



FRONTLINE AFRICA
— ADVISORY —



Africa 2025

The Year That Was

**CELEBRATING
A DECADE OF BUSINESS**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2025 marked the continuation of a protracted governance crisis across Africa. Inherited instabilities from 2024 and years before - including escalating conflicts in the Horn of Africa and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), entrenched military juntas in the Sahel, and systemic economic vulnerabilities across many countries - collided with ambitious continental integration goals.
- Opportunities in critical minerals, trade, and industrialisation remained largely unrealised, as the erosion of democratic norms and institutional stability, rather than external shocks, emerged as the primary barrier to progress. Sustainable growth now depends on credible governance above all.
- Building on 2024's turbulent foundation - where 18 national elections were slated but at least two were postponed (South Sudan and Senegal), highlighting structural governance fragilities - 2025 intensified these trends.
- Elections in Gabon, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Tanzania entrenched one-man rule through fraud, disqualifications, and violence, while rare democratic breakthroughs in Malawi and Seychelles provided fleeting reminders of resilience.
- Military takeovers in Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau, alongside an attempted coup in Benin, amplified continent-wide coup risks, undermining investor confidence and stalling critical infrastructure projects.
- These political shocks directly imperilled the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Africa's flagship integration initiative. Conflict corridors, internet shutdowns, and contested borders in Sudan, DRC, and the Sahel illustrated how governance fragility undermines the AfCFTA's operational mandate.
- The African Union's limited capacity for decisive action, including that of its Peace and Security Council (PSC) - the AU's standing decision-making body for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, designed to provide collective security and early warning - has created opportunities for external actors.
- Foreign powers, such as the U.S. and Qatar, have exerted influence in regions like the Eastern DRC, as well as in Sudan and South Sudan, shaping peace processes while African institutions struggled to assert their authority and coordinate effective responses.
- Amid these setbacks, South Africa's hosting of the first African G20 Summit in Johannesburg, under the theme "**Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability**", briefly advanced a landmark Critical Minerals Framework committing members to on-continent processing of rare earths to anchor industrialisation. However, this agenda was subsequently diluted following an increasingly hostile U.S. reassertion of control over the G20 process, constraining follow-through on broader priorities - namely inclusive growth, food security, debt sustainability, and climate finance - which ultimately stalled amid renewed geopolitical contestation and institutional instability.
- Geopolitical trade dynamics further complicated Africa's economic landscape. Chinese investments under the 2024 FOCAC framework surpassed \$300 billion in bilateral trade, prioritising infrastructure development and a non-interference approach. In contrast, U.S.-Africa relations weakened following the expiration of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the risk of exclusion under Congress's revised AGOA framework, potentially reducing African exports by an estimated \$10 billion. This divergence highlighted the declining influence of conditional democracy-linked aid in shaping trade and investment flows on the continent.
- The 2025 lesson is unequivocal: without addressing governance deficits through empowered regional bodies such as the AU PSC, ECOWAS's democracy protocols, SADC's Organ, and the EAC/IGAD equivalents, Africa risks a decade of fragmentation.
- With high-stakes elections in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Benin looming in 2026, alongside persistent Sahel and Horn conflicts, the continent stands at a crossroads: consolidate reforms to unlock AfCFTA-driven growth, or perpetuate cycles of instability that squander demographic and resource dividends.



Introduction

- Africa in 2025 was a land of contrasts: immense potential for economic transformation juxtaposed against deepening governance challenges that threatened to unravel continental ambitions. A youthful population, abundant critical minerals, and rising global demand for green energy inputs positioned Africa as a pivotal player in multilateral forums.
- The AfCFTA advanced tariff liberalisations, and the African-hosted G20 Summit established frameworks for beneficiation and sustainable growth. Geopolitical shifts, including intensified Sino-African ties and U.S. trade uncertainty, offered new investment avenues.
- Yet these opportunities were overshadowed by a deepening democratic recession inherited from 2024. At the start of 2024, 18 presidential and general elections were slated across the continent, but persistent instability led to postponements in South Sudan and Senegal, limiting the number of polls actually held. Scripted elections, military coups, and persistent violence across key regions highlighted governance, rather than external factors, as Africa's most critical barrier to integration.
- Ultimately, it appears that 2025 represented the apex of multi-year institutional weakening, where global prospects became largely unrealised without reforms. This report reviews the 2024-2025 trajectory, political dynamics, AfCFTA fragility, regional responses, G20 outcomes, trade imbalances, and forecasts 2026 implications, concluding that bridging governance gaps remains the continent's most urgent task.



From 2024 to 2025: Continuity and Escalation of Challenges

Electoral Fault Lines

- The 2024-2025 electoral calendars revealed a stark democratic divergence across Africa. Authoritarian consolidations in Rwanda, Chad, Comoros and Mozambique contrasted sharply with resilient transitions in Senegal, Ghana, Botswana, Mauritius, Malawi, South Africa.
- Even successful alternations were tempered by economic grievances: Kenya experienced widespread protests over fiscal policies, underscoring how governance failures exacerbate inequality.
- Authoritarian consolidations often followed a common playbook: opposition disqualifications, manipulated results, and post-coup “transitions” normalising military oversight. Rwanda’s Kagame secured a fourth term with 99% amid opposition suppression. Comoros’ Assoumani was re-elected after a controversial referendum, sparking protests. Chad’s Mahamat Idriss Déby won amid boycotts and violence. Tunisia’s Saied reset term limits to extend executive control, while Gabon’s coup leader Oligui Nguema won a transitional election with 90% of votes.
- In contrast, resilient outcomes in Senegal, Ghana, Botswana, Mauritius, Malawi, South Africa demonstrated that alternation remains possible where institutional safeguards and civic traditions are stronger.
- Only roughly one-third of Africa’s elections met international competitiveness standards, a trend that intensified in 2025.

Key 2024 Elections and Governance Implications

Country	Date	Outcome	Governance Implications
Comoros	Jan	Assoumani: 60%	Post-referendum consolidation;
Senegal	Mar	Postponed	Electoral delay underscores
Chad	May	Déby: 61%	Military-dominated politics; fragile
South Africa	May	ANC: 40%	Coalition governance; power-
Rwanda	Jul	Kagame: 99%	Entrenched one-man rule; opposition
Tunisia	Oct	Saied: Landslide	Democratic backsliding; media
Botswana	Oct	UDC majority	Historic alternation; anti-corruption focus
Mauritius	Nov	Opposition landslide	Credible transfer; governance reforms
Ghana	Dec	Mahama: 51%	Competitive polls; economic reform
Mozambique	Dec	FRELIMO majority	Consolidated power amid post-election

Junta Entrenchments and Security Deterioration

- 2024 saw the consolidation of military rule in the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad), creating a contagion effect that manifested in 2025 coups in Madagascar and Guinea-Bissau and an attempted coup in Benin. Sahelian juntas pivoted to Moscow-backed security arrangements, deploying mercenaries in exchange for mining concessions, and delayed elections until 2027.
- In the DRC, M23 escalated offensives toward Goma, displacing millions, even as U.S. and Qatar-led peace initiatives attempted to broker agreements. These foreign interventions filled the gap left by the AU PSC's ineffectiveness, illustrating Africa's limited institutional leverage over internal conflicts.
- Sudan remained in crisis, with fighting between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) intensifying, while South Sudan's delayed elections continued to be shaped by Uganda's influence and the interplay of external actors.
- The AU's inability to act decisively, coupled with ECOWAS's failures in preventing West African disintegration, further exposed institutional weaknesses across the continent.



The Democratic Recession in 2025

- Elections in 2025 largely devolved into rituals legitimising entrenched rule:
 - Gabon: Oligui Nguema wins ~90%; constitution amended to expand powers.
 - Cameroon: Biya secures an eighth term with 53.7%; opposition suppressed.
 - Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara wins a controversial fourth term with 89.77%; protests banned.
 - Tanzania: Hassan declared winner with 98%; post-election violence and internet shutdowns.

Democratic breakthroughs:

- Malawi: Mutharika defeats Chakwera with 56.8%; peaceful transfer.
- Seychelles: Herminie wins runoff with 52.7%; smooth alternation.
- Authoritarian patterns - long-serving leaders, implausible margins, neutralised opposition - erode electoral integrity, while resilient cases show alternation is still achievable where institutions are strong.

AfCFTA: Implications of Governance Erosion

- The AfCFTA, Africa's flagship integration mechanism, relies on stable governance, secure borders, and institutional trust. Political shocks in 2025 - elections marred by fraud, disqualifications, and violence, and conflict corridors in Sudan, DRC, and the Sahel - blocked trade routes, raised costs by 15-20%, and created de facto non-tariff barriers.

Country	Event	Economic Effect	AfCFTA Impact
Sudan	Civil war blocks Port Sudan	\$8B trade halted; 8M+ displaced	Eastern corridor severed
DRC	M23 offensive	\$4.2B mining investments suspended	Great Lakes corridor unstable
Madagascar	Military takeover	AU suspension; development financing halted	Investor confidence collapses
Guinea-Bissau	Coup	Investment frozen	ECOWAS corridor weakened
Gabon	Post-coup election	Oil and mining uncertainty	Weakens CEMAC-AfCFTA integration
Cameroon	Biya re-election	FDI deterred	Central-West trade corridor blocked
Côte d'Ivoire	Controversial 4th term	Political risk; cocoa stable	ECOWAS integration threatened
Tanzania	Rigged election	Tourism disrupted; digital trade halted	Digital corridor paralysed
Malawi	Peaceful alternation	Investor confidence up	Southern Africa SADC trade strengthened
Seychelles	Credible runoff	Stable tourism/finance	Limited AfCFTA impact

Continental and Regional Responses

- Africa's specialised regional and continental organs continue to face chronic gaps between mandate and operational reality, limiting their ability to address conflicts and enforce governance norms effectively. The AU PSC, tasked with conflict prevention, management, and resolution, demonstrated mixed effectiveness in 2025. While it was relatively successful in coordinating responses to the crisis in Madagascar, the Council struggled to assert authority in the DRC and Sudan, with inconsistent enforcement creating opportunities for foreign actors, including the United States, Qatar, and other external powers, to shape peace processes.
- Similarly, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation acted swiftly during the Madagascar crisis, particularly following the ousting of President Andry Rajoelina, but proved inadequate in responding to the complex security challenges posed by M23 insurgencies in the DRC.



- These institutional weaknesses across the AU, SADC, ECOWAS, EAC, and IGAD have exacerbated governance fragility in affected states, undermining the continent's broader integration frameworks, including the AfCFTA. Without stronger coordination, adequately resourced institutions, and genuine enforcement mechanisms, Africa's regional and continental organisations remain challenged in addressing the intersection of conflict, governance, and economic integration.



Global Trade and Geopolitical Dynamics

- China:** \$51B FOCAC pledge (2024); bilateral trade >\$300B; non-interference strategy stabilises authoritarian regimes.
- U.S.:** AGOA expiration reduces exports by ~\$10B; conditional democracy leverage fades; foreign aid more transactional.
- Foreign powers influence both governance outcomes and conflict management, often sustaining undemocratic regimes in Burkina Faso, the Sahel, and DRC, while African institutions fail to assert authority effectively.



2026 Outlook: Risks and Priorities

Risk Category	Key Issue/Region	Potential Impact on 2026
Political Risks	Uganda, Ethiopia, Benin elections	Reinforced authoritarian patterns
Security Risks	Sudan (RSF vs SAF), South Sudan	Continued conflict, refugee flows
Security Risks	Eastern DRC (M23 zones)	Investment uncertainty, humanitarian crises
Security Risks	Sahel Juntas	Trade corridor disruptions
Governance Risks	AU PSC, SADC, ECOWAS ineffectiveness	Limited crisis response
Economic Risks	AfCFTA disruptions	4–5% GDP growth constrained
Geopolitical Risks	China, Russia influence vs U.S. engagement	Strategic dependency, policy leverage

Conclusion

- 2025 encapsulated Africa's paradox: a governance crisis rooted in 2024's unresolved fractures collided with rising opportunities, turning potential into peril. Democratic recessions, authoritarian elections, coups, and conflicts exposed institutional voids, while Malawi and Seychelles provided rare counterpoints of resilience.
- The AfCFTA faltered amid corridor disruptions and investor flight, compounded by regional organs' mandate-reality gaps. The G20 Summit delivered frameworks for inclusive growth, beneficiation, and climate finance, yet instability jeopardised rollout. Global imbalances - China's FOCAC surges and U.S. AGOA uncertainty - rewarded authoritarian regimes and undercut democratic leverage.
- Entering 2026, Africa must choose: fragmented instability or reform-driven peace, institutional strengthening, and balanced partnerships to unlock AfCFTA and G20 potential. Governance, above all, will determine the continent's decade.