgic political appeals in Nigeria, and the DRC President's third term signalling collectively illustrate "managed continuity", carefully calibrated moves designed to project stability and court investors without ceding meaningful accountability or power.
- In the security domain, Mali's foiled multi–city assaults exposed the junta's dependence on Russian paramilitary support and the limits of external patronage in addressing root causes of Sahelian instability.
- Economically, renewed anti–immigrant protests in South Africa provoked sharp retaliatory rhetoric from Nigeria and other capitals, threatening cross–border business networks and exposing the fragility of AfCFTA aspirations when domestic socio–political pressures collide with migration realities.
- The net effect is a continent where short–term de–risking windows coexist with rising intra–regional risk and unresolved governance deficits.
- For the private sector, May sharpened the dual reality first flagged in April: tactical opportunities remain available for agile operators.
- Africa is not sliding into outright crisis, nor is it breaking toward sustained stability, it is refining the mechanics of managed volatility under mounting internal and external stress.

Continental Governance & Reforms: Institutional Rituals, Pragmatic Reversals, and the Shadow of Managed Continuity

- May's governance developments captured Africa's familiar choreography of symbolic renewal, tactical pragmatism, and creeping constitutional strain.



Pan–African Parliament: Leadership Refresh or Ceremonial Rotation?

- The Pan–African Parliament (PAP) concluded its Extraordinary Session in Midrand (28–30 April 2026) with the election of a new Bureau for the Seventh Legislature, adhering strictly to the AU's regional rotation principle.
- Hon. Fateh Boutbig (Algeria) took the Presidency, supported by First Vice–President Dr. Ashebir Woldegiorgis Gayo (Ethiopia), Second Vice–President Hon. Zanetor Agyeman–Rawlings (Ghana, aged 47–48), Third Vice–President Hon. Djidda Mamar Mahamat (Chad), and Fourth Vice–President Hon. Arlete da Visitacao (Angola).
- The inclusion of a younger, technocratic figure such as Dr. Agyeman–Rawlings offers a superficial nod to generational change, yet the slate remains dominated by established political networks rather than disruptive reformers.
- As one of the AU's principal organs, the PAP was designed to provide a continental legislative voice. In practice, however, it continues to function primarily as a consultative and symbolic forum with minimal enforcement capacity, limited fiscal autonomy, and negligible influence over executive decision–making within the African Union system. The AU as a whole continues to be found wanting where external geopolitical interests dominate, whether in the Sahel, Sudan, or eastern DRC, or growing economic nationalism across regions.
- In none of these arenas has the PAP emerged as a decisive continental actor. The institution's silence or marginality during high–intensity geopolitical crises reinforces the perception that Africa's supranational governance architecture remains heavily executive–driven, with real power concentrated in heads of state, regional security establishments, and external geopolitical actors rather than parliamentary institutions.
- No landmark resolutions emerged from the session; proceedings focused on procedural matters and institutional strengthening. The election therefore poses the perennial question: does Africa possess a genuinely effective continental deliberative body, or merely a rotating platform that projects activity without authority?
- The PAP transition projects institutional continuity, diplomatic order, and procedural legitimacy, all valuable in a fragmented geopolitical environment. However, it does little to alter the underlying governance equation in which continental institutions remain too weak to meaningfully constrain authoritarian drift, enforce democratic standards, or coordinate decisive responses to transnational crises.
- The result is not institutional collapse, but institutional theatre with limited strategic weight.
- This does not render the PAP irrelevant. Symbolic institutions matter in norm–building, elite networking, and long–term continental identity formation. Over time, such forums can accumulate influence incrementally. However, the gap between the PAP's aspirational mandate and its actual operational leverage remains profound.

- The May Bureau election therefore encapsulates Africa’s wider political condition: calibrated renewal without redistribution of power, reform rhetoric without structural transformation, and procedural legitimacy operating within increasingly constrained democratic substance.
- For investors, this reinforces the April pattern, continental governance advances remain technocratic and incremental, insufficient to offset country-level authoritarian consolidation.

Africa Forward Summit: Asymmetrical “Partnership” or Strategic Re-engagement?

- The Africa Forward Summit (formally known as the Africa-France Summit) in Nairobi, co-hosted by Presidents Ruto and Macron, was framed as a pivot toward “equal-footing” collaboration in clean energy, digital infrastructure, AI, and education.
- Announcements included roughly €23 billion in private investment pledges and commitments to create 250,000 jobs.
- Yet the optics, African heads of state convening at the invitation of a single European power, revived longstanding critiques of asymmetrical diplomacy. France, seeking to rebuild influence after Sahel setbacks, offered de-risking instruments (including first-loss guarantees).
- The summit’s real value lies less in grand rhetoric and more in its pragmatic signalling: former metropole relationships remain functional channels for capital when purely continental platforms stall.
- For the private sector, this creates differentiated opportunity, markets aligned with these co-investment frameworks may see accelerated project financing, but it also highlights continued external dependence rather than autonomous continental agency.



Zimbabwe: Selective Farm Restitutions as Western Re-engagement Tactics

- In a carefully calibrated announcement, Zimbabwe revealed plans to return 67 European-owned farms (nationals of Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) seized during the early-2000s land reform programme and protected under bilateral investment treaties.
- The government explicitly linked the move to honouring international obligations and unlocking debt relief.
- President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s administration has repeatedly positioned itself as attempting to reverse elements of the Mugabe-era land policies, most notably through the 2020 Global Compensation Deed committing \$3.5 billion to dispossessed commercial farmers, initial compensation payments.
- These steps are framed by Harare as pragmatic investor wooing. Yet the pattern is unmistakably tactical: the restitutions target only unoccupied, treaty-protected properties and form part of a broader push to mend fences with Western capitals and multilateral lenders after decades of sanctions and isolation.
- Far from a comprehensive reversal of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, which the government continues to insist remains irreversible, the initiative represents selective concessions designed to signal goodwill and secure financing.
- In the wider African context of land reform legacies, Zimbabwe’s latest gesture underscores a recognition that credible property-rights signals can unlock capital. For the private sector, particularly in agribusiness and value chains, it offers a narrow, conditional de-risking window.
- However, the move does little to address deeper governance deficits or restore broad-based investor confidence. Execution risks remain high, and the selective nature of the restitutions reinforces the perception of policy driven by short-term diplomatic expediency rather than enduring rule-of-law commitments.

Nigeria: Nostalgia for Goodluck Jonathan Amid Continental Leadership Contest

- Public and youth-led calls for former President Goodluck Jonathan to contest the 2027 election intensified in May, positioning him as a stabilising figure amid economic strain and perceived leadership fatigue.
- These nostalgic appeals surface at a pivotal moment: Nigeria is actively competing with South Africa and Egypt for continental economic and diplomatic primacy. While reflective of genuine citizen disillusionment, such manoeuvring risks exacerbating elite fragmentation and pre-electoral policy volatility, dynamics that historically dampen investor sentiment in Africa’s largest economy.



- The episode underscores a deeper tension: when current trajectories falter, people tend to be nostalgic and often look backward for reassurance rather than forward to structural reform.
- For businesses, this signals heightened political-risk monitoring requirements ahead of the 2027 polls.



DRC: Third-Term Signalling Heightens Constitutional Risk

- President Félix Tshisekedi has indicated openness to a third term beyond 2028, framing any extension as subject to popular consultation via referendum.
- Opposition voices promptly labelled the move a constitutional breach in the making. In a country already contending with major rebel offensives, this development fits the continental pattern of “managed power”, formal democratic language deployed to mask elite entrenchment and extend incumbency.
- Tshisekedi’s potential move adds measurable sovereign risk to an already volatile operating environment, particularly for investors in mining and infrastructure where political stability is paramount.

Peace and Security: Foiled Coups and Enduring Sahelian Instability

- May’s security developments reinforced the pattern of selective effectiveness flagged in April: African-led mechanisms retain marginal traction in lower-intensity theatres, but high-stakes Sahelian conflicts remain dominated by external actors and chronic insurgent resilience. The most prominent event was the coordinated multi-city assaults in Mali, which the junta and its Russian backers framed as a foiled coup attempt.

Mali: Foiled Coup Attempt Exposes Junta Fragility and Russian Lifeline

- On 25–26 April 2026, jihadist fighters from Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM, Al-Qaeda affiliated) and Tuareg separatists from the Azawad Liberation Front launched sophisticated, near-simultaneous attacks across at least five locations, including Bamako’s outskirts, Kidal, Gao, Mopti, and Sévaré. The scale and coordination, targeting military positions, the defence minister’s convoy, and symbolic state infrastructure, prompted the Malian junta and Russia’s Africa Corps to declare the operation a thwarted coup d’état explicitly aimed at overthrowing the military regime and dismantling the post-2020/2021 coup order.
- Junta leader Assimi Goïta made his first public appearance days later, meeting the Russian ambassador in a carefully staged display of continuity. Russian Defence Ministry statements credited the Africa Corps with inflicting decisive losses and preventing the seizure of key sites, including the presidential palace.
- While the junta survived, the episode laid bare persistent vulnerabilities: intelligence failures, stretched security forces, and an over-reliance on foreign mercenaries whose presence has not translated into sustainable territorial control or reduced civilian exposure to violence.
- These dynamics fit the broader Sahelian trend observed in April, entrenched military rule in Burkina Faso and Mali, coupled with ideological rejection of democratic transitions, has not delivered the security dividend once promised. Instead, it has deepened external dependencies and invited hybrid threats that blend insurgency with political subversion.
- For the private sector, particularly in extractives, logistics, and humanitarian supply chains, the message is unambiguous: operational risk in the Sahel remains elevated, with sudden escalations capable of triggering force majeure, insurance spikes, and project delays.
- The AU Peace and Security Council’s limited visibility in these high-geopolitical-intensity zones continues to underscore the continental body’s constrained bandwidth.



Continental Economy and Trade

- While April’s SADC technical progress offered cautious grounds for optimism on non-tariff barriers, May exposed the fragility of intra-African economic cohesion when domestic socio-political pressures collide with migration realities. Renewed anti-illegal tensions in South Africa triggered sharp retaliatory rhetoric from Nigeria and other capitals, threatening the very cross-border business networks that regional integration is meant to strengthen.
- Simultaneously, the US-Iran ceasefire, hailed last month as a temporary stabiliser, showed signs of strain, reminding import-dependent economies that external energy relief remains provisional.



South African Businesses in the Crosshairs: Migration Pressures and Retaliatory Calls

- A fresh wave of anti-illegal immigrants protests in South Africa, spearheaded by groups such as March and March and Operation Dudula, swept through Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, and other centres in late April and early May.
- Demonstrators, citing record unemployment and rise in crime as a result of illegal immigration and as a result were demanding decisive action against undocumented immigrants.
- The backlash from Abuja was swift and escalatory. Nigerian lawmakers and senators called for the revocation of operating licences for major South African firms (MTN, DSTV, Shoprite, and others), suspension of diplomatic ties, trade agreements, and aviation links, and broader economic punishment.
- Similar sentiments echoed in other law makers in other legislatures in other parts of the continent, framing South Africa's response to irregular immigration as collective punishment of African nationals.
- The Republic of Ghana has also formally petitioned the African Union (AU) to place a debate on the agenda for the AU Mid-Year Coordination Meeting, scheduled for June 2026.
- The divergent responses from South African authorities, including voices associated with Thabo Mbeki, expose a deeper strategic incoherence in South Africa's migration governance and continental diplomacy. While some leaders emphasised pan-African solidarity, constitutional obligations, and the structural causes of migration across Africa, others increasingly acknowledged growing domestic frustrations linked to unemployment, crime, service-delivery pressures, and irregular migration. This produced a fragmented state narrative that simultaneously condemned xenophobia, defended continental integration, and signalled tougher immigration enforcement without a coherent policy framework.
- Critically, the episode revealed the limits of South Africa's post-apartheid pan-African vision under conditions of economic stagnation and declining state capacity. The ideals associated with the African Renaissance project championed during the Mbeki era were never fully institutionalised at grassroots socio-economic level and remained largely elite-driven diplomatic constructs. As domestic pressures intensified, many communities began to view continental openness as economically destabilising, while activist movements such as Operation Dudula capitalised on perceptions that political elites were unwilling to confront migration realities directly.
- Externally, the inconsistent messaging weakened South Africa's diplomatic position and amplified retaliatory rhetoric from countries such as Nigeria, exposing South African firms to reputational and regulatory risk across the continent. At the same time, much of the continental backlash avoided confronting the deeper governance and economic failures in origin countries that drive migration flows into South Africa. The broader implication is that Africa's integration project remains politically fragile: economic integration has advanced faster at elite and corporate levels than in public legitimacy, leaving AfCFTA ambitions vulnerable to sudden politicisation, bilateral tensions, and domestic socio-economic backlash.
- South African businesses operating continent-wide suddenly faced heightened reputational and regulatory risk, precisely the opposite of the trade-facilitation momentum SADC has sought to build.
- Yet the episode also illuminates a deeper, uncomfortable continental reality that few leaders have confronted squarely: the surge of migrants into South Africa is not merely the product of local policy failures but a symptom of governance and economic dysfunction across origin countries.
- South Africa, as the continent's most industrialised economy and a magnet for labour mobility, is absorbing the downstream consequences of widespread institutional erosion elsewhere and calls to "punish" South Africa economically sidestep this structural mismatch and risk undermining the very AfCFTA logic of integrated value chains.
- For the private sector, the takeaway is sobering, intra-African commerce remains vulnerable to sudden politicisation, supply-chain disruptions, and tit-for-tat restrictions that erode investor confidence in regional markets.

Continental Trade: Lingering Volatility from the Fragile US-Iran Ceasefire

- The US-Iran ceasefire announced in early April delivered the anticipated short-term dividend, reopened sea lanes, eased global oil prices, and modest inflation relief for fuel-importing African economies.
- By May, however, the truce appeared increasingly precarious. President Trump described it as "on life support," with sporadic incidents and stalled negotiations keeping the Strait of Hormuz under tension. Oil prices exhibited renewed volatility, underscoring Africa's structural exposure to external energy shocks.
- For net importers, from South Africa's manufacturing base to smaller economies, the reprieve is proving tactical rather than transformative. Higher transport and production costs continue to feed into food inflation and fiscal strain, while limited refining capacity leaves the continent price-takers in global markets. The episode reinforces April's warning: without accelerated diversification into renewables, strategic reserves, and alternative supply routes, tactical external windows deliver only breathing room, not resilience.



Africa Risk Outlook – May 2026

| Risk Area | Description | Probability | Impact | Key Sectors Exposed | Strategic Implication |
|---|---|-------------|-------------|---|--|
| Continental Governance Weakness | Symbolic institutional transitions at continental level continue to mask weak enforcement capacity, executive dominance, and declining democratic accountability. | High | Medium-High | Public policy, infrastructure, multilateral finance | Continental institutions remain limited in crisis prevention and regulatory harmonisation. |
| Constitutional Entrenchment Risk | Third-term signalling and elite power consolidation in states such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo increase sovereign and political instability risks. | High | High | Mining, infrastructure, banking | Heightened policy uncertainty and elevated sovereign-risk premiums. |
| Sahel Security Escalation | Persistent insurgency, hybrid warfare, and reliance on foreign paramilitary actors continue to destabilise the Sahel despite junta consolidation. | High | High | Extractives, logistics, humanitarian operations | Increased force majeure risk, insurance costs, and operational disruption. |
| External Dependency Exposure | Reliance on external powers for security, finance, and investment continues to constrain autonomous continental resilience. | Medium-High | High | Energy, infrastructure, development finance | Africa remains vulnerable to geopolitical shocks and shifting external priorities. |

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| <p>Intra-African Political Retaliation</p> | <p>Migration tensions and xenophobia risk triggering retaliatory diplomatic and economic measures between African states.</p> | <p>High</p> | <p>High</p> | <p>Retail, telecoms, aviation, consumer goods</p> | <p>Cross-border businesses face reputational, regulatory, and licensing risks.</p> |
| <p>AfCFTA Fragility</p> | <p>Domestic political pressures increasingly threaten trade integration momentum and regional economic coordination.</p> | <p>Medium-High</p> | <p>High</p> | <p>Manufacturing, logistics, FMCG, trade corridors</p> | <p>Sudden politicisation may disrupt supply chains and weaken investor confidence.</p> |
| <p>Energy Price Volatility</p> | <p>The fragile US-Iran ceasefire leaves African importers exposed to renewed oil-price shocks and inflationary pressures.</p> | <p>High</p> | <p>Medium-High</p> | <p>Manufacturing, transport, agriculture</p> | <p>Tactical relief persists, but structural energy vulnerability remains unresolved.</p> |
| <p>Investor Confidence Erosion</p> | <p>Tactical reforms and investor-facing gestures continue to coexist with weak execution and governance inconsistency.</p> | <p>Medium-High</p> | <p>Medium-High</p> | <p>Agribusiness, financial services, FDI-dependent sectors</p> | <p>Short-term openings remain available, but long-term confidence remains constrained.</p> |
| <p>Social Cohesion & Urban Pressure</p> | <p>Rising unemployment, migration stress, and service-delivery failures increase the likelihood of urban unrest and populist mobilisation.</p> | <p>High</p> | <p>Medium-High</p> | <p>Retail, municipalities, transport</p> | <p>Governments may increasingly securitise domestic socio-economic pressures.</p> |
| <p>Policy Incoherence Risk</p> | <p>Divergent messaging from political elites and institutions weakens strategic clarity and crisis management credibility.</p> | <p>Medium-High</p> | <p>Medium</p> | <p>Diplomatic relations, multinational</p> | |

Conclusion

- May's developments reaffirm that Africa's trajectory remains defined by "managed volatility", where governments and continental institutions project stability through calibrated, largely symbolic adjustments rather than substantive structural reform. The Pan-African Parliament leadership transition, selective reform gestures in Zimbabwe, external-facing investment summits, and constitutional signalling in the Democratic Republic of the Congo all reflect continuity without meaningful shifts in underlying power structures. At the same time, security deterioration in Mali and rising intra-African diplomatic friction linked to migration tensions exposed how quickly domestic pressures translate into regional instability, undermining AfCFTA integration ambitions and widening the gap between elite pan-African rhetoric and lived political realities.
- For the private sector, the implication is a more conditional and uneven operating environment. While tactical opportunities persist in reform-linked sectors, infrastructure partnerships, and selective investment corridors, they are increasingly offset by heightened exposure to political fragmentation, regulatory unpredictability, reputational risk, and cross-border retaliation risks, as illustrated by reactions from states such as Nigeria. Africa therefore remains investable, but only within a risk framework that prioritises resilience, jurisdictional diversification, and active political-risk management. The defining challenge is no longer volatility itself, but its entrenchment as a persistent structural feature of the continental landscape.

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