

Recommendations for Bolder Democratic Engagement with Africa

Part of the Trendlines and Transformations Series

A review of the state of democratic governance in Africa holds important lessons for US-Africa relations. Ongoing discussions of democratic trends in Africa suggest mixed but generally positive trajectories, as politics across the continent remains dependent on the interaction of economic, social, and political factors and is also influenced by wider regional, geopolitical, and global trends.

While most Africans [express dissatisfaction](#) with democratic governance for failing to deliver better outcomes, an encouraging [66 percent](#) of the population still prefer democracy to other forms of government. This is higher than in Asia, [Latin America](#), and the [Middle East](#).

The Wilson Center [Africa Program](#) and the Social Science Research Council's [African Peacebuilding Network](#) and [Next Generation Social Science in Africa](#) Program recently convened current and former government officials, academics, and thought leaders to discuss trends in democratic governance in relation to US-Africa relations. This is the first in a series of discussions focused on critical themes in US-Africa relations within an evolving geopolitical context. The discussion provided research-informed policy options in response to these trends.

Here are **five recommended strategic areas** that the incoming Trump administration should focus on as part of a bolder democracy agenda for Africa.

- **Build on existing US government programs that produce democracy and development dividends:** Shore up support for and, where necessary, update the following initiatives and programs – [Prosper Africa](#), [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) (MCC), [Development Finance Cooperation](#) (DFIC), [African Growth and Opportunity Act](#) (AGOA), [Feed the Future](#), and [PEPFAR](#). These cost-effective and bipartisan efforts are at the forefront of driving incremental positive transformations in Africa and creating mutually beneficial US partnerships with African countries.
- **Deepen support for programs and initiatives that show a positive correlation between democracy, trade, and investment:** [Nine of the 20 fastest-growing economies](#) in 2025 are projected to be in Africa. This is an opportunity to support the diversification of African economies, which is required to deliver dividends that African populations expect of their democratic governments. The US should adopt policies that advance economic opportunities for American public and private sector investment in Africa through advancing investment projects like the [Lobito Corridor](#) and additional future-looking cross-border investment opportunities. Promoting US investments in trade in Africa will contribute to economic and democratic growth by expanding job creation and strengthening manufacturing capacity. Additionally, continue to utilize the [Presidential Advisory Council for Doing Business in Africa](#) to generate ideas and broaden

opportunities to strengthen commercial engagement between the US and African countries.

- **Be the preferred partner and dependable democratic advocate for African countries:** Increase investment in development, human security, and democracy, and develop a consistent approach for navigating responses to unconstitutional changes of government. The US should update its democratic toolkit to reflect a coordinated, whole-of-government approach and partner with African countries to strengthen regulatory frameworks and democratic institutions for political transitions towards more responsive government. Strengthen efforts to promote peaceful resolution of violent conflicts on the continent, given their regional impact on security and economic advancement.
- **Support democratic actors across Africa that are preserving civic space:** Assess and, where necessary, increase funding levels to US democracy institutions that are working to strengthen civil society engagement, political processes, and local governance across Africa. In addition, build on the [Young African Leaders Initiative](#) (YALI) program to expand and include youth voices that reflect the changing demographics and dynamics on the continent. Support women's participation in political processes and as elected officials. Further, engage faith-based groups that are advancing inclusive peace processes and conflict resolution.
- **Listen to Africans:** Design and support initiatives with larger and more far-reaching positive impacts for stronger U.S. relations. Immediate, quick-win actions that may seem beneficial to Africa could have larger and far-reaching impacts. Therefore, it is important to understand the benefit of stronger US-Africa relations. Engaging African perspectives is essential to identifying engagement opportunities that align with African citizen desires. Deepen partnerships with and between US and African universities, think tanks, and networks to advance research and knowledge exchange that contribute to development in key sectors that are mutually beneficial to US-Africa relations.

We must recognize that US efforts to promote democracy, governance, and stability in Africa are complicated by a changing geopolitical and strategic context marked by the growing influence of rising regional actors and emerging middle powers. By adopting these context-specific recommendations, this incoming administration will advance democracy in Africa and strengthen US-Africa relations within the context of an overall strategy to make Americans more secure and prosperous.