

AFRICA

YEAR IN REVIEW 2024





Voting during Ghana's 2024 election.
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The Africa Program works to address the most critical issues facing Africa and US-Africa relations, build mutually beneficial US-Africa relations, and enhance knowledge and understanding about Africa in the United States.

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Oge Onubogu in conversation with H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.





AFRICA: YEAR IN REVIEW 2024

A Message From the Director

This edition marks the 10th anniversary of *Africa: Year in Review*. Over the years, the publication has become an opportunity to reflect on the past year of events across Africa and evaluate the implications for US relations with African countries going forward. This anniversary provides us with perspective and allows us to review recent events in relation to longer-term trends.

Ten years ago, we noted a shift in the balance between Overseas Direct Investment and Foreign Direct Assistance. That subtle shift has taken a dramatic turn in recent years, with the most visible manifestation being US infrastructure investment in the Lobito Corridor. This year's essays highlight the Lobito Corridor in addition to other infrastructure initiatives by the US Trade and Development Agency and Prosper Africa that provide new economic partnership opportunities.

With these investments, economic opportunities are expanding. For example, mining investments, particularly for green economy-related minerals, like the Lobito Corridor, are gaining increased attention and competition. These investments are creating opportunities for African countries to capitalize on. Domestically, African countries like Tanzania are making efforts to reform their banking sector to improve access to finance. Additionally, authors in this year's edition argue that intra-African initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area are a way to build on increased investment and financial access if implemented rapidly.

However, citizens need to feel the consequences of this investment and financial access. As one essay notes, unemployment followed by access to food, utilities like electricity, and poverty reduction are citizens' policy priorities across the continent. Management of the economy is an urgent priority with corruption reducing citizens' trust in their governments. The Gen-Z protests in Kenya exemplify how economic frustrations can lead to widespread protest movements calling for drastic changes. Similarly, in South Africa, years of corruption and mismanagement have led to the first coalition government since

majority vote in 1994.

Elections like in South Africa show distinct changes in African politics. However, as many things change, much stays the same. The first edition of *Africa: Year in Review* discussed faltering democratic practices on the continent in a year when more than 16 African countries held national elections. This year reflected a similar dynamic. Called the “super-year of elections,” at the start of the year, 19 African countries were scheduled to hold significant elections. These elections, however, were surrounded by a democratic decline narrative. This year’s essays bring nuance to this narrative by pointing to election processes in Botswana, Namibia, and Ghana, in addition to South Africa, that resulted in peaceful transfers of power and new political coalitions, as well as the support to democratic advancement provided by agencies like the Millennium Challenge Corporation. However, these elections stand in contrast to the evolving electoral disputes in Mozambique, ongoing military leadership in Sahel countries, and long-term leaders holding power across the continent.

In 2015, Burkina Faso was spotlighted with essays on emerging democratic practices. This year, it is discussed in relation to the *Alliance des États du Sahel* (AES), which includes the military regimes of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In 2024, AES states announced their withdrawal from the West African regional economic community – the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The announcement raised serious questions about the future of ECOWAS and regionalism, more generally. The year 2025 will be significant for Africa’s place in global governance, with the African Union holding elections for the Commission Chairperson, South Africa hosting the G20, and Kenyan police still in



A panel discussion during an event on sovereign wealth funds and critical mineral investment in September 2024.

Haiti. These opportunities are clouded by whether Africa's continental and regional institutions are positioned to seize the moment.

Like past years, this year was marked by conflict dynamics across the Horn of Africa and the African Great Lakes regions. Sudan's civil war persisted throughout the year to emerge as the world's largest humanitarian crisis. The US has led in humanitarian response, but one author questions whether more needs to be done. Similarly, in the complex and long-standing conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), another author shares how US and Angolan mediation deescalated tensions between the DRC and Rwanda, but conflict persists. South Sudan's already-delayed elections were once again postponed, pushing the possibility of an election to 2026. And, Ethiopia's naval port agreement with Somaliland on January 2, 2024, was a New Year's surprise for many and reshaped the geopolitical alliances of the region. The subsequent Turkish-led mediation between Somalia and Ethiopia, announced in December 2024, equally shifted the region's geopolitics.

While some trends have continued, others have changed, and new opportunities have arisen. The past decade has brought distinctive changes to the continent and US-Africa relations. On this 10th anniversary, we are excited to share perspectives from individuals who wrote for the first edition ten years ago and glad to welcome new voices into these discussions. Through *Africa: Year in Review* and our other programming, the Wilson Center Africa Program promotes dynamic conversations on US relations with African countries that directly include African perspectives and analysis.

We are honored to be the stewards of *Africa: Year in Review* and are excited to share the important and thoughtful essays in this 10th edition.

Sincerely,

Oge Onubogu

Director, Wilson Center Africa Program

PS. We are excited to have also refreshed the look of *Africa: Year in Review*. The cover art and layout were done by Kenyan artists Lulu Kitololo and her team led by Stanley Kabicho. We hope to continue to use *Africa: Year in Review* as a platform to engage and highlight, not only African and US perspectives on political, social, and economic relations, but to spotlight African artists as well.



Highway construction in South Africa
Chris Van Lennep Photo/Shutterstock.com

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Addressing Africa's Infrastructure Gap Through Innovations in Finance and Technology

Enoh T. Ebong

With a financing gap of up to [\\$100 billion per year](#), unlocking capital for Africa's infrastructure requires a confluence of innovative technical and financial solutions. In 2024, the United States and African countries partnered to employ this approach, addressing critical infrastructure priorities such as those in the digital, transportation, and energy sectors.

While [87% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) live in an area with mobile broadband coverage, 40% lack connectivity due to factors such as digital illiteracy, handset costs, and unaffordable data. Effective project preparation can help narrow this gap.

For example, in Nigeria, a [US Trade and Development Agency \(USTDA\)](#) feasibility study helped mobilize Naira-based financing for an internet service provider (ISP) to electrify its mobile infrastructure using solar energy. [Creative local currency financing](#) allowed the ISP to circumvent Nigeria's shortage of US dollars and the currency fluctuation risks that can imperil project viability. In 2024, the ISP utilized this financing to deploy an innovative US Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) architecture. Because Open RAN enables the interoperability of equipment from multiple vendors, the ISP was able to lower costs and create more affordable connectivity for nearly 100,000 underserved Nigerians.

[Multilateral partnerships](#) are critical for developing high-standard, large-scale regional infrastructure projects. In the rail sector, the Africa Finance Corporation signed [concession agreements](#) with the Angolan and Zambian governments to finance, build, own, and operate a transformational 485-mile rail line between Angola's Port of Lobito and Zambia's resource-rich Copperbelt region. [Contributing to a whole-of-government effort](#), USTDA funded an environmental and social impact assessment to help align the project with international best practices and attract capital for its implementation.

In the energy sector, [less than half](#) of Sub-Saharan Africa's population can access electricity. Bringing power to consumers and businesses requires harnessing innovation for off-grid renewable energy, grid expansion and modernization, power generation, and market-friendly frameworks to attract private investment. In one notable deal, an Abuja-based manufacturer will purchase electricity both on-grid from the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company and off-grid from a private developer of a solar power plant with battery storage. This innovative hybrid arrangement, developed through a USTDA-funded feasibility study, is among the first of its kind in Nigeria. It will help the manufacturer transition from diesel to solar power, connect to the grid for the first time, cut costs, reduce carbon emissions, and serve as a model for other companies.

Closing Africa's infrastructure financing gap also requires attracting new sources of capital. USTDA is doing so through partnerships with entities such as Paris-based [Meridiam SAS](#), which has invested \$85 billion in assets and joins other USTDA partners such as the [Investor Leadership Network](#).

While securing this capital is critical, maximizing its impact requires procurement practices that prioritize long-term value-for-money principles, as well as capacity-building for the African professionals who will execute the growing number of infrastructure transactions that we should expect in the years to come.

Enoh T. Ebong is the director of the US Trade and Development Agency.

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Mobilizing Resources and Accessing Investment: Enhancing Economic Development in Tanzania

Ambassador Elsie S. Kanza

Africa's growth has bounced back from the setback of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent global conflicts. According to the World Bank and Africa Development Bank, Africa's gross domestic product growth in 2024 [averaged 3.8%](#), compared to the global average of 2.9%. Moreover, 11 out of 20 of the world's fastest-growing economies are African. Despite this promising outlook and concerted domestic efforts, Africa's capability to mobilize resources to finance its economic development objectives remains limited. Official development assistance has helped to address the funding gap. However, over the last decade, this assistance has declined due to competing budgetary pressures in donor countries, resulting in the exploration of strategic partnerships with, among others, the private sector and institutional investors.

Partnerships to improve access to finance are key to accelerating the growth of both public and private sectors in Africa. Current financial limitations are exacerbated by an [inaccurate perception](#) of the risks of doing business on the continent. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme, Africa could save [up to \\$74.5 billion](#) in excess interest and foregone funding if credit companies based their ratings on less subjective assessments.

However, there are still measures African countries can take to improve their business environments. Tanzania holds [the highest credit ratings](#) in East Africa by agencies such as Fitch and Moody's, which have rated the country B+ and B1, respectively. These ratings reflect concerted efforts by the government of Tanzania to improve its business environment. Accordingly, in September 2024, the US International Development Finance Corporation, in partnership with Citigroup, signed a loan agreement with Tanzania's CRDB Bank amounting to \$320 million for on-lending to 4,500 small and medium-sized enterprises in Tanzania and Burundi.

Furthermore, Africa needs significant investments in infrastructure development. Tanzania has made significant strides in regional connectivity, including starting to operationalize the new electric standard-gauge railway that will connect to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda. Tanzania has also enhanced the availability of affordable electricity for regional power pools, particularly after the operationalization of the 2,115-megawatt Julius Nyerere Hydropower Plant.

With Africa's young population, sustainable development requires strategic partnerships to also focus on initiatives that create jobs in labor-intensive sectors such as agriculture. By leveraging initiatives such as the United States Agency for International Development's Feed the Future program, Tanzania has been able to develop programs that have facilitated private investments worth over \$1.3 billion and positively impacted more than 900,000 smallholder farmers. Having achieved agricultural self-sufficiency over the past decade, Tanzania is now exporting food to neighboring countries and the rest of the world, including the United States, under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Given that the agricultural sector employs a large portion of the Tanzanian workforce, its successful integration into regional and global supply chains by leveraging public-private collaboration is crucial to driving inclusive growth and financial independence.

Ambassador Elsie S. Kanza is the ambassador of Tanzania to the United States.

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African Continental and Global Trade: The Importance of US Support for AfCFTA and AGOA

Florizelle Liser

Ratified by nearly every country in Africa, the [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) (AfCFTA) is the largest free trade agreement in the world. AfCFTA serves as a platform to facilitate intra-African trade, reduce barriers to business, strengthen economic integration across the continent, and increase African competitiveness in global trade. Africa contributes, unenviably, [less than 3%](#) to global trade volume. Considering its burgeoning population and vast resources, the continent is greatly underperforming its full market potential.

Nevertheless, this year we saw promising milestones with the expansion of AfCFTA's Guided Trade Initiative, which grew from [7 to 39 countries](#). This initiative facilitates the exchange of goods and reduces tariffs, which will increase market competitiveness. The recent innovation of the [Pan-African Payment and Settlement System](#) is another important step to economic integration that facilitates and streamlines transactions that reduce the costs and complexities of foreign exchange for cross-border trade. AfCFTA has started shaping the regulatory framework for digital trade through common rules and open standards that will boost intra-African trade, promote industrialization, and create new jobs and opportunities for both local and foreign industries. Recent developments and implementation of the AfCFTA framework have rightly led many to re-examine and reimagine what is possible for the continent among Africans as well as its partners—including the United States.

There is an appetite in both Africa and the United States to create new, stronger partnerships, and for trade and investment to play a key role in that. It will be important to work together to maximize those opportunities to create a mutually reinforcing US–Africa trade and investment partnership.

An important part of that partnership will be supporting the renewal of the [African Growth and Opportunity Act](#) (AGOA). AGOA shares many complementary goals with AfCFTA—facilitating export growth, encouraging regional and global value chains, incentivizing trade infrastructure, and enhancing overall global competitiveness. The current authorization for this signature US trade preference program is set to expire in September 2025. Looming questions over its renewal resulted in a precipitous decline in trade in 2023 and the first half of 2024—with key sectors such as apparel [declining by as much as 13%](#). While AfCFTA will be a game changer for Africa, its success will depend on access to markets. This suggests that a swift US renewal of AGOA for at least 10 years would send a powerful message to American and African companies that the United States supports Africa's development.

Florizelle Liser is the president and CEO of the Corporate Council on Africa.

Why Infrastructure Matters: A New Approach to Shared Economic Prosperity with the Lobito Corridor

Helaina Matza

When the G7 leaders launched the [Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment](#) in 2022, this type of collaborative economic corridor development was an untested concept. In less than a year, the Lobito Corridor became the flagship example of what can be done with focused diligence, partnership, and common goals.

The Lobito Corridor—connecting Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Zambia through freight rail, energy infrastructure, agribusiness development, and digital access—has captured the imagination of policymakers and industry alike. By refurbishing the existing Benguela railway from the Port of Lobito into the DRC and connecting it with a new 800 km rail line spanning Angola and Zambia, the Lobito Corridor is doing much more than connecting Africa’s copper and cobalt belt to global markets. Large and small companies alike are leveraging the commerciality of the rail, which is cutting down transit time, increasing investment, improving local connectivity, and boosting regional markets along the Lobito Corridor. For example, Carrinho, an Angola-based food producer, is leveraging the promise of new infrastructure to bring an estimated one million smallholder farmers to market. Similarly, Sun Africa is providing clean energy and drinking water solutions across Angola, and Africell is expanding trusted vendor 4G and 5G networks along the Lobito Corridor and beyond.

Each of these projects leverages different US government, G7+, and multilateral development bank tools to finance and de-risk implementation. They are designed to address the growing gap in critical infrastructure investment, with estimates of the financing gap on the African continent as high as \$100 billion per year. As we look at our relationships with emerging economies around the world, it is abundantly clear that we need to show up in the manner we are asked to—by bringing real commercial investment into growth economies and essential sectors. This serves our partners’ efforts to meaningfully grow their economies and move up the value chain. It also serves the United States and our partners as we tackle urgent shared challenges—from the climate crisis to vulnerable critical mineral and semiconductor supply chains—all while meeting growing energy demand as the world takes hold of artificial intelligence.

President Biden made his final overseas trip of his presidency to Angola and while there, he celebrated the progress and promise of the Lobito Corridor. Africa is projected to continue to be the world’s fastest growing continent, with over 60% of its population under 25 years old. In 18 months, the United States and its partners have mobilized over \$6 billion in investment along the Lobito Corridor across multiple sectors, reaching female farmers, budding engineers, and entrepreneurs on the continent. We should replicate this model in parts of the world where our partners are asking for more choices. Our investments can serve Western and local industries alike while creating much needed resilience in the global supply chains of the future.

Helaina Matza is the acting special coordinator for the Partnership on Global Infrastructure Investment at the US Department of State.

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Driving Growth: The Impact of Digital Transformation on African Economies

British Robinson and Romi Bhatia

Coverage of Africa's economies tends to focus on its natural resources, but increasingly, the future of the continent is being shaped by its potential for digital growth. The continent's increasingly young, urban, educated, and digital-adopting populations point to a future where start-ups transform traditional industries and create new ones.

Take Nigerian fintech start-up [Moniepoint](#). Launched in 2015, it is meeting the mobile banking needs of one of the world's fastest growing markets. After going through several initial rounds of funding, it completed a Series C financing in October of this year and is now the eighth African start-up valued at more than \$1 billion. In 2023, the Financial Times called it the second-fastest growing company in Africa, spurred on by big-name investors including Google. Such unicorns were once unheard of on the continent, but that is changing. With [618 active tech hubs](#), countries across Africa are quickly catching up. A critical question remains: who will invest in this transformation?

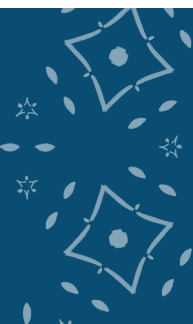
That's the mission of [Prosper Africa](#), a presidential-level national security initiative created in 2019. Our focus is on enabling US-based investors—including pension funds, insurance companies, family offices, university endowments, and the investing public—to participate in Africa's future growth through the global capital markets. The benefits of such investments are clear: not only for growing prosperity in Africa, but also for opportunities for investors and stronger US-Africa ties.

While we are excited about Africa's potential, we have significant work to do. Less than 1% of global venture capital (VC) flows go to African start-ups (approximately \$2.1 billion in 2023). For a continent with nearly 20% of the world's population—and whose share of that total is going to grow significantly in coming decades—that level of investment is insufficient. Africa is a growth market, and US-based investors should be part of that story.

For decades, Africa's "Big Four" of Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa have dominated the attention of the few investors who have taken an interest in the continent. Indeed, these four nations offer vibrant and diverse tech ecosystems that span fintech, e-commerce, health tech, and agritech. But increasingly, other nations on the continent are offering similar opportunities with their governments streamlining legal frameworks to make it easier for new businesses to launch, establishing "startup funds" to attract international VCs, and forging public-private partnerships between international accelerators and local technology hubs, all as a part of a broader strategy to strengthen their startup ecosystems. [Morocco](#), [Senegal](#), and [Côte d'Ivoire](#), to name just three, are ready for US-based investors. Last May, Prosper Africa and the US Embassy in Morocco hosted the inaugural [US-Morocco VC Forum](#) in Marrakech, Morocco, in the lead-up to [GITEX Africa 2024](#), Africa's premier tech and start-up exhibition. Such efforts help draw attention to the kinds of start-ups that are going to reshape the continent in the decades to come.

British Robinson is the coordinator for Prosper Africa.
Romi Bhatia serves as (acting) North Africa director at Prosper Africa.

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A New African Mining Sector? Trends in Mining, Infrastructure, and Investment for African Development

Patrick Utomi

It was an aspirational year for African infrastructure and investment. Trade is increasingly seen as the anchor to alleviating poverty through cross-border economic exchange, especially in the mining sector, during this era of the [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#).

In the first decade after the African independence movements of the 1960s, mining and natural resource exploitation damaged the environment, provided limited, if any, prosperity to the people, and often triggered violent conflict across the continent. Today, the sector continues to be a major source of illicit financial flows from Africa and has been spotlighted for human rights violations, child labor, and unsafe working conditions. In many countries, legal and illegal mining are draining resources without providing needed revenues. The statistics suggest that multinational mining companies [have grown 67% per year](#) during the last two decades, but the producing countries have experienced declining revenue performance.

But hope remains that reforms to the sector, new investment, and improved governance structures will transform mining for the technology revolution and the green economy, leading to important revenue for African economic growth. A key example of this is the celebrated US and European Union investment in the Lobito Corridor that provides infrastructure linking the Port of Lobito in Angola to critical minerals in Zambia. This regional infrastructure investment opens a “growth alley,” enabling value-added elements, like refinement, of the mining value chain.

The mining sector is responding to these new initiatives and buyer demands. At the 30th anniversary of the African Mining Indaba, the sector articulated a determination for fair play in the looming energy transition. Mining entrepreneurs who gathered in Cairo in November 2024 for the [Congress of Africa’s Mineral Resources Development](#) showed greater commitment to developing value chains across borders. After years of deliberating on issues around land rights, regulatory environments, and transparency issues, in the 2024 conference, there was a more focused conversation on value chains, environmental factors, and locally-based value addition.

Additionally, African investment partners are mobilizing to ensure growth contributes to domestic development. Sovereign wealth funds are a critical mechanism to achieving this goal. Botswana continues to provide leadership in prioritizing long-term growth, with its [Pula Fund](#) investing in diamond mining and export revenues with an eye towards future growth.

Still, the paradoxes persist. How can an industry that has created so much harm be the engine of good? Africa’s infrastructure deficit remains huge, but examples exist (such as in Australia) where coordinated efforts and private–public partnerships can lead to important infrastructure development that stimulates much-needed revenue, jobs, and growth. These efforts will only strengthen by ensuring they take advantage of regional cooperation and ongoing pan-African trade initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement.

Patrick Utomi is a Nigerian political economist and management expert. He is a Brown Capital Management Public Policy Fellow with the Wilson Center Africa Program.

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A fire breaks out in Khartoum's Amdurman market due to fighting between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces. Abd Almohimen Sayed/Shutterstock.com

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Peace and Security

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Sudan: A Region that Remains Key to Peace

Ambassador (ret.) Donald Booth

The struggle for power and influence in the Middle East goes beyond the fighting in Gaza and Lebanon and the Iranian projection of power via clients in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. That struggle is playing out in Sudan as well. Sudan's future depends on how Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, and Israel vie for regional influence and how their ability to project power and advance their economic interests plays out.

The Sudan Armed Forces' (SAF's) initial poor performance against its more mobile opponent, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led it to seek support from armed elements of former President Bashir's Islamist National Congress Party (NCP). Recently, the SAF-controlled government in Port Sudan has acquiesced in the return of NCP leaders, who have [openly proclaimed their agenda](#) for restoring Sudan as an Islamic state and their hostility toward the United States. This resurgence of political Islamists combined with the SAF's increasing reliance on Iran for weapons and financing presents the danger of Sudan becoming another Iranian proxy capable of posing a threat to Red Sea shipping and to Israel. Clearly, such an outcome should be anathema to regional actors and to the United States.

How can this be prevented from happening? The approach of some has been to support the RSF, which has asserted it is fighting to prevent the return of the NCP, which, when in power, excluded the periphery of Sudan from influence and economic opportunity. However, given the RSF's history of ethnic killing and violence toward Sudanese civilians, is it rational to expect it can ever govern Sudan?

The United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Nations, the African Union, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development have repeatedly tried to broker a ceasefire and humanitarian access that can be followed by political dialogue, without success. Iran and Russia have actively supported the SAF, while others are quietly backing them. This might seem to be a good bet, as the SAF has achieved some success against the RSF in recent months. But if SAF success means the return of the NCP, which the Sudanese people sent packing in 2019, Sudan will remain highly unstable and an excellent candidate for Iranian manipulation.

Might those in the SAF who envision it to be a professional and patriotic institution that transcends politics be able to find support from regional states whose interests would not be served by expanded Iranian influence? Might Sudanese civilians and neutral armed groups be able to negotiate a transitional government with an SAF devoid of elements intent on revanchism? How the SAF leadership answers these questions will largely determine Sudan's ability to live in peace as a diverse nation.

Ambassador (ret.) Donald E. Booth served as U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan from August 2013 until January 2017 and again as Special Envoy for Sudan from 2019-2021. He is co-chair of the Wilson Center Africa Program's Sudans Working Group.

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Intelligent Diplomacy: Angolan and US Mediation of the DRC-Rwanda Conflict

Cecily Brewer

In a year filled with conflict, it can be easy to miss the bright spots. Escalating tensions between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda could have erupted into a full-blown war, potentially ranking as the world's largest humanitarian crisis of 2024. Instead, innovative US and Angolan efforts to de-escalate tensions between the DRC and Rwanda avoided a [region-wide conflagration](#). As a result, the parties continued work on a ceasefire deal signed in July, and during his historic Angola visit in December, President Biden [thanked President Lourenço](#) for his leadership and mediation of the conflict.

In late 2023, with DRC's December presidential elections looming, tensions between DRC and Rwanda were on the rise. A truce between the DRC government and the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group had collapsed, and [Rwandan forces](#) and M23 rebels [were moving deeper](#) into DRC.

In November 2023, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines embarked on a diplomatic mission [to de-escalate tensions](#), shuttling between Kigali and Kinshasa. Presidents Kagame and Tshisekedi agreed to specific confidence-building measures toward de-escalation, and the US government committed to monitoring their progress.

As the top US intelligence official, Haines brought high-level, sustained engagement and a unique tool kit. Haines helped [provide intelligence](#) to hold both sides accountable to ceasefire commitments. US officials convened regular meetings with their Rwandan and Congolese counterparts, sharing information backed by real-time data on the parties' progress, or lack thereof, on implementing their commitments. This structured monitoring process exposed ceasefire violations quickly and provided a venue for the parties to address them.

Less than a month after Haines' trip, the parties agreed to a [72-hour ceasefire](#) that included a repositioning of forces to allow displaced civilians to return to their homes. The ceasefire was broadly adhered to. Crucially, just five days before the DRC's election, the parties agreed to extend the ceasefire through the DRC election.

The US mediation surge was in support of the resumption of African-led efforts, namely the [Nairobi and Luanda processes](#), which had long sought to address the factors perpetuating this longstanding conflict. In July, [the White House welcomed](#) the Angola-brokered ceasefire between the parties. In late November, the Congolese and Rwandan Foreign Ministers approved a [concept of operations](#) for Rwandan troops to disengage from Congolese territory, and Angolan officials now chair a joint DRC-Rwanda committee to monitor implementation.

While there are violations of the ceasefire and Congolese and Rwandans are far from resolving their long-standing conflict, US and Angolan efforts over the past year have seeded ["genuine prospects for peace"](#) despite the daunting challenges. As always, implementation will depend on the parties' will to do so. Further, US and Angolan innovations in intelligence-driven mediation and ceasefire monitoring and verification could shape future peacemaking efforts across the continent and beyond.

Cecily Brewer is a senior expert on mediation at the United States Institute of Peace.

Kenyan Police in Haiti: Revitalizing Diaspora Engagement, Expanding the Role of Women, and Reexamining the Responsibility to Protect

Vivian Derryck

While Gaza, Ukraine, and Syria dominate the news, the ongoing conflict in Haiti and the Kenyan-led [Multinational Security Support Mission](#) (MSSM) trying to quell it often get overlooked.

The Kenyan police force is in Haiti because the United States cannot ignore a failed state on its doorstep. When US officials approached Kenyan President William Ruto about an intervention to help stabilize Haiti, he readily agreed.

Major opposition from Kenyan civil society, parliamentary objections, and [court challenges](#) delayed the deployment by a year, but ultimately President Ruto prevailed, and the first 400 police officers arrived in June 2024. But after some initial successes, re-escalation in gang violence, accelerated wanton killings, and a looming humanitarian crisis are putting the mission's success in jeopardy.

Beyond the politics and strategy of the police deployment, the MSSM signals the rising power of the African diaspora, foreshadows African women's growing role in security and peacekeeping operations, and presents an opportunity to revisit the [Responsibility to Protect](#) (R2P)—the UN doctrine calling for intervention when a state cannot or is unwilling to protect its citizens—in countries like Sudan.

Despite its future uncertainty, the MSSM has had an outsized impact in heightening African interest in its diaspora. President Ruto [called the intervention](#) a “strong commitment to Pan-Africanism” and said it reflected a desire to “restore the dignity” of Haiti, the world's first independent Black republic.

Africa's focus on Haiti coincides with a growing interest in the African diaspora in the United States, where the diaspora is viewed as an economic, cultural, and foreign policy asset. President Biden's [Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement in the United States](#) further underscores US determination to strengthen the connection with Africa in a multipolar international arena, rife with competition from Russia and China.

When Kenya sent an [all-female police unit](#) to Haiti in October, it not only elevated the visibility of women in peacekeeping missions but also highlighted their role in reducing gender-based violence. Complementing the deployment, the influential [African Women Leaders Network](#) launched its diaspora chapter at the United Nations' 2024 Commission on the Status of Women, where African women connected with Haitian counterparts. Both sides pledged to work for peace and committed to initiating joint sustainable development programs.

The MSSM still faces an uphill battle. With spiraling violence, chronic underfunding, and challenges for the mission in the UN Security Council (UNSC) spurred by Russia and China, this is a time for the African Union (AU), with its diaspora connections, to confront China and Russia to end UNSC opposition to a Kenya-led peacekeeping mission and push the UNSC to consider a similar R2P intervention in Sudan. A successful Haitian peacekeeping mission with support from the AU and the UNSC would be a win for Haiti and reinforce and strengthen the role of the global African diaspora in conflict resolution.

Vivian Derryck is the founder and president emerita of the Bridges Institute. She serves on the Wilson Center Africa Program's Advisory Council.

Rising Tensions in the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Somaliland, and the Potential for Further Regional Instability

Abigail Kabandula

The budding partnership between Ethiopia and Somaliland risks destabilizing the Horn of Africa. On January 2, 2024, President of Somaliland Muse Bihi Abdi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) in Addis Ababa. This agreement grants Ethiopia access to Somaliland's coast for a naval base, a move that the Federal Government of Somalia, the internationally recognized government of Somaliland, fiercely opposes. The deal risks exacerbating tensions in a region already facing multiple conflicts and geopolitical rivalries.

As a landlocked country, Ethiopia has expressed dissatisfaction at its reliance on the Port of Djibouti for access to the Red Sea. Recently, Prime Minister Abiy stated that control of the Red Sea and the Nile is critical for [Ethiopia's survival](#). The MoU with Somaliland represents Ethiopia's bid to secure a port in this strategic region.

The deal with Somaliland is particularly contentious because it undermines Somalia's territorial integrity and reconciliation efforts between Somalia and Somaliland following three decades of self-government and several failed attempts at reunification. Most recently, with the facilitation of President Guelleh of Djibouti, Somalia and Somaliland signed an agreement in December 2023 to revive diplomatic talks, implement past agreements, resolve continuing issues, and strengthen cooperation on security and criminal activity.

Considering this context, Somalia has strongly condemned the MoU between Ethiopia and Somaliland, calling it an [act of aggression](#). Somalia has received diplomatic support from the Arab League, led by Egypt, which has its own tensions with Ethiopia related to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and control of the flow of the [Blue Nile River](#). The United States, under the [Somalia Quint](#), has also voiced support for Somalia's sovereignty. Adding to the complexity, Eritrea, once an ally of Ethiopia during the Tigray War, has distanced itself from Abiy's government and increasingly aligned itself with Somalia.

Abiy's government has shown a willingness to use force to achieve its geopolitical goals. In a July 2023 meeting, he warned that Ethiopia would pursue its port ambitions through peaceful means but would [resort to force](#) if necessary. This rhetoric has raised alarm, as it suggests that Abiy is prepared to escalate tensions into a military confrontation, with the potential to further destabilize the entire region.

Most recently, talks facilitated by Turkey in December 2024 led to an agreement between Somalia and Ethiopia that would grant Ethiopia sea access while respecting Somalia's sovereignty. Although this marks a positive development for the region, Ethiopia has yet to rescind its MoU with Somaliland. For the December 2024 agreement to hold, terms must go beyond surface-level arrangements and present concrete measures to defuse tensions over the long term. The incoming Trump administration could play a pivotal role in supporting the extra-regional mediation that will be required to carry this out.

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Emerging Trends in US Security Engagements in West Africa

Cyril Obi

US security engagements in West Africa cannot be understood without consideration of regional geopolitical challenges spanning political instability, climate change, humanitarian and food crises, extremist attacks, and the emergence of new actors.

Recent geopolitical shifts in West Africa are marked by the rapid decline of French influence—including the expulsion of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—along with the departure of US military personnel from Niger. Both instances came at the request of these countries' new military leadership, which, soon after, accepted Russian security assistance and military cooperation. The rising military and economic influence of middle and emerging powers in the region is further complicating the deep regional insecurity and instability.

The Central Sahel continued to experience [high levels of violence](#) in 2024. These conflicts increasingly present a threat of a spillover into coastal West Africa, partially due to the security vacuum created by the exit of US and French military personnel. Although the United States is taking steps to prevent instability in the Sahel, in part through a ten-year partnership program for coastal West Africa—the [Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#)—, the security implications of their previous departure cannot be overlooked.

Furthermore, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger's withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) creates additional challenges to regional security. Since the three countries (the Alliance of Sahel States—AES) started the withdrawal process, ECOWAS has left the door open for negotiations. Most recently, while accepting their decision to withdraw, ECOWAS [extended the withdrawal timeline](#) from January to July 2025, within which time the AES countries can apply for re-admission. So far, however, the three countries have [stuck to their guns](#).

The trends in 2024 of increasing middle and emerging power security assistance in the region, the drawdown of US and French troops, and the fracturing of regional cooperation mechanisms pose a serious threat to US security cooperation in West Africa. Given the current context, the United States needs to do more to support African-led efforts to strengthen ECOWAS' relevance, capacity, and legitimacy in the face of its waning influence in the region. Over five decades, ECOWAS has provided a forum for conflict prevention, stability, and security in the region. However, the institution needs reform in order to engage the AES states through systematic mediation.

A clear starting point is for ECOWAS, with international and intraregional support, to radically reform its peace and security mechanisms to be more people-centered and inclusive. In this regard, building security and peace will require partners such as the United States to restructure security engagements at the national and bilateral levels to be more inclusive and developmental while [recognizing the agency](#) of their African partners.

Cyril Obi is the program director for the African Peacebuilding Network and the Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa program at the Social Sciences Research Council.

Mozambique's Governance Crisis: Evaluating US Support in the Current Context

Thomas P. Sheehy

Mozambique needs governance that better reflects its citizens' interests. Otherwise, the resource-rich country will suffer continued turmoil and violence. The United States, with its considerable investments in the region, is likewise challenged in Mozambique.

National and provincial elections in October 2024 were marred by government [fraud and intimidation](#), sparking [deadly civil unrest](#). Winning 71% of the presidential vote, the Frelimo party kept the power it has held since Mozambique's 1975 independence. Frelimo's win was predictable, as the country's [last election](#) was also widely recognized as manipulated.

Unpredicted, however, was the emergence of Venâncio Mondlane and his Podemos party as the leading opposition force, far outpolling Frelimo's traditional party foe, Renamo. Mondlane's campaign was fueled by disillusioned, social media-connected youth who view Frelimo as corrupt and Renamo as co-opted. Many other Mozambicans feel disenfranchised, with [voter turnout](#) reported to be only 43.5%.

Similarly, disillusionment and disenfranchisement contribute to ongoing [violence in Cabo Delgado](#) and other northern provinces. A deadly Islamist insurgency, begun in 2017, has successfully recruited to its ranks by playing to the sentiment that natural resources are being developed in exploitative ways without providing local benefits. While the Frelimo government speaks of serving local interests, it is seen as complicit in corrupt business dealings, which gives the insurgency oxygen.

For years, Mozambique was not a priority of Washington's Africa policy. It is today. The United States' financial commitments in the country have increased significantly. The [Development Finance Corporation](#) and the [Export-Import Bank](#) have recently committed billions of dollars to projects in Mozambique. Bilateral aid exceeded \$550 million in 2023, and the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) signed a \$500 million compact with Mozambique the same year. Additionally, the United States has focused on encouraging more representative government. In 2022, Mozambique was selected to receive focused, sustained attention and aid through the [Global Fragility Act](#).

One effort within the Global Fragility Act framework was support for Mozambican civil society to press for free and fair elections. Yet the muted US response toward this year's manipulated elections undercut these efforts and risked appearing hypocritical by Mozambicans wanting democracy.

In South Africa's election last May, the African National Congress, a liberation party like Frelimo, accepted its first defeat and negotiated a unity government with its political opposition, giving the country new hope. Frelimo, in contrast, shows little inclination toward national reconciliation, making Mozambique increasingly fragile and testing US policy.

Tough times demand tough questions. Going forward, the United States needs to examine the situation and its priorities in Mozambique to understand: is the United States capable of supporting more inclusive governance that is essential to long-term stability in Mozambique? Is democracy a US priority? Has the US commitment to the country handcuffed it in helping those Mozambicans peacefully seeking representation?

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Crowd of protesters in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
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Leadership and Governance

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Africa's Growing Political Demographic: Time to Genuinely Engage Africa's Youth

Niat Afeworki

The youth demographic represents an important, growing, and increasingly vocal and involved voting group in African countries. In 2024, young Africans progressively asserted their voices through protests, online activism, and electoral participation. As Africa's population is [on pace to nearly double](#) in the next 25 years, the continent will continue to be home to the world's youngest demographic, and governments need to consider enacting robust and strategic policies to channel demographic rather than dependency.

[Thirteen primary and presidential elections](#) were held across Africa in 2024, and many of these elections felt the impact of the growing youth political engagement. Youth-led protests and organized political involvement marked this significant election year as demands for government accountability and policies prioritizing quality education and economic opportunities highlighted young peoples' determination to shape a brighter, more stable future for themselves, their nations, and the continent.

Young Africans demonstrated their political power by turning to the polls to cast their votes and taking to the streets to voice their concerns. In Senegal, there were youth-led demonstrations to protest former president Macky Sall's postponement of presidential elections. The protests contributed to the elections going forward, with Bassirou Diomaye Faye being elected president. Faye ran on a campaign promising economic opportunities and anticorruption measures, a clear reflection of young voters' priorities. In Namibia, two-thirds of the 1.4 million registered voters were youth, accounting for [58% of voter turnout](#). Although [results are in dispute](#), these statistics paint a powerful picture of the immense potential for their influence on the political process. Alternatively, in South Africa, voter turnout among young people [dropped by 3%](#) from the 2019 elections, illustrating a growing apathy with the country's political processes due to frustration over corruption. Beyond elections, in Kenya and Nigeria, young people took to the streets and social media to express discontent with fiscal policies increasing the cost of living. In Kenya, the Gen-Z-led efforts resulted in President Ruto withdrawing the 2024 finance bill and reshuffling his cabinet.

The youth demographic has shown their power and most pressing concerns through their engagements around political processes, and now elected officials must take heed. They must ensure government transparency and accountability to rebuild trust and political engagement among young people. They must also foster collaboration between Regional Economic Communities, international stakeholders, civil society, and the private sector to produce opportunities for economic security and growth. The United States can also play a pivotal role by partnering with stakeholders and heavily investing in major industries and innovation, such as tech and agriculture, to promote economic growth. Young Africans have immense transformative potential, and governments would be wise to leverage their energy, creativity, and sheer numbers to promote growth because, if neglected, nations risk instabilities that pose serious threats to their countries and beyond.

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Evolving Citizen Policy Priorities: A Guide to People-Centered Development

Joseph Asunka

People-centered development is at the core of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The pledge to pursue inclusive growth, sustainable development, and “leave no one behind” is embedded in the aspirations of both policy documents.

These frameworks have shaped policies across the African continent as governments seek to align national development agendas with continental and global goals. But limited resources mean that governments must prioritize between many competing needs.

What informs governments’ policy prioritization in Africa? The policy priorities of citizens should be the first piece of evidence to consider, which is consistent with the people-centered development agenda that the African Union espouses.

Afrobarometer has documented the policy priorities of ordinary Africans for more than two decades, providing both a current snapshot and a view of shifts over time.

In the most recent Afrobarometer survey, conducted across 39 countries between late 2021 and mid-2023, unemployment ranks as the most important issue for governments to address, cited by 33% of respondents as one of their top priorities. Management of the economy and health (both 29%) follow closely. Infrastructure issues—roads and water supply—are tied at 22%, just ahead of crime/security and education (both 20%). Food insecurity, electricity, poverty, and corruption round out the top policy priorities on the continent.

This citizens’ agenda reflects both a continuity of concerns and a few significant shifts over the past decade. Unemployment has consistently topped the list of policy issues that Africans want their governments to address, and delivery of public services such as health, education, and electricity are usually prominent.

But management of the economy, now ranked as the second most urgent priority, did not feature among the top five issues a decade ago. Across 30 countries for which we have over-time data, concern about economic management has almost doubled since the 2011–2013 survey, probably boosted by the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighteen countries show marked increases, led by Zambia (+37 percentage points), Tunisia (+36), Senegal (+34), and Ghana (+31).

Crime and security are other issues that have risen significantly on the priority list—by 7 points, on average. These issues are particularly pronounced in the Sahel region, which is plagued by violent extremist attacks. Citizens in several Sahelian countries rank crime and security at or near the top of their policy priorities, with marked increases in Burkina Faso (+45 percentage points), Mali (+40), Niger (+27), Senegal (+24), and Sudan (+15).

Priorities vary by country, so context matters. The United States and other development partners will serve the interests of ordinary Africans by paying attention to their priorities, both longstanding and new, and tailoring support appropriately. Prioritizing job creation and effective economic management would be a good starting point across much of the continent.

Joseph Asunka is the CEO of Afrobarometer.

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Institutional Reforms in Africa: A Catalyst for Democratic and Economic Advancement

Chidi Blyden and Jake Grover

While the common narrative of 2024 was of African democracy in decline, this overlooks the long-term trend on the continent and fails to recognize pent-up demand for democracy. It also obscures the less visible stories of democratic progress and economic opportunity that many African nations have experienced.

Despite a few high-profile setbacks, [more than half](#) of Africa's population has seen improvements in their country's governance over the last decade, and [the long-term trend](#) is unequivocally positive. Yet progress has plateaued in recent years, and democracies have not always delivered.

Rather than focus on the negatives, the United States and countries seeking to engage more deeply with Africa should work closely with African nations that have undertaken reform agendas or embarked on a newly democratic path. For example, The Gambia undertook a historic transition to democracy after 22 years under the Jammeh regime. In addition, Senegal's 2024 presidential elections saw a Constitutional Council decision that facilitated a peaceful transition of power underpinned by Senegal's well-established institutions and tradition of democracy.

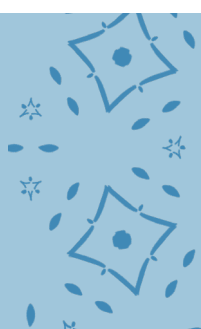
These examples also present economic opportunities. While democracy has a [positive and direct effect](#) on economic growth—increasing gross domestic product per capita by 20% [in the long run](#)—this depends heavily on the context. At the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)—a US government agency with a mission of poverty reduction through economic growth—we only work with relatively well-governed democracies. With over \$10 billion invested in Africa, MCC has supported developing democracies through better public services, investments in human capital, and expanded employment opportunities for their people—initiatives expected to benefit 154 million people.

Over [MCC's 20-year history](#), we have worked with two dozen African countries that meet our selective eligibility criteria. The "MCC effect" incentivizes potential partner countries to institute difficult but necessary policy and institutional reforms. This is in line with the [US Strategy on Global Development's](#) commitment to "strengthening democratic renewal and advancing good governance." Alongside large-scale infrastructure investments, each compact or threshold program also includes a strong focus on policy and institutional reform that recognizes that "institutions matter." For instance, as part of the \$322 million [MCC-Lesotho Health and Horticulture Compact](#), the government of Lesotho signed laws countering domestic violence and enabling women to own land and contribute to the country's economy.

A few positive examples do not necessarily mean that democracy will continue to be favored across Africa. But we must also recognize steady progress across the continent and leaders who are making difficult policy and institutional reforms to fight corruption and expand democratic rights. By delivering on the promise of democracy, continued progress will reinforce African calls for democracy and better position African citizens in a global economy, where Africa will lead the way.

Chidi Blyden is the deputy CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation.
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South Sudan Postpones Elections To 2026: a Move Toward Inclusivity and Stability

Ambassador Santino Fardol W. Dicken

The Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity recently announced that they are postponing South Sudan's elections, originally scheduled for December 2024. The new date for the elections is now set for 2026, marking a two-year extension. This decision goes beyond addressing mere logistical challenges; it reflects South Sudan's commitment to resolving essential issues to ensure a fair and credible electoral process. The delay allows the South Sudanese government to address crucial prerequisites for a successful election, including conducting a comprehensive constitutional review, establishing election laws, and completing a national census. These steps are essential for laying a solid foundation for a stable and democratic electoral process.

While some have expressed disappointment at the delayed elections, the postponement intends to make the election inclusive by incorporating holdout groups involved in the ongoing Tumaini peace talks and others who may want to join the peace process currently being mediated by Kenya. These groups remained outside the 2018 peace agreement, citing concerns over its implementation and inclusivity.

President Salva Kiir Mayardit has emphasized that the Tumaini talks do not replace the existing 2018 peace agreement but instead intend to address and integrate the concerns of the holdout groups within its framework. This approach aims to ensure inclusivity and prevent a cycle of conflict. The reconstituted delegation, led by General Kuol Manyang Juuk, is expected to engage constructively with the holdout groups to expedite the conclusion of the Tumaini peace negotiations, reflecting the government's dedication to achieving lasting peace in South Sudan.

These processes underpin President Kiir's promise to guide South Sudan on a path of peace and progress, adhering to his principle of "never taking his people to war again." The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan in 2018 has brought relative peace in South Sudan, and that is what the signatories of the agreement are trying to maintain.

In this vein, South Sudan calls on its international partners, especially the Africa Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the Troika (Norway, the UK, and the United States), to support its decision, recognizing the postponed elections as a necessary step toward sustainable peace. A free, fair, and inclusive election—conducted only when all conditions are right—offers the best path forward for South Sudan and mitigates the risk of instability that could arise from a premature vote. With adequate support, this move toward a well-prepared election could be a significant milestone in South Sudan's journey toward long-term peace and democracy.

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South Africa's Government of National Unity: New Political Coalitions With Outstanding Ideological Fault Lines

K. Riva Levinson

On April 26, 1994, at a remote polling station in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, on a mission with the United Nations, I witnessed one of the most significant milestones of the 20th century: the election of African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela to South Africa's presidency, ending the injustices of apartheid with the country's first all-race election.

Thirty years later, on May 29, 2024, as a member of an international election study tour on the outskirts of Pretoria, I observed a new generation of South Africans cast their votes. With no attachment to the liberation politics of the past, young voters were looking for a change of their circumstances, which too often include joblessness, crime, and the failure of government services such as electricity, health, and educational provisions. The electorate was responding to decades of greed and corruption by political leaders.

The pre-election polls predicted a loss for the ANC, but the question remained by how much and which party would capture their vote share. With the ANC factionalized, the increasing popularity of new political parties, changing political alliances, and meddling by international actors such as Russia, China, and Iran, no one could predict how the country would respond to the ANC losing its majority.

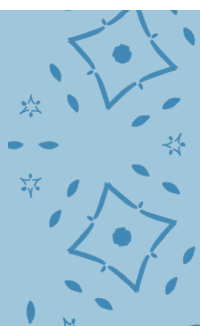
The 2024 elections, like those of 1994, were historic and consequential in their own right. In many ways, they demonstrated that a culture of democracy has become embedded in South Africa. In the end, there was no doomsday scenario; [South Africa met the moment](#). President Cyril Ramaphosa of the ANC and John Steenhuisen of the Democratic Alliance (DA) put aside their ideological differences and formed the Government of National Unity (GNU). They grounded their coalition in respect for the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the rule of law.

Six months in, the GNU's democratic center is holding, buoyed by [investment optimism](#) and the appreciation of South Africa's currency [to new heights](#). However, in matters of foreign policy, [real rifts](#) are emerging. The pull of geopolitical alignments is straining the GNU coalition. Emma Powell, the DA's spokesperson on international relations, suggests that the [ideological fault lines in the unity government](#) need to be mediated and a form of reconciliation found so the country can be consistent in its policy of non-alignment.

The GNU remains a fragile governing coalition, and more effort is needed to provide real change for South Africans. Coercive diplomacy, which threatens trade preferences and isolation, should be set aside for more precise US engagements that strengthen the constitutional center of the governing coalition, support private sector-led economic growth, and blunt the interventions of international actors supporting divisive politics that would most certainly lead to the GNU's collapse.

K. Riva Levinson is the president and CEO of KRL International.

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Personal Reflections On 2024 In Africa

H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo

What a year 2024 turned out to be for Africa. The lack of peace, the threats to democracy, and other forms of insecurity diminished the hope of a peaceful year of progress for two-thirds of the population. At the same time, African countries saw significant elections with important, peaceful transfers of power. All the while, international conflicts and the global economy continue to negatively impact hopes for greater economic growth for many, threatening progress for future generations.

Africa experienced pronounced security concerns across the continent. Events in countries such as Gabon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso engaged the attention of African leaders and concerned world leaders. Some feared that recent upheavals posed an ongoing danger to democracy. On the other hand, ongoing conflicts like in South Sudan, Somalia, and Guinea Bissau were almost taken as normal. The conflict in Sudan deteriorated, and groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya stubbornly persist.

Politically, many positive signs from significant elections resulted in a showing of reinforced democracy. For the first time in 30 years, the African National Congress lost the majority in South Africa's elections. In Botswana, the Botswana Democratic Party, which had ruled the country since independence, lost and peacefully transferred power. Namibia's elections also broke new ground with the welcoming of a female president for the first time. And most recently, Ghana's former president, John Mahama, won the election to return for a second term. Even Chad had an election. It was won by the military leader (well, it was democratization, in a way).

On the economic side, several African countries posted growth at year-end but not at a level that will get them out of poverty or reach the status of an emerging economy within a generation. Similarly, despite the efforts and contributions of the World Bank, African Development Bank, African Export-Import Bank, and Africa Finance Corporation, Africa's infrastructure development is painfully slow, grossly underfunded, and generally inadequate. To spur necessary trade to advance Africa's economies in support of future generations, the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is a pact African leaders should pursue with maddening efforts and speed. The progress made (or not made) in 2024 has begun to dampen the enthusiasm of some who felt hopeful with the AfCFTA's launching.

Africa has no immunity against the adverse effects of international events. For example, the ongoing wars, conflict, and unrest in the Middle East and in Ukraine continue to have deleterious effects on trade, commodities, and vital imports, to name a few.

At best, after 2024, Agenda 2063 remained stagnant and with guns unsilenced. On balance, Africa has more issues on the debit side than the credit side at the end of the year. But learning and applying the right lessons to guide future engagements will keep 2024 from being a lost year.

H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo served as Nigeria's head of state from 1976 to 1979 and later as its president from 1999 to 2007.

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Upholding Electoral Standards to Curb Growing Impunity in Africa

Joseph Siegle

In Africa and around the world, 2024 has been known as the year of elections. It may also be remembered on the continent as a year of deepening impunity. Nineteen African presidential elections were on the docket at the beginning of the year. Yet authorities in five of these countries—Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, and South Sudan—failed to even hold the polls. Where elections proceeded, [six were recognized](#) as deeply flawed, including those in Algeria, Chad, the Comoros, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Tunisia. The “winning” incumbents were, nevertheless, congratulated by their peers around the continent and the globe as if this were normal.

Impunity around elections tends to be part of a culture of violating the rule of law. Protections for a free press and controls against corruption are key indicators of respect for the rule of law. In the 11 countries that ignored or staged elections, 9 had incidents where journalists were killed, disappeared, or detained in 2024. The median ranking for these 11 countries on Transparency International’s [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) is 142 (out of 180 countries globally). This is roughly 20 places higher than the African median.

Impunity around elections is also linked to higher rates of conflict. Sudan provides a sobering case in point. The rival Sudanese military leaders were united in preventing elections and civilian rule during the transition period from 2019 to 2021 despite having agreed to do so. This unwillingness to follow the rule of law ultimately spiraled out of control and catapulted the country into conflict in 2022.

That conflict has been marked by an extraordinarily high level of impunity. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have persistently engaged in ethnic violence in Darfur and widespread looting and rape in other regions. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching areas it does not control. Still, leaders from the RSF and SAF continue to be welcomed by some African and other heads of state.

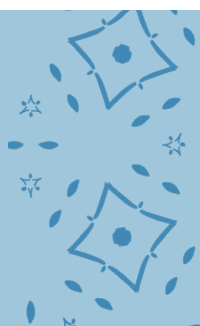
While the authorities exploiting impunity may not bear much reputational, legal, or financial cost, the burden on citizens is heavy. Instability wrought by impunity frequently spills across borders, making it a regional threat. This is the current reality engulfing Sudan’s seven neighbors.

While redressing impunity may seem a Sisyphean task, a concrete starting point for the continent in 2025 is elevating the standards around elections. This, in turn, will be a building block toward stability. Ruling parties that graciously accepted electoral losses in 2024, as was the case in Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, and South Africa, show that such norms are attainable.

The culture of impunity is contagious. So too can be the momentum for higher standards. Flipping the trend line is imperative if Africa is to realize its aspirations.

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Supporting Kenya's Democracy: US–Kenya Relations in a Time of Domestic Volatility

Aaron Stanley

Kenya received a prominent spotlight in US–Africa relations this year. President William Ruto's May 2024 state visit marked the first time in 16 years that an African leader received an invitation for this celebration of bilateral relations. The visit to Washington came with a [raft of funding commitments and partnerships](#) and, notably, the designation of Kenya as a major non-NATO ally—the first in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The expanded partnership came under [immediate scrutiny](#), however, as youth-led protests across Kenya were met with a [violent police response](#) less than a month after President Ruto's trip. The protests responded to the 2024 Finance Bill but had their foundations in longstanding frustrations among Kenyans over the cost of living, government accountability, and corruption.

It is helpful to contextualize Kenya's political challenges and these protests through a long-term lens. Kenya's democracy is young. The country's first true [democratic elections](#) were in 2002 with the election of President Mwai Kibaki. Then, following election-spurred [violence in 2007 and 2008](#), the country inaugurated a new constitution. The current government structures are less than 15 years old.

New institutions are most vulnerable in these early years. As people engage with these institutions, the different sides jockey for power and influence. While, in many cases, the political tussles eventually subside and new institutions become accepted as the “rules of the game,” it can take up to a generation. In other cases, this competition can rupture into violent conflict as it did in Kenya in 2007 and 2008.

Taxation represents one of these fundamental rules of the game and a critical connection between citizens and their government. A closer correlation between a state's revenue and citizen taxation [creates stronger ties](#) than when a government's revenue comes, for example, from a commodity such as oil. However, corruption, perceived inequality, or frivolous spending all deeply harm the citizen–government relationship.

In Kenya, the Gen-Z protests responded to a government that is increasing taxes on a population that does not feel it is getting the appropriate value back. There is [visible corruption](#) across the country, and citizens regularly decry what they see as [superfluous spending by politicians](#). On top of that, many citizens feel that their political processes lack genuine consultation and inclusion.

The Gen-Z protests are an important inflection point in Kenya's citizen–state relations. How a government responds to these inflection points sets off on a path dependency that can be difficult to alter in the future. Limited responses that do not address structural concerns may provide short-term stopgaps but will ultimately fail to resolve increasing discontent and a fractured citizen–government relationship. With that perspective, the United States has an opportunity, particularly with the newly elevated non-NATO ally relationship, to play a constructive role that can help Kenya strengthen its democracy through experience sharing, engagement, and the promotion of transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance.

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John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana, addresses the General Debate of the UN General Assembly's seventy-first session. Drop of Light/Shutterstock.com

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Global Engagement

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Congressional Action: Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan

Representative John James

As the Chairman of the Africa Subcommittee on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I am concerned that the potential of the US-Africa relationship is not being realized due to the failure of US policy to address the very real challenges being faced on the continent.

One of the largest humanitarian crises taking place today is in Sudan, where over 18 months of devastating conflict has escaped the attention of the world.

Why is this the case? In 2004, when the Janjaweed, a militant organization, was committing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, there was international coverage of the suffering of the Sudanese people led by Hollywood celebrities.

Today, genocide is once again being committed in Darfur. It is unacceptable to hide behind the Ukraine war and conflict in the Middle East and claim a lack of resources or attention to act. In September 2004, the United States was involved in two wars in the Middle East with US soldiers on the ground, and yet President George W. Bush's administration declared genocide in Darfur, refusing to ignore the plight of the Sudanese people.

Today, as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world unfolds, US policy has insufficiently responded with an uncoordinated sanctions strategy and dead-end, failed peace talks.

Congressional leaders will, therefore, lead the way in holding malign actors accountable. In April 2024, the leaders of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee requested that a determination be made on whether the Rapid Support Forces leader, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti"), should be designated by [The Global Magnitsky Sanctions program](#) and that existing authority be used to sanction the Sudanese Armed Forces leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. This letter triggered a legal requirement for the administration to reply to Congress within 120 days with a decision. Unfortunately, the administration passed the buck, ignoring the seriousness of the bipartisan, congressional concern.

In 2004, it was also Congress who took the lead in declaring genocide being committed by the Janjaweed. In July 2024, the House of Representatives unanimously passed [House Resolution 1328](#) which I introduced to again declare genocide in Darfur. It is beyond time for the Department of State to make the same determination.

I also call on the US government to declassify intelligence on the involvement of all third parties in the conflict in Sudan.

I will continue to bring awareness to the immense humanitarian cost of the conflict in Sudan, including through the formal declaration of genocide in Darfur, and to the destabilizing actions of third parties involved in the conflict. This conflict must end, and it will only do so when the world holds the actors involved accountable.

Representative John James serves as the US representative for Michigan's 10th congressional district since 2023.

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Partnering to Advance Development: USAID and Africa in 2024

Monde Muyangwa

In 2024, the African continent witnessed great tumult but also many positive developments. While several conflicts worsened, instability spread, and diseases emerged, the [United States Agency for International Development](#) (USAID) continued to support progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS across Africa, make key investments in its people, and expand and strengthen efforts to lift up economic resilience and development. I want to highlight three key areas in which USAID engaged with our African partners this year to address both opportunities and challenges.

USAID helped address the impact of drought and strengthen long-term food security. In southern Africa, the worst drought in a century caused widespread food insecurity, affecting an estimated 26 million people and contributing to an energy crisis across the region. In response, the US government provided humanitarian assistance and made agricultural investments to boost long-term food security. USAID's [Feed the Future Accelerator](#) recognizes that southern Africa has the potential to be a breadbasket, both feeding the region and exporting beyond it. Providing short-term food assistance to those in need while developing resilient food systems will ensure a more sustainable food security outlook for the entire continent.

USAID helped to increase US-Africa trade and investment. In the last six months of 2024, the US government facilitated 401 deals valued at \$32.5 billion across Africa. USAID prioritized working with [Prosper Africa](#) to boost trade and investment as part of this investment surge. In 2024, Prosper Africa expanded its engagement with the continent, launching the US-Africa Trade Desk, which closed its first deal for over \$56 million soon after its creation. Prosper Africa continues to create opportunities to leverage private investment dollars and reduce perceived risk for investments on the continent, while USAID has continued to engage multilateral and bilateral partners for increased economic resilience across the continent.

USAID helped improve health outcomes and strengthen pandemic control and identification capacities. Global health security remains a priority in our post-COVID-19 world. In Africa, we saw continued gains in responding to HIV/AIDS, preventing and treating malaria and TB, and addressing ongoing outbreaks while also managing new disease outbreaks such as mpox and Marburg. USAID is supporting the historic rollout of the world's first malaria vaccines and played a pivotal role in expanding access to vaccines for the mpox response while increasing access to diagnostics. Critically, USAID is investing in risk communication and information integrity campaigns to enable people to access accurate outbreak information for the Marburg and mpox outbreaks.

USAID remains a steadfast partner to countries across Africa. As 2024 draws to a close, we look forward to building on the progress made and helping advance development goals across the continent.

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From Music to Trade: Africa's Cultural Proliferation and Economic Growth

Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli

For the first time in history, twelve African artists from four countries are nominated across multiple categories in the 2025 Grammys. The nominations reflect Afrobeats' rise and African music's global impact. Sub-Saharan Africa's music industry is the [fastest-growing worldwide](#), with revenue up over 20% in 2023 alone. The industry showcases how African youth are transforming the [continent's creative landscape](#) across fashion, technology, and beyond.

Africa is not only undergoing a cultural renaissance but also emerging as a global economic force. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), encompassing 54 nations, has created one of the world's largest free trade zones, unlocking vast market potential for global economies, including the United States. In 2023, intra-African trade reached 14.9% of Africa's total trade, up from 13.6% the previous year. This growth is driven by AfCFTA's tariff reductions, improved transportation, and digital trade expansion. Projects such as the Lagos–Abidjan Corridor, connecting Nigeria and Ivory Coast, have smoothed trade flows across West Africa, benefiting industries ranging from manufacturing to agriculture and catalyzing regional economic growth.

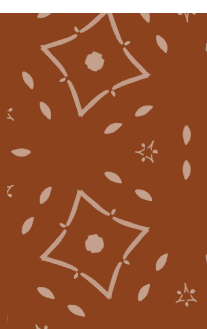
In spite of these positive trends, Africa continues to be burdened by persistent negative stereotypes that hinder its potential on the world stage. [Africa No Filter](#) recently estimated that these stereotypes, which often paint Africa as a "hungry child" or a region of "risk," cost the continent an estimated \$4.2 billion in annual interest rates. These costs are likely higher, considering the skewed credit ratings that inflate borrowing costs for African countries. According to the United Nations Development Programme, Africa could save [up to \\$74.5 billion](#) if credit ratings reflected the financial risks more accurately. A global narrative that frames Africa mainly in terms of crisis disregards the resilience and potential of the world's fastest-growing continent.

To be clear: the ongoing crises of debt, climate, and conflict in parts of Africa must not be ignored. But the continent is poised to meet these challenges with innovative solutions that reflect countries' actual wants, not what the rest of the world presumes they need. Strengthening partnerships is beneficial to the health, economic growth, and national security of all countries. As new leadership emerges in the United States and other major economies, increased investment in African infrastructure, value-addition interventions, and digital payment systems will further unlock intra-regional trade and growth.

Global media has a responsibility to move beyond stereotypes to highlight African success stories and innovations. At ONE, we advocate for Africa's agency by collaborating with media and influencers to tell authentic stories. We are pushing for fair financing, enabling trade policies, and transformative investment in critical sectors. Africa's trajectory reflects resilience, creativity, and strength. With the right partnerships and an accurate global narrative, the potential for growth is vast—not only for Africa but for a world that stands to benefit from an empowered and flourishing continent.

Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli is the president and CEO of the ONE Campaign.

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Revitalizing Multilateralism in Africa: Positive Advancements in Governance, Trade, and International Engagement

Jide Okeke

Multilateralism works. Yet its effectiveness in Africa has been jeopardized by recent geopolitical polarization and regional conflicts. The [2023 Human Development Report](#) highlights how instability has cross-border implications in Africa. Between 2020 and 2023, Africa experienced a [resurgence of military coups](#), especially in West and Central Africa with prevailing consequences. For example, the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States signifies a shift in regional alliances, with new external influences reshaping Africa's regionalism.

Despite these challenges, Africa is demonstrating commendable resilience in its governance and development landscape. This is evidenced by the pattern of electoral outcomes, progress in intra-Africa trade, and Africa's enhanced voice in the global arena. Building on these gains through sustained collective African leadership engagement will pave the way for strengthening the multilateralism required to advance Agendas 2030 and 2063 on the continent.

2024 was described as a "Super Election Year," with [presidential elections in 14 African countries](#). Electoral processes thrived in countries such as Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, and Botswana, where opposition parties won or gained ground. Amid strong competition, Namibia elected its first female president. Countries such as Guinea and Gabon, affected by coups, began implementing roadmaps to restore constitutional order. Across most elections in Africa, voting patterns suggested a strong link between election results and the yearning for more people-centered governance.

Intra-Africa trade remains a critical focus of multilateralism. 48 African Union (AU) member states have ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement. 39 of these countries have joined the [AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative](#), a group that applies preferential terms to their members. Regional Economic Communities, alongside private sector leadership, are crucial for removing trade barriers and enhancing productivity. Prioritizing the free movement of people and cross-border infrastructure development remains essential to unlocking the full potential of the AfCFTA.

Representation of African interests on global platforms also expanded in 2024. The AU's admission to the G20 in 2023 marked a significant recognition of Africa's role in global economic governance. Beginning with South Africa's presidency of the G20 in December 2024, Africa has a unique chance to advance its development goals, particularly regarding inclusive economic growth, food systems, data governance, and the reform of the global financial architecture.

Overall, Africa made notable strides in 2024, achieving several collective goals and reinvigorating cooperation, albeit precariously. The future remains uncertain, especially with new developments in global governance capable of shaping Africa's development trajectory. However, Africa's progress toward an effective, coherent, and unified leadership at the continental level will help to promote stronger multilateralism as we enter 2025.

Jide Okeke is the coordinator of the Regional Program for Africa at the United Nations Development Program's Regional Service Center for Africa.

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The African Union Becomes a Full Member of the G20

Alex Vines

The African Union (AU) attended the G20 summit in November 2024, under the leadership of Brazil's presidency. This was the AU's first time attending as a full member and a watershed moment for amplifying Africa's voice in global forums.

The AU, made up of more than 50 nations, debuted as a full member of the G20 this year after upgrading from its previous status as an "invited international organization." The G20 is an intergovernmental economic forum comprising 19 countries and two regional unions, the European Union and now the AU. It represents 85% of the global economy, 75% of world trade, and 67% of the global population.

The AU was represented at the 2024 G20 summit by its chairperson of the Assembly, with assistance from the AU Commission chairperson, as decided at the 37th AU summit in Addis Ababa in February 2024. This decision was a compromise following a dispute on the leadership of the AU delegation and may not prove to be an effective long-term attendance formula for future G20 summits.

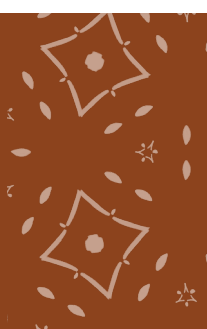
The 37th AU summit also identified six priorities to shape its engagement with the G20. These priorities not only address the most pressing concerns of Africa but also align with broader areas of debate within the G20. These include: accelerating the implementation of the AU's Agenda 2063; intensifying advocacy for reform of the international financial architecture and sovereign debt restructuring; increasing agricultural outputs towards food security; advancing the green energy transition; enhancing trade and attracting investments to support the Africa Continental Free Trade Area; and improving Africa's credit rating to boost investment, health, and vaccine manufacturing.

The South African presidency of the G20 began in December 2024 and is focused on fostering "[Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability](#)." It seeks to address critical global challenges, particularly for Africa's development. A key focus will be addressing the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality as well as Africa's development in alignment with the AU's [Agenda 2063](#). At the G20 summit in November, President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasized inclusive economic growth, food security, and artificial intelligence as South Africa's priorities for the coming year.

2025 presents the AU with an opportunity to collaborate with South Africa, the host of the first-ever G20 summit in Africa. But South Africa and the AU will need to be realistic and avoid the lengthy aspirational framing that Brazil and many other presidencies have aspired to, as this may simply alienate members who do not share some of the founding G20 principles. Remaining focused on limited and practical deliverables will ultimately be a more productive strategy for advancing Africa's interests on the global stage.

Alex Vines is the director of the Africa Program at Chatham House.

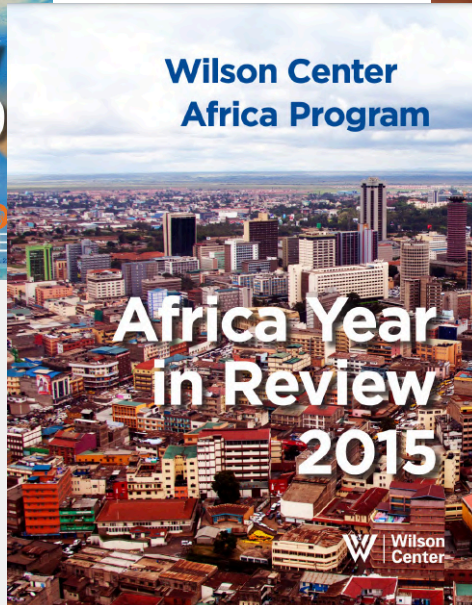
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Sunset in Nairobi, Kenya.
Antony Trivet Photography/Shutterstock.com

10 years of Africa: Year in Review



Our heartfelt thanks to to the contributors and readers who have made ten years of *Africa: Year in Review* possible. We look forward to continuing to provide a platform for coverage of critical developments in US-Africa relations and producing another decade of independent, scholarship driven analysis.

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