

The state of Africa in the new world order

written by Will Shoki | April 8, 2025



Africa today stands at a crossroads, caught between internal crises, shifting global power dynamics, and the slow unraveling of the post-liberation political order. Across the continent, ruling parties that once commanded legitimacy as national liberators are losing their grip; yet the opposition remains fragmented, offering little in the way of alternative governance.

The Mozambican elections of 2024 provide one of the starkest examples of this decline, as the ruling Frelimo party declared victory in a process widely condemned as fraudulent. Opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane was running under the newly formed Podemos. He accused the government of orchestrating a massive electoral manipulation after parallel vote counts suggested he had actually won. The ruling party responded to mass protests with a violent crackdown. This continued a trend of suppressing political dissent while maintaining control through increasingly authoritarian means.

The growing illegitimacy of these liberation-era governments is not limited to Mozambique. In South Africa, the ANC has lost its outright majority for the first time since 1994, securing only around 40% of the vote in the 2024 elections. After decades of political dominance, the party now finds itself in an uneasy and deeply fragile coalition with the Democratic Alliance (DA), its long-time rival. This has forced the ANC into a more centrist governing position, limiting its ability to pursue policies that its traditional base might expect.

While some within the ANC view this coalition as a necessary compromise to maintain stability, others see it as a betrayal of the party's historic mission, particularly given the DA's neoliberal policy orientation. The consequences of this arrangement remain uncertain—whether the coalition will last, whether it will further fracture the ANC, or whether it will give rise to stronger opposition movements outside of the mainstream electoral process.

The ANC's decline follows a broader trend in Southern Africa. Zimbabwe's Zanu-PF remains entrenched through repression rather than popular support, using the judiciary and electoral commission to block serious opposition challenges. Meanwhile, Namibia's Swapo and Botswana's BDP have both faced unprecedented electoral challenges (with the BDP losing an election for the first time since independence), signaling that even once-stable ruling parties are no longer guaranteed easy victories. The unraveling of these movements suggests that their once-powerful

liberation credentials no longer provide a sufficient mandate for governance.

Conflict

The weakening of these governments is unfolding against the backdrop of worsening conflict and instability elsewhere on the continent.



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Sudan remains locked in a devastating war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. This is a conflict that has displaced millions while becoming increasingly internationalised, with Egypt and the UAE backing opposing sides. The war has not only deepened Sudan's economic collapse but also threatens regional stability, with spillover effects in Chad, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to struggle with armed insurgencies, particularly the resurgence of the M23, whose support from Rwanda has exacerbated regional tensions. Accusations of cross-border interference are further straining diplomatic relations.

These crises are not isolated; they reflect a deeper failure of governance across Africa, where the state is often unable to resolve social and economic grievances without resorting to violence.

The Trump effect

Amidst these crises, Africa is also navigating a shifting international order. The return of Donald Trump to the White House has already begun to reshape US-Africa relations. There has been a turn toward more transactional engagement and a renewed emphasis on security over development. One of Trump's first major foreign policy moves was slashing foreign aid, dismantling USAID, and cutting funding to key health programmes, including PEPFAR. This left millions without access to HIV treatment and other critical services.

This has been felt most acutely in countries where health systems are already under severe strain, exacerbating public health crises that could have long-term destabilising effects. The administration's rationale for these cuts is rooted in its broader 'America First' ideology. This sees foreign aid as an unnecessary expenditure rather than a strategic investment in stability.

And this has coincided with a hardening of US immigration policy. The administration is considering

a sweeping visa ban that could affect dozens of African countries, restricting travel for students, workers, and tourists alike. This approach is reminiscent of Trump's first-term travel bans. It signals a deepening of US isolationism in relation to Africa, treating the continent more as a security and migration risk than a diplomatic or economic partner.

Trump and South Africa

The administration's hostility toward South Africa has been particularly striking. Trump expelled the South African ambassador and imposed sanctions. This was in response to Pretoria's land expropriation policies and its foreign policy positions, particularly its efforts to hold Israel accountable for its genocide in Gaza. The administration brands this sympathy for Hamas and Iran.

These punitive measures reflect the administration's broader discomfort with governments that challenge US hegemony, particularly those within BRICS. By framing South Africa's policy positions as "anti-American," Trump has effectively severed one of the most significant diplomatic relationships between the US and an African power. This also plays into his administration's broader emphasis on privileging right-wing, authoritarian-aligned states while isolating governments perceived as left-leaning or independent.

US, China and African resources

At the same time, the Trump administration is pursuing a different kind of engagement with other African states, particularly in the resource sector. The administration is currently negotiating a minerals-for-security agreement with the DRC. They are offering military assistance in exchange for exclusive access to critical minerals, essential for advanced US industries, particularly in technology and defense. The deal would grant US companies extensive control over cobalt and other essential minerals. It reflects a shift in US strategy from development aid to direct economic extraction.



Trucks transporting minerals from a pit in Tenke Fungurume Mine in southeastern DRC. The US is offering military assistance in exchange for exclusive access to critical minerals, essential for advanced US industries.

The administration argues that this partnership will help stabilise the DRC by providing security assistance. Critics warn that it risks deepening neocolonial dynamics by prioritising resource extraction over genuine economic development.

At the same time, China's approach to Africa is also changing. For two decades, Beijing was the continent's dominant economic partner, financing infrastructure and trade at a scale unmatched by any other external power. However, with China's domestic economy slowing, its willingness to provide large-scale loans to African governments has diminished. Countries like Zambia and Kenya, heavily indebted to China, have already felt the pressure of Beijing's recalibrated lending strategy. The days of China offering easy credit for grand infrastructure projects may be coming to an end,

leaving African states in a precarious position. Many governments, having structured their economies around continued Chinese investment, now find themselves struggling to adjust to this new reality. The shift leaves Africa with fewer external financing options, as Western financial institutions have also tightened lending conditions, particularly for heavily indebted countries.

A possible new politics?

For African governments, these developments raise difficult questions about political and economic strategy. The decline of national liberation movements has not yet resulted in the emergence of viable progressive alternatives. Opposition parties across the region have largely embraced neoliberal governance models rather than articulating new visions for economic transformation. Instead of a decisive shift toward democratic renewal, much of the continent appears to be veering between increased state repression and fragmented opposition. Many opposition parties, while vocal in their criticism of ruling governments, have failed to offer economic programmes that break with the dominant neoliberal paradigm. This has meant that, even where ruling parties face electoral decline, there is little indication that their replacements would fundamentally alter the political or economic landscape.

While movements rooted in labour and grassroots struggles continue to push for change, their ability to challenge entrenched power structures remains uncertain. The weakness of Left alternatives in Africa today reflects broader global trends, where socialist and social-democratic forces have struggled to reassert themselves in a world shaped by finance capital and corporate power.

However, there are signs that this could change. Across the continent, there are growing calls for economic sovereignty, demands for stronger social protection programmes, and increased resistance to external financial dictates. If these struggles coalesce into more coherent political formations, they could provide the basis for a new kind of politics—one that breaks with both the failures of post-liberation parties and the limitations of liberal opposition forces.

The post-liberation political order in Africa is coming apart, but what comes next is far from clear. The erosion of ruling party legitimacy has not yet translated into meaningful systemic transformation. In many cases, it has simply opened the door for new forms of elite maneuvering. In this moment of transition, the real battle is not just over elections but over the very nature of the state, economic governance, and Africa's place in a rapidly changing world order. Until alternatives emerge that challenge the continent's dependence on global finance, resource extraction, and debt-driven growth, Africa will remain locked in cycles of instability, with or without the old liberation movements at the helm.

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