

# SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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## ANTI-GOVERNMENT RALLIES IN MALI

At least 20 people have been injured, and one killed, following anti-government rallies in Mali. Thousands of people rallied in Mali's capital, Bamako, demanding the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Protestors are frustrated at the prevalence of violence in the region, economic struggles suffered by citizens, and corruption in the government.

The latest protest was the third of its kind in less than two months, in a movement dubbed the 'June 5 Movement'. An opposition coalition consisting of political parties and community groups organised the rally in order to place increasing pressure on the country's leader. The coalition is led by influential scholar and populist imam, Mahmoud Dicko. Dicko was the leader of the 2019 movement to oust the then Prime Minister, Soumeylou Boubeye Maïga. It is alleged that state forces ransacked the office of Dicko the day after the protests.

On Friday July 10, the movement escalated dramatically. Protesters blocked off main roads and attacked the main parliament building. People also stormed the state broadcaster, which temporarily forced them off air. Police fired rounds of tear gas at protestors in a bid to disperse the crowd.

Prior to the latest rally, the June 5 Movement had dropped their official demand that President Keita resign, nevertheless calling for significant reforms

regarding corruption in government and jihadi violence in the region. However, at the protest on Friday, June 10, there was widespread demand for the President to step down. The latest protest occurred after the coalition group issued a ten-point document calling for civil disobedience in the form of occupying state buildings, blocking roads, and not paying fines.

Thus far, two leaders have been arrested in relation to the protests. Prime Minister Boubou Cisse and President Keita have said they are "open to dialogue" regarding the demands of the protestors.

The June 5 Movement came a few months after the country's constitutional court overturned the election results of 30 seats – a move that many argued helped Keita's government get into power. In response, Keita dissolved the constitutional court and will appoint new judges in order to review the election ruling in March and hopefully bring an end to the political turmoil.

## MALAWI BECOMES FIRST COUNTRY IN AFRICA TO OVERTURN ELECTION RESULTS

Malawi has become the first African nation to overturn official democratic election results through a re-run. Lazarus Chakwera comfortably defeated the incumbent, Peter Mutharika, to win the presidency. The May 2019 result was ruled invalid by a Malawi court after polling officials noted significant irregularities with the votes.

Chakwera won 58.6 per cent of the vote, a wide majority which secured him the five-year presidency in the south-eastern African country of 18 million. For comparison, Mutharika won the presidency in May 2019 with 38.6 per cent of the vote, demonstrating the popularity that Chakwera has with the Malawian population. Notably, the most recent election has been free of international polling observers due to COVID-19. Mr Mutharika has alleged that he and his polling monitors have been intimidated, and have suffered violence. The allegations were dismissed by polling authorities and denied by Chakwera.

Mere weeks after taking power, Chakwera has ignited controversy and allegations of favouritism and nepotism. In his 31 seat cabinet, six figures are related to each other, though not directly to the president himself. The Human Rights Defenders Coalition, who led the call to nullify the May 2019 election, has expressed concerns over the new cabinet. Many human rights activists in Malawi are disappointed, as they hoped Chakwera would usher in an era free of the nepotism and cronyism seen under old regimes. There are also concerns that the country is not being represented equally; more than seventy per cent of the cabinet are from the central region of Malawi, Chakwera's political stronghold.

Many had pinned hopes of reform and strengthened democratic principles on the historic election re-run. Other countries in Africa have also looked at Malawi at what can be achieved to combat corruption in their elections. Zambia's opposition leader said that Malawi has 'set a great example for Africa'. Mr Chakwera has promised to reform the government, rid the public service of corruption, and increase confidence in the state forces. Whether or not Chakwera can deliver on these promises will be seen in the coming months.

## CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

Ghana: Ghana is one of the countries in Africa that have been particularly hard hit by the virus. More than 22,000 cases have been identified in the country, and over 90 per cent of the staff for the Ministry for Education has been infected with

the virus.

South Africa: Despite having one of the toughest lockdowns on earth - where even the sale of alcohol and cigarettes was banned - South Africa has seen a massive increase in cases. As of mid-July, there are more than 250,000 cases, more than anywhere else in Africa. Many believe the rampant inequality and poor living conditions for the majority of the country's population is exacerbating the spread.