

THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

5 December 2025 Column

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A MIXED YEAR FOR AFRICA: A ROUND UP

Africa has experienced a turbulent year, with the shifting geopolitical landscape affecting countries from Cape to Cairo and the past year has brought challenges and achievements across the continent. From economic shifts and major political developments including the Generation Z protests, to some social progress and big climate concerns, this roundup highlights some of the key issues and trends that shaped the continent's diverse landscape.

The end of aid as we know it

The inauguration of US President Donald Trump and the rise of transactional politics and relationships drastically shifted Africa/US relations this year. The sudden and abrupt cuts in aid and funding for HIV caused immediate panic in the non-governmental and government sector. The aid cuts also affected long-standing health programs, such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

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In a recent report by UNAIDS said the global response to the disease "immediately entered crisis mode" after support was halted by Trump in January. The Trump administration also gutted the major US aid organisation, USAID.

According to Africa Practice, in 2023, USAID allocated a total of USD 12.1 billion to countries in sub-Saharan Africa and USD 12.7 billion in 2024, equating to 31% of USAID's foreign assistance.



The Africa Practice stated that a significant portion of this funding went “towards life-saving programs such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, and nutrition interventions”.

With these cuts, the US showed it was not a dependable or predictable partner. Africa has been deprioritised, and Trump has been the US wants access to Africa’s rich mineral wealth. The US cuts also demonstrated that Africa has been overly reliant on aid and support.

The US cuts forced Africa to look inwards and forced it to wean itself off US aid support. This shift has prompted many African nations to explore alternative partnerships and funding sources; however, it is too soon to say whether governments have begun prioritising sustainable development initiatives that could reduce reliance on external aid.

South Africa and US relationship changes

Relations between the US and South Africa have reached an all-time low since Trump took office in January, also partly due to Elon Musk, a South African-born individual, using X to spread untruths and promote alarming claims, including accusations of 'white genocide' with several local Afrikaner groups. Relations between the two have

reached an all-time low due to actions such as cancelling millions of rand in aid projects, signing executive orders to grant Afrikaners refugee status, and expelling Pretoria's ambassador to the US, Ebrahim Rasool.

And the political dynamics of US-South Africa relations have also become increasingly complex. Trump's administration has favoured a transactional approach to international partnerships, and it's become clear that deep-rooted historical ties and mutual interests are no longer relevant.

Earlier this year, the author suggested that more developments were forthcoming, and since then, the relationship has continued to deteriorate. There was still more to come, including the free trade agreement, AGOA, and South Africa losing access to duty-free access to the US for some of its exports to the US including cars and fruit.

Then there was also the fact that Trump did not attend the G20 meeting. Trump’s selection of Leo Brent Bozell III as ambassador is also a concerning indication, and it is evident that the US administration

continues to maintain its criticism of Pretoria.

THE 2026 G20 ROIKA WILL BE SA, US AND UK.

At the time of publication, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee had approved Bozell's nomination to serve as ambassador to South Africa; it is now up to the full Senate to confirm the controversial right-winger Bozell for his position in Pretoria in 2026.

This decision has sparked considerable debate among political analysts, who questioned the implications of such an appointment for US-South Africa relations. There's concern that Bozell's views may exacerbate tensions rather than foster constructive dialogue.

In a recent statement, Trump expressed his disapproval of South Africa's invitation to the G20 leaders' summit in the US in 2026. However, it will be easier said than done. The previous, current, and incoming presidencies do form an important troika that supports the G20 presidency. During South Africa's presidency, the Troika consisted of Brazil, South Africa, and the United States of America. The 2026 troika will be SA, US and UK. Trump cannot act unilaterally on this front and exclude South Africa and could question the G20's legitimacy in addressing global challenges.

Gen Z protests challenge long-time rule

Over the past few months, we have witnessed young people challenging dominant political powers across various regions, from Kenya to Morocco to Madagascar. Young people have effectively utilised social media as a tool for mass mobilisation, confronting traditional media and political elite power structures. Protests erupted in Madagascar in October, initially focusing on the pressing issue of electricity and water shortages, where the median age is 19. Later, these protests led to the ousting of President Andry Rajoelina and the subsequent military takeover.

These demonstrations then broadened to encompass a range of critical concerns, including unemployment, corruption, poor governance, and inadequate basic services for millions of people. High unemployment and growing inequality have been some of the major drivers of change in countries across Africa. Anger and political exclusion have fuelled the protests.

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The UN says there are more than 1.22 billion young people in the world. Africa is home to nearly 400 million young people between the ages of 15-35 and 60% of the continent's population is under the age of 25. According to the UN population fund, young people are defined as those aged 10 to 24.



The Gen Z protests are highlighting a profound frustration with the limited opportunities available to young people, prompting governments and older generations to re-evaluate their governance methods. What this wave of activism highlighted was the growing influence of youth in shaping political landscapes, as they demand accountability and transparency from their leaders and challenge political elites that they say are responsible for the profound structural challenges in some economies.

Ongoing Sudanese conflict

It's been a violent year for the people of Sudan. A war has plagued Sudan for the past two years, causing widespread destruction in various parts of the country. The war has been devastating for the country, which is Africa's third largest and is surrounded by Egypt, Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Eritrea. Sudanese people have either fled the country and become refugees or are facing a humanitarian crisis.

Humanitarian organisations, such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), have described Sudan as the "biggest humanitarian crisis ever recorded," with millions of people displaced. The situation continues to worsen as access to necessities like food, water, and medical care becomes increasingly limited. Ongoing violence and political instability often hinder aid efforts, leaving many in desperate need of assistance.

The fighting has involved two military leaders who were once close comrades: army head General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the leader of the rebel group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who have been battling for ultimate power.

In September, the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and UAE - known as "the Quad"—proposed a three-month humanitarian truce to the two sides in September. But the mayhem and killings have continued unabated without accountability. In October, the RSF took control of el-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, and human rights groups reported widespread mass killings. In November, the RSF accepted the Quad's proposal for the truce, but Sudan's army chief, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, rejected it and instead accused the mediators of being 'biased'. This rejection underscores the deepening divide between the factions and raises concerns about the ongoing humanitarian crisis. As violence escalates, the international community faces increasing pressure to intervene and facilitate lasting peace, which seems elusive.

Bloody Tanzania election

This October, Tanzania witnessed one of the most violent elections in its history. The ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, won the election amid an unprecedented violent crackdown on protests and an election boycott.



The Independent National Electoral Commission, the electoral body, quickly announced that the incumbent president, Samia Suluhu Hassan, won the election with 97.66% of the vote. Hassan was hastily sworn in on November 3, a ceremony was held for the second term that excluded millions of people and was closed to the public amid continuing protests.

Tanzania has always prided itself on relatively peaceful elections in the past, but this crackdown has shredded and shattered that notion. The ruling party clearly wanted to remain in power despite facing criticism, and this election has shown that they are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve this, even if it means resorting to extreme measures. Since the violent crackdown, we remain unclear about the extent of the death toll and the number of arrests of opposition party members. The opposition believes hundreds of people died, but until it goes to print, the government has yet to give a death toll. It has, however, set up a commission of inquiry.

Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has been asked to investigate President Samia and the government for crimes against humanity. An international coalition of lawyers and human rights groups alleges that mass killings occurred, along with the secret disposal of hundreds of bodies. Activists and global watchdogs continue to call for urgent intervention to ensure justice for the victims

and their families. At the time of going to print, the European Union froze aid worth more than a 150 million euro. The European Parliament rejected the country's 2026 aid package citing what it calls 'systemic democratic backsliding' and serious human rights violations'

2026 - Economic headways

As we wrap up the year and look ahead to 2026, African economies and growth will be a key issue. The African Development Bank projects a 4% growth for the continent and has urged governments to enable smarter domestic capital use to counter inflation, debt, and financial leakages.

The Bank says the positive growth outlook is 'underpinned by buoyant private consumption spending, accommodative monetary policy, a weaker US dollar, which is aiding disinflation, and stronger growth among key trading partners.'

However, the Bank is concerned that the rising debt service payments will eliminate the available resources and funding needed for development and socio-economic spending. This, in turn, could hinder progress on crucial infrastructure projects and social programs essential for sustainable development.

According to the Institute of Economic Justice, Africa's debt servicing now consumes nearly 17% of government revenues and 15% of export earnings, eroding fiscal space and reducing import capacity. It's estimated that African countries would pay close to \$89bn in external debt service alone, with 20 low-income countries currently at risk of debt distress. How African governments navigate this in 2026 will be key, as these precarious financial situation points will erase any growth and determine whether multilateral institutions will announce comprehensive debt relief measures. Without such interventions, African nations will struggle to achieve their development goals, further exacerbating poverty and inequality across the continent.

PREVIOUS ISSUES



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HOW GEN Z ARE UPPING THE ANTE ON AFRICAN LEADERS

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