

IS AFRICA TURNING AGAINST THE WEST?

edited by **Giovanni Carbone** and **Lucia Ragazzi**

introduction by **Paolo Magri**



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Introduction

When, in 2021, Africans were asked by the Afrobarometer which external actor had a more positive influence on their respective countries, the results were stark: first came China (63% said it had a positive influence), then came the United States (60%), while their “former colonial power”, usually a European country, came second to last (46%). Only Russia fared worse (35%).

Opinions change fast, and one has to wonder whether today African considerations about China wouldn't be lower, given how difficult it has been for a number of countries in the continent (such as Zambia, Ghana, or Ethiopia) to renegotiate their own debts with Beijing. However, one thing is clear: from governments to public opinions, African countries seem to be drifting towards increasing manifestations of anti-Westernism.

Of course, this is not a new trend: frustrations against external interference, paternalism, and a general lack of development tied to Western-led aid have all been thorns in the flesh for West-Africa relations. Still, the recent apparent increase in anti-Western sentiment is worrisome, as it comes at a specific moment where alternatives seem to be more easily available, from different models of development from China to unconventional security options offered by Russia. Yet, Western countries do not seem to be doing much to combat such negative sentiments – in fact, double standards seem to abound.

Why does Ukraine (and its 7 million refugees) matter more than African crises (and their 8 million refugees)? Why is the

response to African crises underfunded, with African countries receiving only 19% of all official development assistance disbursed by EU countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)? Why do Europeans look more at the effects of the Ukraine crisis on their own costs of food and energy, and worry less about their spillovers on other parts of the world, first and foremost Africa?

One consequence of this growing anti-Western sentiment seems to be also a movement away from Western values, especially those that seem to “underperform”. For instance, democracy is progressively out of luck in the African continent: this summer alone, we observed two coups. Since 2020, there were 9 coups in sub-Saharan Africa. Of these, 8 were in Francophone Africa.

Finally, just as different political souls, needs and priorities animate the continent, so the relationship between Africa and the West takes on many aspects. There are the better-known ones: the problematic relationship between (some) French-speaking countries and Paris, of which the recent anti-French demonstrations in the Sahelian capitals gave a powerful image, or Moscow’s charm offensive towards the continent. What, however, are the signals to look at to fully and deeply understand the relationship between Africa and the West?

This Report sets out to illuminate some of the elements that are crucial to put into perspective Africa-West narratives and perceptions, and to assess their consequences on bilateral and multilateral relations.

Anti-Western sentiment in sub-Saharan Africa is, inevitably, rooted in the problematic colonial history of European countries. The main object of this sentiment is France, towards which a combination of historical responsibilities – from its postcolonial relationship with its *pre-carré* to major persisting economic interests – and contemporary narratives is putting Paris’ posture in the continent to a test. Giovanni Carbone’s chapter, which opens the report, traces in a broad but precise manner the forms of the many behaviours to which France

is called upon to respond: a perceived arrogance in relations with its former colonies, various forms of paternalism and interventionism in the political decisions of African countries, up to the belief in the existence of a supposed “hidden agenda” in Paris, functional at guaranteeing its political privileges in Africa at detriment of the continent. While the accusations against France are a particularly notorious case, this phenomenon involves the entire West – from the EU to the US – which is seen as responsible for unfair global power and wealth distributions, with African countries lagging clearly behind the rest. At the same time, many Africans voice a resurgent desire to engage with alternative partners. A shift away from the West’s gravitational pole in African leadership choices, more visible in today’s political developments, is rooted in longstanding dynamics and has potentially far-reaching consequences.

What’s for sure is that it is crucial to understand Europe’s relationship with Africa by looking well beyond the short term. Just as a feeling of frustration with the West has matured on the basis of historical legacies, so too has the search for autonomy by African countries – and the Global South in general – in global politics. Significantly, Elizabeth Sidiropoulos and Gustavo de Carvalho invite us to see the “past as prologue” to understand the return of non-alignment as a priority in African international perspectives. Non-alignment, they explain, is a historical concept that has animated Africa’s consciousness as part of the Global South in the question of what place to claim on a global chessboard held hostage by the competition between great powers. In today’s world, the conditions for a renewed non-alignment, which goes beyond mere neutrality, are explored by African countries looking to claim an active role in an increasingly multipolar, but also increasingly divided world. In this sense, the war in Ukraine did not bring back to life a concept that had been frozen in time since the Bandung conference; on the contrary, it provided a concrete opportunity for enacting a “non-alignment for the 21st century” that many countries have been seeking for years.

Malte Brosig's chapter makes a truly pertinent contribution to this reflection, offering an analysis of African voting behaviour in the UN Security Council and General Assembly. Looking at how African countries have aligned with the big global players in the two fora, the chapter provides the reader with data to assess whether and how voting behaviour has changed in the face of major shifts, shocks and rivalries over time.

Diving deeper, the next chapters analyse the modalities and extent of anti-Western demonstrations in Africa. As the main face of Western countries in Africa, France embodies this sentiment more than others. Denis Tull offers a clear and careful analysis of the manifestations of anti-French sentiment, especially in the Sahel and West Africa. The chapter goes on to reflect on the dialectical relationship between the anti-French populism prevalent in certain African countries and the reactions by Paris. Cornered by accusations of arrogance to which it does not seem capable of responding with radical change, Paris seems destined to lose influence on the continent, a circumstance that opens up new questions on the role for other European countries in the region.

If France is the prototype European post-colonial power, what about the United States, the representative country of "the West" par excellence? What differences are there in the way Africans see the US and China, its great international competitor? Robert Mattes and Peter Lewis offer an accurate overview of how African public opinions view these two global powers through Afrobarometer polls, outlining the level of international awareness in the various countries, the prevailing views towards the US and China, and their evolution over time. The results challenge our preconceptions of African attitudes, showing – with due caution towards any generalisations – how positive views towards the US and China are not mutually exclusive in the various countries, and how the propensity to view the rest of the world positively is often due to trust (or lack thereof) in one's political class and other domestic factors.

Africa's relationship with various international actors from the specific angle of international media is the focus of the chapter by Dani Madrid-Morales and Herman Wasserman. Western media are losing their protagonist role in the continent, where broadcasters from countries that until a few years ago were seen as peripheral are now making inroads. The African media landscape is deeply geopolitical in nature. Starting from this assumption, the authors analyse the efforts of various governments to invest in what they call a "scramble to shape African public opinion", comparing the perception of the narratives pursued by Western countries versus those pursued by "the rest", reflecting long-term and short-term changes.

In his chapter on anti-Western narratives in East Africa, Haggai Mastiko focuses on the manifestations of anti-Western sentiment in the main countries of the region. Animated by an almost journalistic impetus, the chapter offers a roundup of manifestations that are particularly explanatory of the main criticisms that the region's leaders and key public figures express towards the West. Giving voice to the main narratives and motivations for such postures, the chapter provides useful tools to understand the main grievances towards the West, their roots, and how they are commonly expressed.

Finally, Hagan Sibiri's chapter focuses on anti-Chinese resentment in Africa: a different angle, but one that also helps put the region's relationship with the West into perspective. Against the backdrop of a strong Chinese engagement with Africa over the past two decades, there has been an increase in concerns and grievances with Beijing. Although this arises from specific aspects in the relationship with China, it betrays to a large extent a more general mistrust on the part of African public opinion towards partnerships perceived as unfair and incapable of translating into a concrete benefit for the population: a call for the EU and its member states to invest in sustainable and accountable economic practices with the continent.

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1. Africa Rising: Against the West?

Giovanni Carbone

Turning Against the West

In recent years, a growing bitterness against “the West” has become apparent in key parts of Africa, manifesting itself in a variety of ways, including street protests and social media uproar, votes at the United Nations and sudden volte-faces by regimes, words spoken by heads of state and off-the-record diplomatic conversations.

Examples abound of late, and in many cases the resentment builds on Africans’ troubled past with Western countries and in part, conversely, on the nostalgia of by-gone relations with the latter’s rivals. The South African government, for instance, voiced discontent time and again during both the Covid-19 crisis, when President Cyril Ramaphosa famously spoke of “vaccine apartheid”, evoking the historical responsibility of advanced economies for the country’s sufferings, and then the war in Ukraine, which brought into the spotlight Pretoria’s cosy ties to Moscow, also rooted in the past. Seven thousand kilometres to the north, in Senegal, a country that “traditionally radiated French-influence in the region”,¹ symbols of Paris’s presence, such as Eiffage toll gates and Orange mobile phone booths,

¹ M. Iñiguez de Heredia, “Reversing ‘liberal’ aspirations: a view from ‘citizen’s’ movements in Africa”, *Global Society*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2022, p. 418.

were targeted during the 2021 riots sparked by the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko. Cutting off ties with France has also been a major issue in the regime changes caused by the spate of military coups that shook nearby Sahelian countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger). On the opposite side of the continent, meanwhile, angry Ethiopians took to the streets and to social media, during the 2020-22 war in Tigray, to demand an end to the allegedly pro-rebel “fake news” and partisan reporting by the likes of BBC, CNN, Reuters, the AP and the New York Times. The regime itself “openly encouraged hostility against Western media as well as the human-rights groups and international institutions”.²

The palpable coldness of African leaders towards the European Union also increasingly exposed “a widening gap between the official discourse and the reality of the strategic partnership”³ proposed by Brussels and formally endorsed by both sides at the 2022 EU-AU summit. As an experienced observer put it, this was a crude “awakening from the illusion of a smooth and unbreakable bond between Africa and Europe”.⁴ African officials also expressed similar suspicions when the US pledged substantial new funding aimed at winning back support in the region,⁵ since the promises made at a previous summit of African and US leaders, back in 2014, had largely remained on paper.⁶ But the definitive wake-up call for both Washington and Brussels was the historic March 2022 vote through which

² T. Gardner, “I was a war reporter in Ethiopia. Then I became the enemy”, *The Economist – 1843 Magazine*, 24 June 2022.

³ F. Mattheis, D. Deleglise, and U. Staeger, *African Union: The African political integration process and its impact on EU-AU relations in the field of foreign and security policy*, Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2023, p. 41.

⁴ G. Laporte, “Learning to manage different interests and expectations in the AU-EU partnership”, in ETTG, *Europe-Africa relations in a multi-crises world*, January 2023, p. 6.

⁵ US-Africa Leaders summit, [Overview – Fact sheet](#), Bureau of African Affairs, US Department of State, 2022.

⁶ W. Declan, “Biden courts African leaders, but some are skeptical of big promises”, *New York Times*, 22 December 2022.

the UN Nations General Assembly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as only a meagre majority of 28 African states supported the resolution (i.e. 52% of all votes from the continent, compared to an 81% “yes” vote among non-African members), with the remaining 26 breaking rank by abstaining, being absent, or voting against (Eritrea).

Although there are clear regional differences, the growing impatience seems to be directed at Europe and America. An upsurge of “anti-Westernism” is underway, that is, a wide range of public discourses and political attitudes, primarily manifest in public opinions, popular protests, media debates, statements by the elites, international positioning and policy decisions, that express discontent with – or full-fledged negative sentiments against – Western countries or values, typically because of their external interference in the domestic affairs of African states and/or their hegemonic and patronising role in multilateral institutions and the global economy.

Rather than an entirely new phenomenon – the continent has long been home to a variety of similar forms of indignation – the growing hostility we see today is a strong, expanded and highly visible resurgence. Moreover, to an extent, Africa’s outrage is certainly part of broader criticism levelled at Europe and America from around the world, particularly from across the Global South.⁷ There is, on the one hand, a rejection of a West-dominated global order that is perceived not only as unjust and unjustifiable, but also as increasingly ineffective. Rules are made by those same dominant powers, the argument goes, that end up disregarding and flouting them whenever they need, or prefer to, as happened with Iraq, Libya or Syria – and now again in Gaza. This is compounded by what is perceived, rather understandably, as an omnipresent and offensive “sense of superiority of the West ... with never-ending lecturing others, that is making many Asians and Africans angry”.⁸

⁷ T. Murithi, “Order of Oppression Africa’s Quest for a New International System”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2023.

⁸ K. Debeuf, “Why the West is losing support”, *EUObserver*, 1 November 2022.

Yet the current wave of anti-Westernism in Africa also has its own historical roots and present-day reasons. The articulation of today's antipathies, for example, partly draws on the two main forms that radical post-colonial opposition to the West historically took. One is the tradition of Marxist-oriented revolutionary anti-imperialism that, in the 1950s and 1960s, had Ghana's first leader Kwame Nkrumah as its most prominent pioneer. The other one is what is often termed Afrocentric neo-conservatism, owing to the likes of Senegal's intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop, who also gained popularity from the late 1950s, which stresses the need to reclaim dignity, centrality and autonomy for African cultures and voices. What both traditions share is their persistence over time, if often underground, and the core idea that "Europe is guilty of underdeveloping Africa and bears responsibility for Africa's past and present woes".⁹ In the new millennium, anti-colonial language was also adopted by the radical Islamist movements that gained ground in some parts of the continent, with their unrelenting condemnation of the West, its values and institutions across Muslim Africa. Tellingly, the well-known tag used for Nigeria's Islamist insurgents – "Boko Haram", that is, "Western education is forbidden" – sums up the message of unflinching and comprehensive aversion to the culture, institutions and lifestyles of the northern hemisphere.

Critical views of the West thus built on some long-standing perspectives by revisiting them and expanding their reach. Their rise comes at a time when many Africans are suffering from the worsening conditions in which they live and long for change, as we shall see below.

Countering the West: Who Are the Targets?

The anti-French drive witnessed across large swathes of central and western Africa is by far the most long-established, widely

⁹ D. Ekpo, "How Africa misunderstood the West. The Failure of Anti-West Radicalism and Postmodernity", *Third Text*, vol. 10, no. 35, 1996, p. 4.

rooted and easily visible component of anti-Westernism in the continent. Ever since independence, Paris has notoriously retained cosy relationships with its former colonial territories, built on politico-diplomatic and cultural ties, unique monetary arrangements, substantial economic interests, a conspicuous business community, and a series of military garrisons spread throughout much of the region. The controversies and the bitterness surrounding the forms and implications of France's presence and influence spanned over more than six decades. However, the anti-French political and popular initiatives recently observed in the likes of Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and the Central African Republic – with other countries following suit in somewhat milder ways – arguably represent an unprecedented spike of recrudescence and virulence. The peak was when, between 2021 and 2023, soldiers in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger ousted regimes that had cooperated with France in the fight against jihadism in the Sahel, where, over a decade, Paris had deployed its largest ever and most high-profile intervention in the continent. In each of the three states, the new military juntas ejected French troops, went on to expel French ambassadors, and, in different ways and degrees, moved closer to Russia.

Africa's anti-French discourse is articulated via a variety of recurrent tropes¹⁰ of long-established behaviours that are no longer deemed acceptable and that should now resolutely be ended. The first is the “arrogance” of Paris in pretending to dictate or influence the political and economic course of action in other, nominally independent countries. Arrogance is often masked in the form of paternalism – albeit one that borders on racism – in treating Africans as minors who must be taught how to conduct themselves. Paternalism in turn justifies

¹⁰ Cf. C. Châtelot and C. Bensimon, “En Afrique de l’Ouest, la France désavouée par les opinions publiques”, *Le Monde*, 2 November 2023; D. Tull, *Contesting France: rumours, intervention and the politics of truth in Mali*, 2021 (published as “Contester la France: rumeurs, intervention et politique de vérité au Mali”, *Critique Internationale*, vol. 90, no. 1, 2021, pp. 151-71). See also Denis Tull, “France: the controversial face...”, in this volume.

guardianship, that is, making decisions “on behalf of” former colonies that are deemed “not yet able” to manage their own affairs and respond to the many problems they face. A cultural dimension at times underlies the said recriminations, as France’s enduring interferences is claimed to prevent the emergence of an autonomous, “truly African” development trajectory. On a different level, Paris’s continued exploitation of Africa’s vast and valuable energy and mineral resources, a major *raison d’être* of colonialism itself, is angrily pointed at. Robbing resources from Africa hampers its development, it is argued, adding to France’s noxious control of key economic sectors and of the currency in most of its former colonies. This leaves African governments powerless and ineffective when trying to improve domestic socio-economic conditions. Paris, after all, allegedly failed to promote whatever economic protection or advancement was promised to its African partners, as demonstrated by the fact that Anglophone countries in the continent, the argument goes, are way ahead of Francophone economies. Nor was Africans’ security ensured, whether one looks at Rwanda in the 1990s or at the Sahel today. The reason is said to lie in French hypocrisy and a hidden agenda of unofficial priorities (plundering mineral wealth, shielding complacent autocrats, protecting the Tuareg, etc.), when not a full-blown conspiracy to keep Africa poor through behind-the-scenes collaboration with local actors – whether an incumbent leader, his political opponents, putschists, jihadists, specific ethnic groups, or others – against a country’s common good and interests.

What is not always fully appreciated, however, is that today’s West-bashing is not limited to France nor to French-speaking African countries. In fact, many of the key motives behind popular protests and public discourse against Paris mirror ideas and dynamics that have been spreading in non-Francophone countries too, albeit often to a lesser extent, intensity, frequency and visibility. Most of the tropes of anti-French discourse – neo-colonialism and exploitation, arrogance and paternalism, hypocrisy and conspiracy, and so on – are typically broadened

and applied to the West as a whole. Nor is this only occurring in Francophone countries, as mentioned. Perhaps the best illustration of this is the turbulent developments in the relations with America and Europe that, in very recent years, have characterized both South Africa and Ethiopia – that is, sub-Saharan Africa’s two largest non-Francophone countries outside (and far away from) western and central Africa. But continent-wide issues as diverse as the activities and prosecutions of the International Criminal Court, the nature of trade agreements, migration management, the Covid-19 pandemic, policies and vaccines, the energy transition for curbing carbon emissions, the LGBTQ+ rights movements, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and many others, all fuelled arguments and sparked initiatives aimed at resisting and possibly countering European and American power and desiderata in Africa. Long-standing memories of Europe’s colonial occupation and hostility towards US “imperialism” handily offered a fertile ground that Chinese and Russian rhetoric and propaganda have no difficulty in cultivating. Increasingly, thus, African criticisms and attacks against Paris, Brussels and Washington have been framed as part of a broader problem with the West as such.

Backdrop, Drivers and Speed of the New Blame Wave

There are good reasons why many Africans are now fed up with much of what the West does. Regardless of the terminology critics may opt for – imperialism, neo-colonialism, hegemony, patronization or other – it is hard to deny that advanced economies have shaped and largely controlled international institutions in ways that have suited them but not necessarily Africa; that they have abundantly exploited the continent’s vast natural resources for the sake of their own progress; and that they often feel free to interfere with the domestic affairs of African countries (which, on the contrary, are not used to releasing statements expressing ‘concern’ for election outcomes in the US, for secessionism in Quebec, or for corruption in Hungary). Since, for decades,

Africans have only experienced patchy development at best, the West was simply too exposed not to take the blame.

But the “name and blame” targeting of the West only actually escalated in recent times due to the maturing of other conditions. First, exasperation was nurtured by the combination of the rapid expansion of Africa’s impatient youth with the worsening of living conditions across several states in the region. Meanwhile, two new factors of recent making crucially enabled and favoured the voicing of such grievances, namely, the broader and faster reach of social communications that the digital and social media revolution generated, and the gradual transformation of the international landscape, where alternative, non-Western partners have been on the rise. In what follows, we shall have a look at each of these dynamics.

It is a well-known fact that Africa’s youth has become massive. The continent’s population growth rate remains unparalleled when compared to any other world region, as African fertility rates are only gradually adapting to a reality of lower mortality. Sub-Saharan Africa had 180 million inhabitants in 1950.¹¹ It currently accommodates around 1.2 billion people. Individual country trajectories are astonishing. Some twenty years ago – i.e. in 2000 – Mali had a population of 11 million; it now has 23 million. Ugandans grew from 24 million to today’s 48 million, while Mozambique went from 17 million to 33 million. Across sub-Saharan Africa, youngsters below the age of 20 constitute a majority. This swelling youth carries high expectations of economic and social improvement that largely go unmet. Economic growth has not been strong nor shared enough, leaving too many without the jobs, material resources and personal satisfaction they probably hoped for. Indeed, in recent years, significant parts of Africa have actually been losing ground, as economic and security conditions have deteriorated.

¹¹ All demographic data in this section are from United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2022*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022.

Regional growth averaged only 2.6% in 2015-22, less than half what it was during the previous fifteen years.¹² Economic expansion was thus in line with population growth rates, so that GDP per capita, which peaked at US\$1,681 in 2015, stopped growing and, after declining for a few years, in 2022 (US\$1,617) it had still not fully recovered the ground it lost.¹³ Moreover, while extreme poverty was reduced for some twenty-five years – from 58% in 1993 to 35.1% in 2019 – progress has slowed down considerably, with the 13.1% comprehensive decline of the 2002-2011 decade cut to a mere 5.8% decrease between 2011 and 2019.¹⁴ With Africa's overall population growing, the slowdown in poverty reduction implied an actual reversal in absolute terms, as the total number of poor, which had contracted from 379 million to 365 million during 2002-11, began expanding again, reaching 389 million by 2019. The pandemic made things worse, adding a further 28 million poor in the three years between 2020 and 2022, so that sub-Saharan Africa currently counts an estimated 420 million individuals in absolute poverty. Similarly, gains in life expectancy at birth decelerated in the three years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (2017-19), when compared to any other three-year period since 2000, and a net decline was then suffered in 2020 and 2021, the first since 1998.¹⁵ Needless to say, socio-economic conditions and development inevitably vary very significantly across the region, as well as within individual countries. Yet, of late, too many Africans have suffered a lack of progress.

Violence too has been on the rise. The 2010s saw an expansion in areas torn by conflicts, notably through parts of the Sahel and the Horn, with other crises ravaging West African countries

¹² International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook database*, 7 April 2023.

¹³ Per capita GDP in constant 2015 US\$. World Bank, World Development Indicators, accessed 2 September 2023.

¹⁴ The data in this paragraph are from World Bank, *Poverty and prosperity 2022. Correcting course*, World Bank, Washington, 2022.

¹⁵ United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2022*.

(Nigeria, Cameroon), central Africa (the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan) and even northern Mozambique. According to some estimates, state-based armed rebellions increased from 15 in 2011 to a peak of 30 in 2020,¹⁶ while other hotspots emerged where ethnic communities clashed with each other over control of land or water. As a result, 2021 recorded the largest number of battle-related deaths since 2001.¹⁷ Even more telling is the massive number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the sub-Saharan region – the vast majority forced from their homes by the spread of violence – which reached 36 million in 2022, up from 10.2 million in 2010. This means an increase of more than three and a half times in little more than a decade, with a 12 million increase during the last five years alone (2018-22).¹⁸

More people, worse living conditions: a rapidly-increasing number of Africans felt cornered. Their reactions were bound to include the search for those who held, or were thought to hold, some kind of responsibility. The main target was often those in office. Unsurprisingly, satisfaction with democracy and support for elections declined, particularly among the youth.¹⁹ But the West also increasingly became the subject of fierce political attacks and of growing hostility in African public opinion. Digital and social media played a key role in amplifying and disseminating resentment across a variety of national and regional publics. During Ethiopia's Tigray war, for example, both spontaneous and government-inspired social media campaigns targeted not only international media outlets,

¹⁶ J. Palik, A.M. Obermeier, and S. Aas Rustad, *Conflict Trends in Africa 1946-2021*, PRIO, 2022.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *The State of The World's Refugees 2000*, p. 307; UNHCR, *UNHCR Global Trends 2010*, p. 41; “Record 36 million Africans forcibly displaced”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 19 July 2022.

¹⁹ Afrobarometer, “Africans want more democracy, but their leaders still aren't listening”, Policy Paper no. 85, 2023, pp. 14-15.

but also humanitarian aid agencies – including UN agencies – comprehensively perceived to be Western-controlled and pro-rebel.²⁰ In Senegal, Mali and elsewhere, digital anger was aimed at Paris, with radical anti-French discourses snowballing on social media. New opinion leaders emerged and quickly became iconic figures for large cross-national audiences in the articulation of this renewed “anti-imperialist” struggle. In West Africa, in particular, charismatic French-Beninese Kémi Séba and Swiss-Cameroonian Nathalie Yamb grew increasingly influential through the prolific online production of videos, posts and writings across a range of social media. They both identify as Pan-Africanists, pushing for the assertion of Africa’s sovereignty and thus a full emancipation from Western dominance, particularly from France. Their target is not limited to France and its meddling in the affairs of African nations, but extends to those African leaders who are deemed lackeys of Paris too, most notably Côte d’Ivoire’s Alassane Ouattara, Senegal’s Macky Sall and Niger’s (former President) Mohamed Bazoum. However, depicting the aversion to France as an establishment-versus-opposition divide is wide off the mark. Ruling elites too often developed a political interest in blaming France in order to divert attention and shake off responsibility, turning a foreign presence into “a political windfall” for the government.²¹

A Broader Game

Pointing the finger at the West was made easier by the new international landscape. Over the past two decades, the continent has become more crowded with external actors than ever before. Reversing a period of relative international neglect during the 1990s, it was both advanced countries (European states as well as the US and Japan) and emerging economies

²⁰ P. Kleinfeld, “Aid neutrality under fire in Ethiopia’s widening conflict”, *The New Humanitarian*, 22 July 2021.

²¹ Tull (2021).

(not just the well-known case of China, but also India, Russia, Turkey, the Gulf States, Brazil and others) that (re-)discovered economic and geopolitical reasons to establish or consolidate relations with African countries.

In most accounts of Africa's evolving external relations, outsiders seem to be almost the only characters on stage, the continent being little more than the passive turf where an international contest is being waged. Such a portrayal is obviously misleading. Africans are not inert nor unresponsive, they are not a static feature of the playground nor of the background. Rather the contrary. A growing external presence has greatly expanded the role sub-Saharan countries can play. The recent rise and availability of non-Western partners to which Africans could look, and turn to, made the notion of cutting ties with the West appear more feasible and attractive than had ever been the case. Political, economic and military support could now come from the likes of China, Russia, Turkey, the Gulf States, India, Iran, Israel and others, making Africa less dependent on traditional partners. Over the past twenty years, for example, China has become the major trading partner and a key investor for most sub-Saharan states. Russia, which lacks comparable economic muscle, proved ready to step in and provide diplomatic and occasionally military support wherever it saw an opportunity to counter the influence of its Western enemies. Turkey has become a provider of military equipment too, most famously drones, for a fast-growing number of African governments. The forms and styles of cooperation with non-Western countries can be very attractive, most notably when support is sought for authoritarian practices and military operations unhindered by concerns for the fate of both rights and civilians, as happened in cases from Mali to the Central African Republic to Ethiopia. In Addis Ababa, the capital of a strategically crucial country, major anti-US and anti-UK popular rallies warned foreigners not to interfere with the Tigray conflict. The regime appeared to drift closer to Russia and China, who gave it diplomatic backing for the "domestic" management of the war, as well as to Turkey and

the United Arab Emirates, who provided military equipment. More generally, with a different geopolitical landscape taking shape on the continent in which new economic and political partnerships are now on the table, Africans and their governments have been increasingly allowed “the opportunity to distance themselves from the West”,²² and given more “confidence ... to go their way”.²³

Anti-West discourse is evidently on the rise across different parts of Africa, often accompanied by popular protests and political and diplomatic action. Building on well-established sentiments and traditions, if often held somewhat underground, the forceful re-emergence, re-articulation and diffusion of anti-Westernism in different parts of the continent is being favoured by the socio-economic difficulties many African states have been going through in recent years, the fast expansion of digital communications, and the evolution of the region’s external relations, themselves closely connected with a changing global scenario. Europeans and Americans have only started to take note, fully understand, and try to react.

²² A. Osmanovic, *There is war in Europe. Africa is looking for its position*, Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, March 2022.

²³ “With us or with them? In a new Cold War, how about neither”, *New York Times*, 24 April 2022.

2. The Global South and the Resurgence of Non-alignment: An African Perspective

Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Gustavo de Carvalho

Introduction: Past as Prologue

In a global landscape increasingly marred by division and geopolitical rivalries and epitomised by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, non-alignment has re-emerged as a foreign policy position for many countries in the developing world, especially in Africa. Entangled in intricate diplomatic webs with powerful actors from the Global North and South, Africa needs to manage a precarious balance.¹ Non-alignment is a pragmatic option to maintain their autonomy, protect their interests, and uphold stability.

The focus on non-alignment in Africa is not an isolated or new phenomenon. It has been a feature of some countries' foreign policies during and after the Cold War. However, in

¹ For the purposes of this article, the term “Global South” refers to a heterogeneous collection of developing nations primarily from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Although the concept has gained prominence in academic and policy circles, its scope is sometimes criticised for being conceptually opaque due to the inclusion of countries with varied economic sizes and political influence. Nonetheless, the term serves to group together nations that perceive the current world order as discriminatory against them, even if there is no uniform agreement on the specific changes needed.

the latter case, non-alignment was initially less of an issue, given that the current rivalries and tensions between the West,² Russia, and China had not yet surfaced.

In the XXI century, Africa saw a resurgence of external interest from new players. The most significant of those players was China, but others included Türkiye, India, the United Arab Emirates, and South Korea. This meant more economic, political and diplomatic options for African states, enabling them to balance the influence and power of the West.

However, already in the 2000s, tensions were emerging: China's outreach to Africa, its growing bilateral trade, the substantial infrastructure built that became a prominent feature of its economic footprint on the continent, as well as the high-level political interactions, were raising concerns in Western circles about their possible loss of influence.

Western attempts to characterise Chinese actions on the continent as a second scramble for Africa, while regarding their own actions as driven by more benign sentiments, were not welcomed by many African elites or civil society actors. In addition, Russia's growing interest in Africa in the 2010s, especially after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, elicited similar responses – and even sharper concerns, as its involvement was defined by its military and security engagements with elites, with very little focus on economic development.

In a 2008 essay in *Foreign Affairs*, John Ikenberry argued that “Today's Western order ... is hard to overturn and easy to join”. Ikenberry continued, “China can gain full access to and thrive within this system. And if it does, China will rise, but the Western order – if managed properly – will live on”.³ Ikenberry's key phrase in that assumption was “if managed properly”. The other element that became increasingly apparent was that an

² While the term West masks many differences among the countries that make it up, we use it here to refer to the dominant global grouping that has defined the international system to date.

³ G.J. Ikenberry, “[The Rise of China and the Future of the West. Can the Liberal System Survive?](#)”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2008.

open international system might not be sufficient for those who considered its construction a reflection of Western norms, values and rules. This applies as much to China as it does to many other countries in the developing world.

In a piece written a few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni noted that the “Russia-Ukraine War has ignited complex questions of hierarchies of power, anti-imperialism, neutrality and non-alignment, arising not only from the way the states of the Global South have responded to the apportionment of blame for the war but also how great powers treat smaller states”.⁴ Crucially, he characterised the war as being at the “centre of the contending forces of ‘rewesternisation’ and ‘dewesternisation’.” These forces struggle over the “control of the colonial matrix of power and the possibilities of a shift of capital from the Atlantic circuit to the Sinocentric circuit”.⁵

Dewesternisation – a shift from a US-centric to a Sinocentric world in this argument – does not necessarily imply a pro-Global South outcome. However, groupings such as BRICS regard dewesternisation as essential to transform the global governance system.

The Bandung principles (1955) that spawned the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) looked to a world where war was not the solution, where international relations should be characterised by non-violence, the recognition of the equality of all races and all nations, regardless of their size, and respect for the United Nations (UN) Charter.⁶ These principles have been articulated by several Global South countries in international fora and elsewhere since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war.

⁴ S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “[European War and Global South Perspectives](#)”, CODESRIA Bulletin Online, no. 11, July 2022, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ Statement presented by Vicente Paolo Yu, Deputy Executive Director of the South Centre, at the NAM Forum held at the Palais des Nations (Geneva) on 20 April 2017, “[Non-aligned Movement and Bandung Principles as Relevant Today as Ever](#)”.

They are important factors in considering Africa's perspectives on the new non-alignment.

This chapter explores the evolving role of non-alignment as a strategic choice for the continent, and examines how Africa responds to global geopolitical tensions to preserve its economic and political interests.

A Non-alignment for the XXI Century

In her speech at the G77 + China Summit in September 2023 in Havana, Cuba, South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Naledi Pandor, resonated not just the sentiments of her country but those of a broader chorus of voices from the Global South about the challenges that the current geopolitical rivalries were presenting to the Global South. She declared:

The struggle for the soul of the South and for unilateral global dominance has never been more intense, and as the South, we must seize this historic moment to ensure we develop the ability to be free agents of a development agenda that will advance our battle against poverty, inequality, and unemployment.⁷

Pandor's call transcends mere rhetoric. It offers a lens through which Africa's increasingly nuanced strategy of active non-alignment can be viewed – prioritising geopolitical caution and developmental agendas. Pursuing such autonomy echoes the broader themes discussed here, reaffirming that Africa's assertion of non-alignment is not an abdication from global participation but a reimagining of its role. This reimagined stance aims to ensure that Africa is not merely reacting to international forces

⁷ N. Pandor, “[Statement by Dr Naledi Pandor, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa](#)” (Statement, General Debate of Summit of Heads of State and Government of the G77 + China, on the theme: “Current Development Challenges: The Role of Science, Technology and Innovation”, Havana, 16 September 2023).

but being strategically proactive in insulating itself from external pressures to strengthen its focus on tackling socio-economic challenges and advocating for such focus in the global arena.

Earlier, in April 2022, Pandor called for closer cooperation with the other members of the NAM that would “actively contribute to shaping the reform deliberations within the UN system, as well as giving new content to the UN Security Council (UNSC)”.⁸ In that sense, South Africa and other members of the Global South should resist “becoming embroiled in the politics of confrontation and aggression that has been advocated by the powerful countries”.⁹ They should “assert their independent, non-aligned views”.

Indeed, the NAM is not the same as non-alignment, a foreign policy position a country decides to adopt. While the NAM, in its declarations, reiterates many positions of the Global South, the actions of individual states may differ depending on how a particular international development may impact their specific interests. But some countries, such as South Africa, see the NAM as a forum for coordination on foreign policy positions.

In line with the transformation of the international system underway, a reconceptualisation of non-alignment in the XXI century is occurring. Latin American thinkers such as Carlos Ominami, Carlos Fortin, and Jorge Heine have posited the notion of an active non-alignment, the agenda of which incorporates, among others:¹⁰

- Maintaining an equidistant position of coordination between the two competing powers on global issues;
- Strengthening regional bodies;
- Committing to multilateralism;

⁸ Naledi Pandor, “[Speech by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, on the occasion of the Budget Vote](#)”, 12 May 2022.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ C. Fortin, J. Heine, and C. Ominami, “Latin American Foreign Policies in the New World Order: The Active Non-Alignment Option”, *Anthem Press*, 2023, pp. 271-72.

- Coordinating regionally on global economic governance;
- Joining new international financial institutions;
- Reorienting foreign policies and foreign ministries; and
- Redefining obsolete notions of national security.

It has been presented as a Latin American doctrine whose origins preceded the Ukraine war and was essentially a reaction to Trumpism in the continent. In the wake of the Ukraine war, it has taken on a new life and urgency. This philosophy encourages balanced engagement with various power blocs, providing a nuanced framework that nations like Brazil, India, and South Africa are already adapting to navigate the complexities of the current geopolitical landscape.

The historical roots of non-alignment and its institutionalisation provide context but contrast the current scenario. While the principle originated as a Cold War strategy to safeguard autonomy in a bipolar world, at the time mainly through the NAM, today's multipolar geopolitical stage presents opportunities and challenges for Africa and the Global South. The waning dominance of traditional powers like the US and the rise of others such as China and India signify a more diffused global distribution of power and influence. Nevertheless, this dispersion comes with its complexities, including the implications of the Ukraine crisis on areas like food supply chains and foreign investment.¹¹

The Global South is not a monolithic entity. The term has been used to incorporate all of the developing world; yet this entity includes the world's second largest economy, China, an aspiring global power, India, and many rising middle powers. China and India are emerging poles that challenge traditional North-South dichotomies, offering African countries a more intricate set of options for alignment. Non-alignment in this context is not only between the west and the 'South' but among a number of poles.

¹¹ O. Eguegu, "[The Russia-Ukraine War: Implications for Africa](#)", Occasional Paper, South African Institute of International Affairs and Development Reimagined, March 2023.

In a world where the lines between the Global North and South are blurring, non-alignment offers African states the strategic flexibility to engage with various global actors, safeguarding their interests while contributing to regional stability.

Indeed, as African nations grapple with the complexities of a shifting global order, they are compelled to ask pressing questions about the updated philosophy of non-alignment: what advantages can be gained from a strategy that accentuates autonomous decision-making, particularly in a world marked by high economic interdependencies between global blocs? What are the risks inherent in such a stance? These questions have not been thoroughly examined, nor are they being driven at a continental level by African regional organisations like the African Union (AU). Rather, the principles and the execution are being debated nationally and not necessarily in all countries.

The XXI-century world is much more interdependent than the world of the Cold War. Transnational global challenges are also much more significant now than 50 years ago. But if the tensions between the US/West and China/Russia spill over, how feasible will non-alignment be for African countries and what will be the trade-offs? Is a non-aligned position a risk mitigation strategy or one that renders benefits? The answers to all these questions may vary depending on the specific point of the global geopolitical trajectory. They may also reveal a spectrum of non-alignment options.

The Ukraine Crisis as Catalyst for African Non-Alignment

The Ukraine war was the catalyst for non-alignment to become more strident as many African countries experienced significant pressure from the West to align with its position on the Russian invasion, including in the imposition of sanctions. Russia also went on a charm offensive throughout 2022 and 2023 to reinforce its narrative on the causes of the war and cement its ties with ruling elites in many African states.

Despite pressures to join the Western or China-Russia camps, African states and others in the developing world are increasingly attempting to forge their own path. However, such a process has not been without its hurdles for African countries' ability to project narratives and perform actions aligned with their stated positions.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Europe and North America were confident that this blatant violation of the UN Charter would be interpreted in the same way by the world, bar a few "recalcitrant" countries. Indeed, most countries throughout 2022 voted in favour of UN resolutions condemning the invasion, including many African countries like Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. Some African countries, notably Kenya, provided powerful statements of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the need to respect the UN Charter.¹² In a UNSC meeting on 25 February 2022, Kenya's Ambassador Martin Kimani referenced the problematic intervention in Libya to caution against similar mistakes.¹³ He lamented the Council's failure to protect Ukraine's sovereignty and argued that the UN Charter should always be used to advocate for peaceful dispute resolution. In a subsequent panel discussion in February 2023 in which one of the authors participated, Kimani highlighted the collective inability of the global community to constrain great powers, making the point that if the international community could not reform the UNSC and the UN, countries would rely on regional arrangements and military alliances and commit the UN to the ash heap. It would, therefore, be important to embed the norms of the Charter in Africa's regional arrangements.

¹² [Statement by Amb. Martin Kimani during the Security Council Meeting on the situation in Ukraine](#), 21 February 2022, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya, United Nations Security Council 2021-2022.

¹³ UN Press, "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto", Security Council, 25 February 2022.

In the UN General Assembly's first resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, most countries voted in favour, a trend that persisted throughout the year. Yet, a counter-narrative emerged as 35 of the 193 member states, primarily from Africa and Asia, chose to abstain or did not vote. Notable among the abstaining African nations were Algeria, Angola, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania, many of which underscored the need for negotiations and peaceful dispute resolution. On that occasion, only Eritrea, known for its often contrarian foreign policy stances, voted against the resolution with Belarus, Syria, North Korea, and, unsurprisingly, the Russian Federation itself.

South Africa, a country that consistently abstained from the resolutions condemning the invasion, urged the United Nations to "take decisions and actions that will lead to a constructive outcome conducive to the creation of sustainable peace between the parties".¹⁴ A media statement justifying the South African vote encapsulated the position of many nations in the Global South, articulating a need for non-aligned, independent views that steer clear of confrontation.¹⁵

While South Africa and Kenya diverged in their votes on Ukraine, their underlying diplomatic tenets showed remarkable alignment. Both nations championed dialogue, international law, and a robust UN role in conflict mediation. South Africa abstained, not to reject Ukraine's sovereignty, but to advocate for resolutions encouraging lasting peace over blame assignment. On the other hand, Kenya's vocal opposition to Russia's actions steered clear of Western sanctions, underscoring its commitment to multilateral solutions for territorial disputes.

¹⁴ M. Joyini, "South Africa's Statement in Explanation of Vote on Ukraine in the UN General Assembly Emergency Special Session, 2 March 2022 – DIRCO", Statement presented at the UN General Assembly Emergency Special Session, New York, 2 March 2022.

¹⁵ "Statement by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, during the Media Briefing on the Russia/Ukraine conflict", Statement, Pretoria, 8 April 2022.

These views challenge assumptions that the voting split in Africa created fundamental divisions among countries. Thus, despite divergent voting patterns, the convergence in diplomatic principles offered a window into broader African perspectives that would consistently highlight the need for peaceful settlements and diplomatic dialogue over confrontation. By resisting a binary “us-versus-them” narrative, these countries echo a non-alignment principle, even if not always explicitly or clearly stated.

A prime example of this type of engagement occurred in June 2022, when the President of Senegal, as rotating chair of the AU, and the chairperson of the African Union Commission visited Russia. Amid rising tensions in Ukraine, which threatened Africa’s food security, these leaders lent legitimacy to the final agreement, mediated by the United Nations and Türkiye, that ensured uninterrupted access to grains and fertilisers from Russia and Ukraine. The deal would eventually not be renewed in mid-2023, leading to a new diplomatic offensive by African countries to reduce the risks it may cause to African food security.

However, African countries have also struggled to present a coherent front regarding their non-aligned stances, generating much confusion on different interpretations of non-alignment. South Africa, for instance, faced several domestic and external crises due to its actions, often leading to domestic public opinion backlash and strained relations with Western countries. From the onset of the war in 2022 until mid-2023, South Africa developed and pursued narratives that did not always match the actions of certain government actors. The country’s involvement in controversial incidents – such as co-hosting a naval exercise with China and Russia on the anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2023 and the allegation made by the US ambassador that South Africa smuggled arms to Russia, among others – have raised questions about whether the country was genuinely non-aligned.

Although the country has historical and political ties with Russia, recent actions indicate a shift towards a less

ideologically driven position. In June 2023, leaders from South Africa, Zambia, Comoros, Congo Brazzaville, Egypt, Senegal and Uganda visited Kyiv and St. Petersburg for high-level engagements with Presidents Zelenskyi and Putin. This visit, led de facto by South Africa, aimed to create a potential space for negotiation between the conflicting parties, highlighting Africa's proactive approach to fostering dialogue amid global tensions and mitigating the war's impact on the continent's food security.

The visit, the start to what has been called the African Peace Initiative (API), was the first step towards a more coordinated African approach to the war. However, the initiative was not driven by the AU. The emissaries focused on three key areas, which could help build confidence and lay the groundwork for negotiations on an end to the conflict, namely, the return of the children abducted from Ukraine, discussions on the exchange of prisoners of war, and, most notably for African countries, a push to restart the Black Sea grain deal, which had lapsed. These points have become the cornerstone of the API. They were central to subsequent discussions with Ukrainian and Russian counterparts, from the Russia-Africa Summit to Ukraine reconstruction discussions in Copenhagen and Jeddah and even at the UN General Assembly in September 2023. While the initiative has not entirely neutralised perceptions of African countries' leanings towards Russia, it has strengthened the continent's non-aligned position and displayed a willingness by African states to take an active, constructive role in global peace and security issues without needing to take sides in the conflict.

What Are the Underlying Causes of African States' Non-aligned Positions?

There are both philosophical and practical reasons for such a foreign policy position. While the Cold War has ended, the philosophy of non-alignment remains relevant, especially as the world transitions from unipolarity to new forms of

multipolarity or a mix of bipolarity and multipolarity. The fractured international landscape poses risks and opportunities for diversified partnerships for Africa, crucial for achieving goals like the AU's Agenda 2063. Assuming the voting patterns in the UN resolutions do not fully explain the African shift towards non-alignment, exploring some conditions that led to such a position is essential.

African nations view this increasingly dispersed power landscape as a bulwark against the hegemony of any single global entity, thereby creating a more equitable environment for their developmental goals. Although the post-Cold War period saw Western dominance, the rise of multiple power centres, notably China, has reignited the appeal of non-alignment, especially in the face of what some like Ndlovu-Gatsheni have argued is a “refusal of the West to accept or adapt to the new historical era”.¹⁶

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has sharpened this focus. Many African nations perceive the war as a European proxy conflict between Russia and the West rather than a global issue. The then AU chairperson, Senegalese President Macky Sall, has emphasised that Africa does not wish to become a battleground for a new Cold War.¹⁷ Instead, the continent aspires to be a “pole of stability”, open to mutually beneficial partnerships.

African countries are particularly cautious about becoming pawns in these geopolitical rivalries. They are hesitant to pick sides, especially between China and the West, which are integral to their economic and developmental objectives. African nations have cultivated diverse trading and investment partners. The European Union is still Africa's largest trading partner, but China is the single largest trading country. The US is also important, primarily through its unilateral preference scheme, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Other significant partners include India, the United Arab

¹⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2022), p. 2.

¹⁷ K. Larson, “Africa Leader Warns of Pressure to Choose Sides in Ukraine”, *AP News*, 20 September 2022.

Emirates, Türkiye, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Russia and Brazil.

This economic diversification militates against African countries' alignment with one global power overtly, as doing so could jeopardise their economic and development prospects. While international relations involve more than just transactions, non-alignment is increasingly tied to Africa's developmental objectives. However, the growing difficulties of managing such a balancing act as geopolitical tensions grow became apparent when the US ambassador made the allegations that South Africa had supplied Russia with weapons, leading some in the US Congress to threaten to remove South Africa from AGOA.

Against this background, successfully implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has become even more necessary. While it is intended to be implemented incrementally, its aim is to develop regional value chains to contribute to Africa's move up the industrial value chain and become less dependent on external actors; both the pandemic and the war in Ukraine made this an imperative for Africa.

Several practical cases demonstrated for Africa the West's duplicity and hypocrisy over the years. The most recent was the Covid response and the high cost of vaccines or the inability to access them by developing countries. The Europeans opposed the proposal by South Africa and India to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for a temporary waiver on intellectual property rights on vaccines, although the incoming US Biden administration in 2021 lent it rhetorical support.

The unfulfilled promises relating to climate finance made in Copenhagen in 2009 are another source of resentment, coupled with the repeated call by developing countries for more adaptation finance, which is more necessary than mitigation finance since African emissions are less than 4% of the global figure. Calls for reform of the global economic governance institutions so that developing countries have more voice in shaping the rules, including on debt, have also had slow responses.

The Ukraine war has highlighted two other issues: Africa and the Global South have always objected to the weaponisation of the dollar and unilateral sanctions. The interest shown by many in the Global South to join BRICS in 2023 can be largely attributed to a desire to belong to a grouping that is considered as being the vanguard of “dewesternisation”, even if all may not agree on what should replace the existing system. A core focus for BRICS in 2024 will be the use of local currencies and alternative trade payment systems that would reduce the risks perceived by its members inherent to the current global order.

Will Non-alignment Benefit Africa and Can It Be Sustained?

Africa’s non-alignment should not be misinterpreted as a reluctance to engage internationally. Instead, it reflects an evolving strategy to maintain autonomy while seeking mutually beneficial relationships with world powers. The strategy has historical roots, enabling countries from the Global South to sustain robust trade relations across the political divides, a tactic deemed as relevant today as it was during the Cold War era. As Africa continues to manage this delicate balance, the region’s determination to defend its interests and navigate complex global dynamics remains at the forefront.

While this non-aligned position does not condone violations of international law, such as Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine, many call for a balanced approach in the UN towards all instances of international law violations, including Israel’s actions towards Palestine.¹⁸ The emphasis is on avoiding punitive measures that isolate one party, as seen in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles, which contributed to the Second World War. This call for consistency in applying international law and

¹⁸ “Statement by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, during the Media Briefing on the Russia/Ukraine conflict”..., cit.

the UN Charter resonates with several countries in the Global South and Africa.

Nevertheless, can African countries sustain their non-aligned position and yet reduce the risks of such positions? Africa still struggles to adopt a coordinated position on many contentious global issues. Yet, the continent has displayed greater agency in recent years. It may not be in a position yet to ensure all outcomes in its favour. Still, it can articulate its positions better.¹⁹ This rising agency has empowered them to reject accepting being told what their responses should be, particularly by the West. The same applies in the security realm, in the Sahel, for example, where the solutions proffered by Europeans have failed; hence the search for other options, whether these be Wagner mercenaries or coups overthrowing elites deemed to be corrupt and acting as puppets of European powers.

Non-alignment, therefore, is a pragmatic tool that allows states to retain economic and political relations with actors across dividing lines, to hedge and express displeasure with the current global system while still engaging with it. Nevertheless, navigating the geopolitical rapids may become increasingly difficult. The Global South must eschew binary thinking, avoiding the pitfall of picking sides in both rhetoric and practice. In doing so, they require the implementation of positions not only self-identified as non-aligned but perceived as such by others.

Sustained commitment and heightened political efforts are indispensable for this potentially transformative shift to solidify and recalibrate the Global South's international standing. This approach would reinforce non-aligned countries' potential role as dialogue facilitators in the international arena. Thus, the continent can carve out a role as a diplomatic intermediary while upholding its non-aligned principles. The API could

¹⁹ For example, the AU adopted a common position on climate change and the SDGs and a growing number of African leaders are voicing similar messages regarding the energy transition, the global financial system and food security to name a few.

be an encouraging sign that, when effectively harnessed, non-alignment can become a vehicle for peacemaking efforts and foster greater international understanding.²⁰

While many in Africa and the West saw the API with cynicism and suspicion, there are reasons to believe this could impact the eventual dialogue between Russia and Ukraine. By presenting themselves outside the West versus Russia camp context, Global South countries can use their existing dialogue channels with both parties. Furthermore, Africa's presence in the debate can be strengthened by increasing coordination with other Global South initiatives in the Ukraine conflict, like China, Brazil or Indonesia.

Indeed, one particular challenge regarding non-alignment is its diffuse understanding among countries in the Global South. This brings the need to revive the non-alignment concept, tailoring it to the Global South's unique geopolitical realities, which are still evolving.

The answer to this does not lie solely in the NAM but in collective action between its members and other international institutions. For instance, regional blocs like the AU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are vital in promoting collaboration and fostering dialogue among nations in the Global South. They should be much more active in presenting the case for non-alignment. By tackling shared issues and objectives collectively, these regional organisations could assist countries in navigating the complexities of the international system and guarantee that their interests are protected.

²⁰ R. Yade, "Give Africa's Peace Delegation for Ukraine a Chance", Atlantic Council (blog), 15 June 2023.

Conclusion

Non-alignment in the contemporary world is more nuanced than ever. Coordination is a strength, but it is also essential to recognise that countries and regions have unique circumstances and non-alignment, as a foreign policy position has to be tailored to reflect these in each case. It should also not be perceived as a cure-all for these countries' problems. It must work with other policies and initiatives to encourage regional development, maintain stability, and promote prosperity.

Non-alignment should not be regarded as a mere convenience or a political stance but rather as a proactive plan addressing the Global South's shared challenges. At its heart, it should promote autonomy, not isolation, necessitating a deeper understanding of the distinct challenges and opportunities in the evolving geopolitical landscape.

As we navigate the XXI century, non-alignment is more than neutrality²¹ or hedging²² positions. It presents an opportunity to harness the potential of a multipolar world while acknowledging and mitigating inherent risks. Amid a landscape littered with challenges and opportunities, Africa and the broader Global South must seize the chance to redefine this principle and the values it should advance in the XXI century.

²¹ A. Botes, "Ukraine – South Africa Is Not Neutral, We Are Non-Aligned", *Daily Maverick*, 16 May 2022.

²² M. Spektor, "In Defense of the Fence Sitters: What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 102, no. 3, 18 April 2023.

3. African Countries and Voting Alignments in the UN Security Council and General Assembly

Malte Brosig

The return of great power rivalry might be one of the defining elements of our time. During the many contemporary crises such as Covid-19, the war against Ukraine or climate change, there is little common ground among great powers on how to solve them. Instead, antagonism and polarisation are increasing, which puts multilateralism and the liberal order under stress.¹ While we are far away from a radical system change or breakdown, it is noticeable that a loosening of traditional forms of global governance is underway.² In these times of confrontation, how are African countries positioning themselves in the UN Security Council and General Assembly? Have their voting patterns shifted, reflecting great power rivalry, or have they been stable despite significant global shocks and crises?

This chapter aims to answer these questions by analysing voting patterns in two UN organs, the Security Council and the General Assembly. While growing tensions leave their traces in

¹ J. Ikenberry (2018), “The End of the Liberal Order?”, *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2018, pp. 7-23; S. Patrick, *Multilateralism a la Carte: The New World of Global Governance*, Valdai Papers, Valdai Discussion Club, 22 July 2015.

² Yf. Reykers, J. Karlsrud, M. Brosig, S.C. Hofmann, C. Maglia, and P. Rieker, “Ad hoc coalitions in global governance: a conceptual framework”, *International Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 2, 2023, pp. 727-45.

voting records as more and more resolutions are adopted without consensus, the average number of adopted resolutions remains stable in both organs. However, the number of contested issue areas is growing. As the analysis will show, voting behaviour of African countries differs significantly between the Security Council and the General Assembly. While in the former the African members (A3) occupy a marginal position and need to align with the P3 (i.e., the Western permanent members: the United States, the United Kingdom and France), the situation in the General Assembly is different. Here developing and emerging countries constitute the majority group, which allows them to take a more proactive position. The chapter starts by exploring voting in the Security Council before moving to the General Assembly. The focus will be on the post-Cold War period and especially on the last two decades.

African Voting in the Security Council

Before analysing African voting in the Security Council, it is important to understand how the Council works and how power structures operate as they influence voting behaviour. Because Africa has no permanent members or veto power, it is at a structural disadvantage. To be adopted, a resolution requires nine affirmative votes (60%) out of 15 and no permanent member vetoing the draft resolution. As Africa only has three non-permanent seats it can neither block a resolution nor does it have much power to initiate the drafting of resolutions. In fact, drafting power rests firmly in the hands of the so-called penholders which are the P3 (US, UK and France), who write the vast majority of resolutions.³ As a consequence, the A3 were the sole author of only 17 resolutions out of 1,391 between 2000 and 2021.⁴ This illustrates the marginal role African

³ *The Penholder System*, Research Report 3, Security Council Report, 18 December 2018.

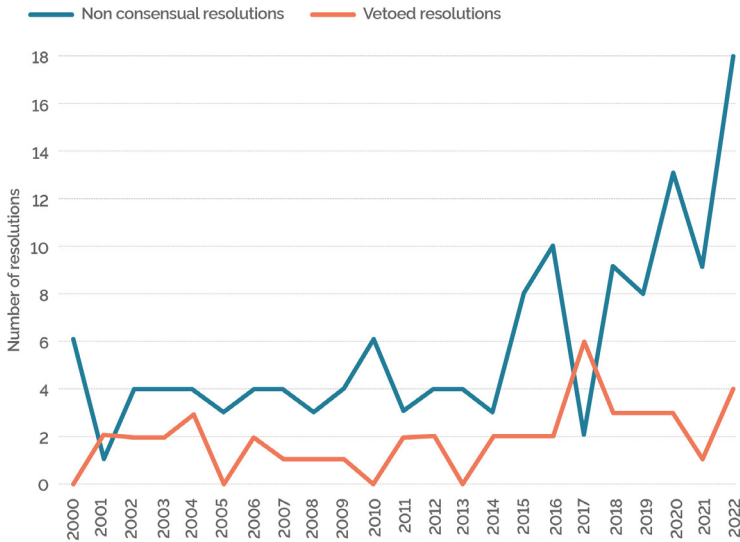
⁴ M. Brosig and M. Lecki, "The African Three (A3) in the UN Security Council:

countries are playing as a single group. It also points to their need to seek alignment with other groups and powers, to make African interests visible.

The open antagonism between the US, Russia and China across several issues might lead to the impression that the Security Council is in decline, akin to the dark days of the Cold War in which East and West frequently vetoed each other's draft resolutions. Is this the case today as well? Considering the years since 2000, we can observe two trends, a relatively stable Council machinery but also increasing polarisation. On the positive side, the number of resolutions adopted per annum is stable and usually varies between 50 and 60. The use of the veto has also not increased. It often ranges between 2-3 per year, thus affecting only a fraction of voted resolutions. Most important for African countries, those resolutions usually do not refer to Africa. Of course, the mere existence of the veto has certainly prevented the tabling of drafts for voting. But despite all the real tensions among great powers, even the war against Ukraine has not triggered much of a spillover and total deadlock. However, one can also observe that consensus voting is on the decline. The number of non-consensus resolutions has been increasing over the last 10 years and has significantly grown in the year of Russia's invasion (Figure 3.1). Still, a clear majority of resolutions get adopted by consensus, and most of Africa related resolutions are among them.

Translating Agency into Influence?”, *Politikon*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2022, pp. 254-73, cit. p. 263.

FIG. 3.1 - UNSC VOTING 2000-22



Source: Author's own compilation

If we take a closer look at how the A3 vote in the Security Council, it makes sense to focus on those resolutions which are adopted without consensus. Table 3.1 provides an overview of A3 and other groups' voting alignment from 2000 to 2021. We can see that there is the greatest alignment with the United Kingdom (99%), France (94%) and US (85%). Russia and China enjoy a far lower rate of 53% and 71%, respectively. Thus, in the Security Council, African countries remain closely aligned to key Western countries. This is not very surprising, as the P3 draft most resolutions and effectively hold all country portfolios in their hands (that is, they are drafting resolutions focusing on country-specific issues, which are often treated as geopolitically more important than thematic resolutions which are left for elected members). The US is also the largest financial contributor to the UN and pays 28% of the UN peacekeeping budget. The structural design of the Security Council which privileges the P3

makes them too important a partner for the A3 to antagonise them. Voting alignment of the A3 resembles those of most other groups, like the E10 (i.e., the elected, non-permanent members of the Council), Europe or South and Central America.

TAB. 3.1 - AVERAGE ANNUAL CONSISTENCY OF SAME VOTING BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL P5 MEMBERS AND SELECTED GROUPS, NON-CONSENSUAL SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS, 2000-21

Country	E10	A3	Asia	S. & C. America	Europe
Russia	38%	53%	100%	45%	47%
China	71%	71%	100%	67%	64%
US	68%	85%	54%	86%	88%
UK	98%	99%	100%	99%	100%
France	93%	94%	83%	96%	100%
P5 Average	74%	80%	87%	79%	80%

Source: M. Brosig and M. Lecki, "The African Three (A3) in the UN Security Council: Translating Agency into Influence?", *Politikon*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2022, p. 263.

However, this should not simply be equated to assuming that African countries generally vote with the West. When comparing voting patterns of two regional powers, Germany and South Africa (2019-20), it is revealing how different their preferences are. Table 3.2 provides an overview of how the two countries have voted on non-consensual resolutions. In situations of high contestation (veto use) both countries often found themselves voting in different camps. They voted the same way in only 54% of cases. On these highly contested resolutions South Africa displayed no clear alignment to either the Western group or China and Russia. In 54% of cases it voted not only with Germany but also with China and Russia. In almost a third of cases it voted with the US. Divisions in the Council which lead

to the non-adoption of a resolution practically always emanate from disagreements among the P5. Germany displays a clearer alignment with the Western group. In 77% of cases it voted with the US and only 8% with China and Russia. The latter two always voted together.

TAB. 3.2 - VOTING COINCIDENCE GERMANY, SOUTH AFRICA, RUSSIA, CHINA, US (2019-20)

	Failed resolutions (13)		Non-consensus resolutions (21)	
	South Africa	Germany	South Africa	Germany
China	54%	8%	43%	43%
Russia	54%	8%	24%	5%
US	31%	77%	71%	90%
GER/SA	54%		81%	
CN/RUS	100%		52%	
US/CN/RUS	0%		5%	

Source: M. Brosig, "Effective Multilateralism in Difficult Times? Evaluating Germany's and South Africa's Term at the UN Security Council 2019-2020", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), 2021, p. 5.

On less contested issues – that is, resolutions that are not vetoed but are adopted without consensus – the voting patterns of Germany and South Africa start to merge. In these cases, South Africa voted more often with the US (71%) and Germany (81%) than with China (43%) and Russia (24%). Interestingly, on more contested issues South Africa displayed a stronger orientation towards Russia than it did on less contested issues. Here one can clearly see the attempt to navigate between big powers and not to get too closely aligned with a particular camp. Germany voted with the US in 90% of these cases, with China in 43% and with Russia in 5% of cases. When comparing

voting patterns between the A3 and European countries, for example, bloc voting is more cohesive for the latter. While both groups are fairly cohesive most of the time, the Western bloc is nearly fully cohesive (see Table 3.3) throughout. In 2019-20 the A3 only achieved 54% of group voting cohesion on failed resolutions while European members were at 100%. This trend also holds when applying a longer timeframe.

TAB. 3.3 - REGIONAL BLOC VOTING (2019-20)

Regional Bloc - same voting by European members:	
Failed resolutions	100%
Non-consensus resolutions	95%
Regional Bloc - same voting by African members:	
Failed resolutions	54%
Non-consensus resolutions	76%

Source: Brosig (2021)

The case of South Africa and Germany voting on the issue of Syria and humanitarian access to Idlib, a rebel stronghold, is illustrative of African members' dislike of getting drawn into great power competition (Table 3.4). During its time in the Council (2019-20) Germany was one of the penholders for the Syria file. It drafted several resolutions which were vetoed by Russia and China and was confronted with Russian rival drafts which were vetoed by the US. While Germany voted with the Western camp in all cases, South Africa split its vote by basically endorsing any proposal, either German- or Russian-drafted.

TAB. 3.4 - VOTING ON SYRIA 2019-20 (VETOED RESOLUTIONS)

	South Africa	Germany	Russia	China	US
Against	0	3	4	4	4
Affirmative	7	4	4	4	4
Abstention	1	1	0	0	0

Source: Brosig (2021)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 left its traces on the Security Council. It led to the highest number of non-consensual resolutions for decades (Figure 3.1). 18 of the 53 resolutions adopted were non-consensual. Increasing tensions because of the war and increasing Russian military engagement on the continent are also reflected in changing voting patterns of A3 members. Resolutions on Libya or the Central African Republic (CAR) show the A3 not voting in full alignment with the West. However, on other occasions the A3 also did not vote with China and Russia, as, for example, on resolutions regarding Mali and South Sudan. Resolutions concerning the war against Ukraine were drafted by a large group of 81 countries in February 2022 as well as by Russia in March. Unsurprisingly, none was adopted. On this issue the A3 voted consistently with Western countries for a resolution condemning the war and against the Russia-sponsored resolution.

In sum, the picture which emerges exploring long-term voting patterns as well as country and event voting is a differentiated one. The majority of resolutions are adopted by consensus. However non-consensual voting is growing, and the African countries are voting increasingly with different groups. Despite this, voting coincidence is strongly aligned to the P3. This is not surprising because the power structures in the Council are biased to favour these countries as they draft most resolutions affecting the African continent. Thus, alignment might not

necessarily always express political alignment but could be the result of necessity and pragmatism instead. The A3 do not systematically vote with Russia or China but they might, for example, seek to avoid getting drawn into great power rivalry, as the example of South Africa and Syria has shown.

African Voting in the General Assembly

The UN General Assembly differs from the UN Security Council in important ways which influence voting patterns. Its 193 members enjoy equal voting rights, which favours the interests of developing nations, who can form a majority. While in the Security Council great power interests are protected by the veto and the relatively small number of members, the Assembly better represents the entirety of UN members by being politically inclusive. This is most visible in the drafting process. While in the Security Council drafting concentrates predominantly on the P3, drafting General Assembly resolutions is mostly shared and usually involves a larger group of countries, on average around 55 to 67.⁵ The consequence is that resolutions in the General Assembly do not fail, while in the Security Council veto use and non-adoption of resolutions appears every year. Within the General Assembly, developing countries are in the majority and thus the G77 is the most active group, drafting 17% of all resolutions, with the Africa group drafting 6% and EU countries as a cohesive group only sponsoring 1% between 2009-19 (Table 3.5).

⁵ P. Seabra and R. Mesquita, “Beyond Roll-Call Voting: Sponsorship Dynamics at the UN General Assembly” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2022.

TAB. 3.5 - GROUPS SPONSORING GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS (2009-19)

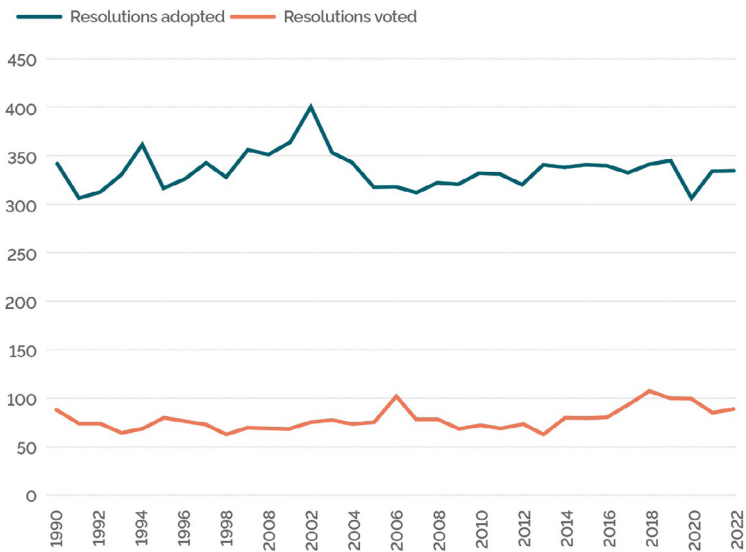
Group	Number of drafts	Percentage
No group	1732	69
G77	424	17
Africa Group	147	6
NAM	105	4
Other Groups	66	3
OIC	25	1
EU	19	1
Total	2518	100

Source: P. Seabra and R. Mesquita, "Beyond Roll-Call Voting: Sponsorship Dynamics at the UN General Assembly" *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2022, p. 7

However, the vast majority of resolutions are sponsored collectively without specific group allocation, which speaks of the relatively intact internal cohesiveness. Since its foundation in 1945, and until 2022, the UN has convened 77 sessions and adopted 19,817 resolutions, equivalent to an average of 257 per session.⁶ Since the end of the Cold War, around 340 resolutions are adopted every year (Figure 3.2). Although the General Assembly has adopted more than 7 times as many resolutions than the Security Council, its resolutions are non-binding. However, its coverage of topics is more diverse than that of the Security Council, which concentrates on peace and security, a sector in which the Assembly usually only gets involved when the Council is incapacitated.

⁶ UN Digital Library, [Voting Data](#), 2023.

FIG. 3.2 - NUMBER OF ADOPTED AND VOTED UNGA RESOLUTIONS 1990-22



Source: UN Digital Library, [Voting Data](#), 2023

This can lead to situations in which, for high profile conflicts involving key interests of the P5, UNSC resolutions get vetoed and the issue is relegated to the General Assembly. The threshold for adopting a resolution is much lower in the Assembly, it only requires a simple majority of the votes cast while in the Security Council a 60% threshold applies with no veto being applied. These two very different voting systems and membership compositions make it less likely that great power competition will block or divide the General Assembly. The majority (70-80%) of resolutions are adopted without a vote and most are sponsored by a large number of countries but without specific group or bloc affiliation. This has not changed dramatically over the years. However, there has been a visible rise in the number of voted (non-consensus) resolutions. These increased from 2013 (19%) to 2020 (32%) but fell to 26%

in the following two years (Figure 3.3). Russia's invasion of Ukraine had no disruptive effect leading to a decline of non-voted resolutions or additional polarisation.

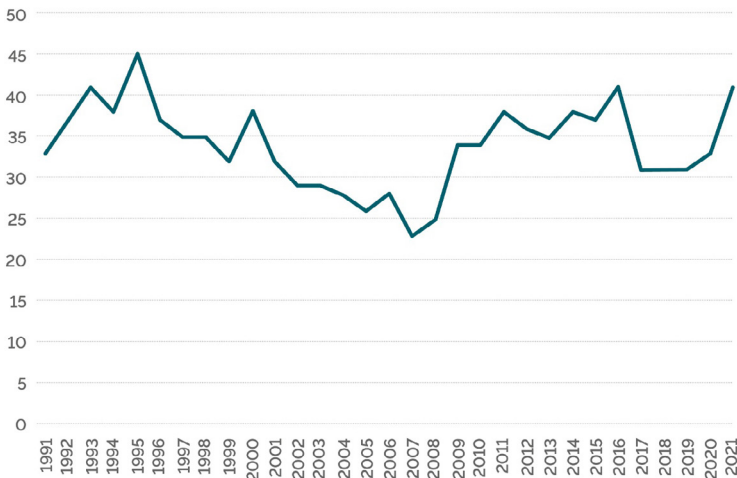
FIG. 3.3 - PERCENTAGE OF VOTED RESOLUTIONS UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 1990-22



Source: UN Digital Library, [Voting Data](#), 2023.

Indicative of this rather stable trend is also US voting coincidence with the General Assembly. Over the last 30 years it reached a low point of just 23% in 2007, long before debates around great power rivalry surfaced. It reached its second highest level in 2016 and 2021 at 41%. Thus, it is difficult to argue that the General Assembly has turned more divisive, at least from the perspective of the US (Figure 3.4). While the trend of great power rivalry seems not to have altered general voting patterns within the Assembly, this does not mean it is without tensions. Given the large number of resolutions which are adopted each session, even a low percentage of voted resolutions reflects the sizable number of non-consensus topics.

FIG. 3.4 - US VOTING COINCIDENCE IN THE UNGA 1991-21



Source: US State Department, "Report to Congress on Voting Practices in the United Nations for 2021", Washington D.C., 31 March 2022, p. 6.

A snapshot analysis of 2022 voting on contested issues reveals ongoing divisions between developing and developed nations (Table 3.6). However, this is not a new trend. The literature has long pointed to the North-South divide and South-South solidarity, for example, within the group of developing nation, the G77.⁷ While voted resolutions indicate non-consensus, it matters how contested a resolution is. If only a handful of countries abstain or reject a resolution, or if bloc voting in larger numbers occurs, it points to either minimal dissent by only a few members, or deeper divisions. Table 3.6 offers an overview of resolutions which were adopted with deeper divisions and opposite group voting in which either the majority of Western or African countries found themselves in opposite camps.

⁷ K. Iida, "Third World solidarity: The Group of 77 in the UN General Assembly", *International Organization*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1988, pp. 375-95; K. Soo and B. Russett, "The new politics of voting alignments in the United Nations General Assembly", *International Organization*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1996, pp. 629-52.

TABLE 3.6 - LIST OF VOTED RESOLUTIONS WITH HIGH DEGREE OF DIVISIONS IN 2022

Resolution	Topic	Vote: Y/N/A/not voting
A/RES/77/247	Israel/Palestina	87/26/53/27
A/RES/77/250	Arms race outer space	115/47/7/24
A/RES/77/204	Combating Nazism	120/50/10/13
A/RES/77/206	Mercenaries & human rights	130/52/4/7
A/RES/77/214	Human rights & unilateral coercion	130/53/1/9
A/RES/77/215	Equitable international order	122/54/10/7
A/RES/77/216	Peace as human rights	131/53/1/8
A/RES/77/218	Extrajudicial executions	133/0/44/16
A/RES/77/222	Death penalty	125/37/22/9
A/RES/77/228	Human rights Iran	80/29/65/19
A/RES/77/229	Human rights Crimea	82/14/80/17
A/RES/77/230	Human rights Syria	92/14/71/16
A/RES/77/238	Drugs	124/9/45/15
A/RES/77/183	Rural poverty	123/51/0/19
A/RES/77/174	New international economic order	123/50/1/19
A/RES/77/175	Globalization: development UN	130/2/45/16
A/RES/77/149	Independence to colonial countries	124/3/42/24
A/RES/77/131	Independence to colonial countries	120/2/49/22
A/RES/77/36	Information & security	112/52/8/21
A/RES/77/82	Prohibition nuclear weapons	116/50/15/12
A/RES/77/39	Nuclear weapons	120/0/60/13
A/RES/77/42	Weapons outer space	122/50/4/17
A/RES/77/48	Multilateralism disarmament	127/6/49/11
A/RES/77/47	Nuclear disarmament	136/35/8/14
A/RES/77/74	Reducing nuclear danger	119/49/13/12
A/RES/77/54	Treaty prohibition nuclear weapons	119/44/13/17
A/RES/77/57	Legality nuclear weapons	133/35/13/12
A/RES/77/67	Nuclear weapons free world	131/38/11/13
A/RES/77/65	Nuclear disarmament	120/42/20/11
A/RES/77/96	International security	94/53/28/18
A/RES/77/22	Palestina rights	101/17/53/22
A/RES/77/23	Palestina rights	90/30/47/26
A/RES/77/26	Golan	92/9/65/27
A/RES/77/13	UN-CSTO	51/7/70/65
A/RES/76/267	IDPs Abkhazia, Georgia	95/12/56/30

Source: UN Digital Library, [Voting Data](#), 2023

Of the more than 330 adopted resolutions in 2022 (only regular sessions), 89 were voted resolutions, and out of these 35 can be categorised as highly divisive. Unsurprisingly the issue of Palestine and Israel remains a dividing topic, as are the issues of nuclear weapons, and human rights in Crimea, Iran, the occupied territories of Georgia, and Syria. Developing countries often see criticism of human rights violations as unfair instrumentalisation of these rights for political purposes. Attempts by developing countries to forge more fundamental changes in the current global order (see resolutions: 77/215, 77/174) are also not finding much sympathy among Western countries.

In this context, resolutions adopted in the wake of the war against Ukraine which were passed in emergency sessions held outside the regular meeting schedule in 2022 and 2023 appear not overly divisive. Four out of the six resolutions received affirmative votes from 140-143 countries, with just 5-7 countries objecting out of 193. Russia's suspension from the UN Human Rights Council and a resolution on reparations received much lower approval overall and among African countries (Table 3.7).

Although resolutions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine are not highly contested, African voting differed, highlighting some important nuances. A split appeared between a sizeable number of countries abstaining as well as voting for the resolution. Only Eritrea voted with Russia on resolutions that gained the highest approval (ES/11/1+2+4+6). Just above half of African countries voted for the resolutions while the rest abstained or did not vote. The continent is evidently split. In general, one can distinguish between four inner African voting groups. The first group of mostly 'yes' voters is the largest: it consists of 24 countries (see Table 3.8) but constitutes less than half of African votes. Almost equally large (21) is the group of countries which either abstained or did not cast their vote. Four countries tend to reject resolutions and four split their voting.

TAB. 3.7 - UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY VOTING ON UKRAINE 2022-23

Resolution	Topic	Vote: Y/N/A/non-vote	African vote: Y/N/A/non vote
A/RES/ES/11-6	Peace Ukraine	141/7/32/13	30/2/14/7
A/RES/ES/11-5	Reparation for Ukraine	94/14/73/12	15/5/18/5
A/RES/ES/11-4	Territorial integrity Ukraine	143/5/35/10	30/0/19/5
A/RES/ES/11-3	Suspension Russia from HR Council	93/24/58/18	9/8/24/12
A/RES/ES/11-2	Humanitarian consequences Ukraine	140/5/38/10	27/1/20/6
A/RES/ES/11-1	Aggression against Ukraine	141/5/35/12	28/1/17/8

Source: UN Digital Library, [Voting Data](#), 2023

TAB. 3.8 - AFRICAN VOTING PATTERNS ON UKRAINE

Voting preference	Number of countries	Country
YES (at least 4 times)	24	Benin, Cabo Verde, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, DRC, Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Somalia, Togo, Tunisia, Zambia
Abstainers & non-voters	21	Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, eSwatini, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda
Rejecters (minimum 2)	4	Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Zimbabwe
Flexible (split votes)	4	Botswana, Gabon, Lesotho, Sao Tome & Principe

Source: UN Digital Library, [Voting Data](#), 2023

African voting patterns on Ukraine deviate from those of Western countries, which practically all voted for the resolutions. The reasons for the African division can best be explained by their dislike of being forced to take sides either between the West and Russia, a disposition to oppose hard sanctions against a non-Western country, historical ties with the Soviet Union, and the need for Russia as a counter-balancing actor against a still dominant West on the global scene.⁸

Conclusion

In sum, voting in the Security Council and General Assembly has become more polarised but not at a dramatic level. The output of resolutions remains stable and a great majority of them is adopted by consensus in both organs. However, signs of deeper divisions are on the rise in non-consensual voting in the Security Council and voting on resolutions in the General Assembly. In the former, African countries remain aligned to the P3 in most instances. This is not surprising as the A3 occupy a rather weak structural position and need to align with other countries to get resolutions adopted. As the P3 draft most resolutions, occupy a permanent seat with veto power and sponsor large parts of the UN budget, such an alignment is not very surprising.

A different picture emerges in the General Assembly. Here divisions between Western and African countries are more pronounced, but this is not a new trend. With a different membership structure and voting procedure, a different practice in favour of developing countries has emerged. This is most visible in the high number of countries sponsoring resolutions, while a more activist position of developing countries is also noticeable. On selected issues there is an obvious North-South divide in voting, which particularly affects highly divisive topics.

⁸ E. Sidiropoulos, “How do Global South Politics of Non-Alignment explain South Africa’s position on Ukraine?”, Brookings, 2 August 2022.

The issue of Ukraine is not among the highly divisive issues, but African countries are split into two camps, either supporting the respective resolutions or abstaining or not voting. This can be interpreted as a sign of approval of the principles of the UN Charter, especially on state sovereignty, but also of a dislike for getting drawn into great power rivalry over a conflict which is of peripheral relevance for most but can also have negative effects for some.

4. France: The Controversial Face of Europe in Africa

Denis M. Tull

If Africa is turning against the West, as the title of this report suggests, then France has borne the brunt of this process. Like no other country, France embodies and crystallises these sentiments. At the same time, French relations with former African colonies are characterised by a singularity that cautions against the temptation to derive conclusions deemed valid for “Europe” or “the West” more generally. In a context of multipolarity, African states navigate their international relations very rationally, diversifying partners in the hope of maximising benefits. If this text employs the expression “anti-French sentiments” to explore an increasingly acrimonious relationship, it should be noted that these “sentiments” refer to French policies and politics, not France itself. The text focuses on France’s relations with the Sahel, but it would not be surprising if its relations with former colonies elsewhere in West and Central Africa also enter a period of accelerated change, much of which is driven by African actors, not France.

What Are the Manifestations of Anti-French Sentiment?

France has recently suffered a dramatic turnaround in its influence and reputation in the Sahel, and even in West Africa as a whole. As regards influence, this is evident on the

level of state-to-state relations and foreign policy. A series of military coups has brought governments to power (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) that have resulted in sharply deteriorated bilateral relations or outright political conflict with France. The acrimonious and very public rupture in French-Mali relations is the most obvious signpost in this regard, entailing, among other things, the expulsion of the French ambassador to Mali (January 2022), followed by the – largely forced – withdrawal of the French military Operation Barkhane in August of the same year. Barely one year later, similar events took place in neighbouring Burkina Faso, when the military government ordered France to close its military base near Ouagadougou, where 400 French special forces had been deployed since 2011.

In both Mali and Burkina Faso, the fall-out was accompanied by further attacks against French cultural and diplomatic representations, the suspension of French media outlets (RFI, France 24) and public protests against French influence, while France reacted by ending or suspending its development assistance. At the time of writing, developments in Niger seem to follow a similar screenplay. In all three cases, military governments have cancelled long-standing military defence accords with France, a trademark of the postcolonial relationship between France and its “*pré carré*”. Everything considered, this quick and tumultuous rupture has signalled the end of six decades of close cooperation and the end of France as the preeminent foreign partner of these Sahelian countries.

A perhaps even more serious development is the rising tide of negative perceptions and attitudes of Sahelian publics towards French policy in the region. While robust, comprehensive and longitudinal data points are missing, there is ample evidence of increasingly critical or even outright hostile attitudes, certainly in the Sahel countries. Since at least 2020, this has included a wide range of protests and street demonstrations; sit-ins and even attacks against French representations and interests (embassies, cultural centres, businesses and even convoys of the French army); myriad hostile declarations by activists and

opinion leaders; and an avalanche of outbursts on social media.

Interviews with a variety of Malian interlocutors of different social, economic and political stripes likewise demonstrate a significant degree of hostility towards France, expressed in calls for a general pushback against French influence and deep-seated suspicions about French policy and its interests.

This rising anti-French tide has come as a shock to French government officials who, on the contrary, expect gratitude for the country's military and political sacrifices to save the region from being overrun by jihadist movements. France not only provided immediate and decisive support to Mali, on the request of the Malian authorities in 2013 (Operation Serval), it went on to sustain and broaden its assistance over nearly a decade across the wider Sahel region (Operation Barkhane). France has paid a heavy price in blood and treasure, including 59 fallen soldiers and at least €6 billion of military expenditure over the course of the operation.¹ President Emmanuel Macron has recently defended French policy: "If France hadn't intervened [in 2013 in the Sahel], we wouldn't be talking about Mali, Burkina-Faso or Niger today... These states would no longer exist", a view that is widely shared among French decision-makers.²

The depth and scope of anti-French sentiment cannot be overstated. In all likelihood, the problem for France goes beyond the Sahel. Opinion surveys have suggested that France's reputation problem exists elsewhere. According to a 2020 poll in Senegal, 57% of respondents said France's political and economic influence in the country was somewhat or very negative.³ Similar numbers were reported in Cameroon (55%

¹ Operation Barkhane's annual expenditure averaged €600 to €800 million per year.

² VIDEO – "Mali, Niger et Burkina 'n'existeraient plus aujourd'hui' sans la France, s'agace Emmanuel Macron", *TF1 INFO*, 28 August 2023.

³ "Les Sénégalais jugent positive l'influence économique et politique de la Chine et des Etats-Unis et pointent du doigt celle de la France", *Afrobarometer*, 28 May 2023.

negative), Togo (59%) and Gabon (72%).⁴ However, negative attitudes were in some measure less pronounced in Burkina Faso (48%) and Côte d'Ivoire (42%).⁵

Explaining Anti-French Sentiment

Two explanations can be advanced to make sense of the rising tide of anti-French perceptions and resulting political conflicts.

The first is the disappointing outcome of a decade-long intervention, i.e. the French failure to halt the downward spiral of violence, political turmoil and socioeconomic crisis in the Sahel.⁶ This failure is exacerbated by increasing spill-over effects into West Africa's coastal states. To be sure, stabilisation efforts in Mali and the Sahel have been a collective failure. National, regional and continental actors and institutions have not been bystanders to the crisis. The same is true for the "international community", including myriad bilateral partners, the EU and the UN, including its MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) stabilisation mission.

If Sahelian publics and opinion-leaders single out France as the main culprit, not entirely fairly, this is due to the outsized role it has consistently played in Mali and beyond since 2013. Paris has largely conducted and directed the military and security response to the crisis. It was also the pivotal political and diplomatic player to mobilise EU and UN partners; it has shaped MINUSMA and EU missions (European Union Training Mission – EUTM Mali, European Union Capacity Building Mission – EUCAP Sahel in both Mali and Niger); it has played an important role in various regional and international frameworks (the Sahel Coalition, the G5 Sahel,

⁴ Analyse Online, *Afrobarometer*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ G. Carbone and C. Casola (eds.), *Sahel: 10 Years of Instability - Local, Regional and International Dynamics*, Milan, ISPI-Ledizioni, October 2022.

Task Force Takuba etc.); and it has been vocally involved in the minefield of local politics, most controversially in Mali's peace process. To all intents and purposes, this has made France the most visible, influential actor in the Sahelian drama. It has also made it the politically most vulnerable player, mechanically attracting the brunt of responsibility and accusations.

However, performance, outcomes and visibility provide an insufficient explanation for the tide of public opinion. Perceptions and assessments of France's present and immediate role are undoubtedly informed by the country's much longer political, military and economic history in the region. Memories of colonisation and post-colonial domination are activated to make sense of the current predicament.

French involvement in the region is analysed through the prism of past intentions and policies, i.e. colonial and postcolonial encounters, stories of occupation, exploitation, discrimination, domination and paternalism, which Sahelian societies do not view as a distant past. A well-known illustration of this activation of historical registers – reading present actions through past experience – is France's perceived proximity to Tuareg rebels. To put it in simplistic terms, the fact that the French army prevented Malian soldiers from occupying the northern town of Kidal in 2013 has been interpreted by a large segment of Malian society as evidence of a French conspiracy with separatist groups in North Mali. Likewise, a popular view across the Sahel is that if the French army has failed to stabilise Mali, it was because France had no intention of doing so. It is often argued, to the contrary, that maintaining instability in the Sahel is part of France's "hidden agenda" to politically dominate and economically exploit Mali and the region.

This suggests that present-day anti-French sentiments have deep historical roots and are informed by persistent postcolonial suspicions. It would be an error to dismiss the prevalence of these narratives or even often-implausible conspiracy theories as manipulation and disinformation. Their wide circulation attests to their intrinsic interest to a large number of people. Citizens

from all walks of life, including academics and intellectuals, consider them credible.⁷

To insist on the weight of history is not to say that the French disaster in the Sahel was unavoidable. French policy has contributed to the backlash. The sheer duration of the intervention made critiques over time all but inevitable, as it does in most long-running operations (UN or otherwise) that overstay their welcome. In Bamako, terms like “*tutelle*” (utelage), “siege” and even “occupation” have long entered the political lexicon of the crisis. The durability of the intervention makes possible and legitimises a form of internationalised government that many Sahelian citizens perceive as a humiliation and a violation of sovereignty. In Niger, for example, a majority of citizens (64%) rejects the government’s recourse to foreign military partners.⁸

If its omnipresence on all political and military fronts has earned Paris the reputation of being omnipotent, this assessment tends to ignore the agency of local actors, many of whom have savvily defended their interests, often against those of France. Thus, the degree to which France is able to shape events in the Sahel is debatable. Nevertheless, what many citizens in the Sahel can agree upon is France’s unrelenting *ambition* to do so.

Consequences: The Rise of Populism

The political significance of anti-French sentiments lies in the fact that they are increasingly mobilised by populist leaders. France has become an object of domestic politics.

For populist individuals and groups, the former colonial power is *the* enemy of the people. France has become a

⁷ D.M. Tull, “Contesting France: Rumors, Intervention and the Politics of Truth in Mali”, *Critique Internationale*, vol. 90, no. 1, pp. 151-71.

⁸ M. Tahirou Ali Bako, “Terrorisme : Les Nigériens sont satisfaits de l’implication de leur armée et ne veulent pas de l’aide d’une armée étrangère”, *Dépêche* no. 653, *Afrobarometer*, 18 June 2023, p. 8.

culprit for their countries' ills, such as fraying democratic systems, poverty, inequality and insecurity. As was mentioned, Operation Barkhane was often accused of failing to improve security, if it was not suspected of actually supporting "terrorist groups". However, when Paris took the decision to withdraw its forces from Mali, it was accused of abandoning Mali "in full flight".⁹ When the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took sanctions against Mali and later Niger, a widely shared conviction in the region suggested that it was actually France that had instigated the regional bloc to slam both countries.

All of these more or less specific accusations illustrate the broader idea that France threatens, undermines or prevents the freedom of African nations. In this reading, France has never permitted its former colonies real independence, including genuine political and economic liberation, hence, the pervasive political and economic problems of the region. Based on widespread political and economic disenchantment, the surging populism in the Sahel is fiercely nationalist, though perhaps not so much anti-Western insofar as Western states other than France have – so far – been spared the wrath of populist leaders and the public.

Coup plotters have been the main beneficiaries of populism in the Sahel. Admittedly, they were credited for deposing unpopular leaders amid a persistent multidimensional crisis, but the promise of liberation from foreign and especially French influence has proved to be a strong or even stronger driver of support and popular legitimacy. Indeed, it is fair to say that the image of the external enemy has contributed more to the popularity of coup regimes than anything they may have done or announced. It is far from obvious that the situation in Mali has improved under military rule. The picture is even bleaker in Burkina Faso, where on the watch of Capitaine Ibrahim Traoré,

⁹ "Le Mali reproche à la France un 'abandon en plein vol' dans la lutte contre les djihadistes au Sahel", *Le Monde*, 26 September 2021.

the state has kept losing control over its territory at alarming rates. Whether Niger's coup regime will fare better remains to be seen. But France, the real or imagined external enemy, has helped to close the ranks behind the new regimes. Having an enemy is important for defining one's own identity; battling an enemy helps to demonstrate one's own value – in this case of ambitious military officers and their civilian supporters – to their national audience.¹⁰ This is key in generating domestic support because hostility towards the former colonial power is the single issue on which many or even most citizens will agree, regardless of class, gender or political convictions. For coup leaders, who are newcomers in the political arena, this windfall is absolutely essential. Mobilising public support in this way is the most efficient way to create a political base. It is also key to confronting the predictably hostile reactions to coups by Western partners and Africa's regional organisations. These outside actors face a profound dilemma when confronting a junta that can make a credible claim to popularity, as is the case in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Thus, staging and enacting a show of force by whipping up anti-French sentiment has the political purpose of enhancing the authority and legitimacy of emerging political actors – and their right to govern. Were it not for the external enemy, attitudes of Sahelian publics towards incoming military regimes may be far more diverse than is often assumed.

Anti-French narratives have steadily integrated the fabric of political discourse in the region over the past decade. This is not just the case in the Sahel: events in Mali have been the spark that has accelerated a broader trend. The way in which the Malian regime stood up to France has set an example that has fired up activists and publics across the region. The Malian government has demonstrated masterfully that taking on the French government was a politically effective strategy

¹⁰ U. Eco, *Die Fabrikation des Feindes und andere Gelegenheitschriften*, München, Carl Hanser Verlag, 2014, p. 9.

to generate and consolidate domestic political legitimacy. One consequence is that it is not only France, but also domestic politicians who are feeling the heat. In countries such as Senegal, for example, populist opposition figures attack incumbents as “France’s henchman”. This strikes a chord among urban youth and intellectuals who sense a pervasive French imperialism.¹¹ It has become politically risky for politicians to be perceived as being close to France. These groups and their populist tactics transform the domestic political balance of power and put pressure on governments. In other words, France has become an object that can greatly add to making and breaking political careers. Well aware of these dynamics, it was all the more remarkable that Niger’s President Mohamed Bazoum staunchly embraced cooperation with France and other Western partners. Others are more cautious. Amid the rising tide of hostility towards French influence, few leaders and public figures in the region have come out in defence of France.

French Reactions

As mentioned previously, anti-French narratives have deep historical roots that connect the present with the past. The large-scale and intrusive French footprint over the last decade has reignited fears and critiques of political interference and domination in the region, even though, of course, France was asked by regional powerholders to provide its assistance. For reasons of space, this is not the place to dwell on the mistakes and contradictions that have exacerbated local critiques of the French intervention and its effects. What bears emphasis, however, is the cognitive dissonance between French self-perceptions and the views that prevail in the region. Most French officials seem to assume that their good intentions, efforts and effects were self-evident and should be recognised as such in the region. Few are willing to acknowledge problematic

¹¹ “Sénégal. Les raisons d’une abstention surprise”, *AfriqueXXI*, 9 March 2022.

aspects – or even concede that issues could be perceived as such. Hubris has blinded French officials, rendering them unable to face the reality of a rising tide of critique and contestation that has over time spiralled into open hostility. The same hubris came to the fore when Paris could no longer ignore that anti-French narratives were spreading like wildfire. Politicians and officials have vigorously defended French involvement in the region, highlighting Operation Barkhane’s military successes and insisting that the region would have been worse off without French intervention.¹²

President Macron, for example, argued that

It was not France’s role to be the sole provider of political solutions after the military solution. We took on, unintentionally, an immense responsibility. It means that today, we are conflated with the rejection affecting the Malian political class, which has failed to set its country back on track ... That is why, under no circumstances will I allow the sacrifice of our soldiers to be stained once more with the same conflation, and under no circumstances will I allow that to happen again, whereby a spiral of unaccountability and substitution turns France into the perfect scapegoat.¹³

In this view, France is the scapegoat for the failures of politicians and governments in Mali (and supposedly elsewhere in the Sahel). But French officials and politicians also look elsewhere. In every discussion about France’s troubles in the Sahel, the topic of disinformation will be put forward by politicians and officials, arguing that French unpopularity is largely the product of smear campaigns sponsored by competing foreign powers, especially Russia, which has recently competed with France in the Sahel. While such views may comfort domestic

¹² N. Loiseau, “Quand sera-t-il possible de considérer que les coups d’Etat africains sont avant tout l’affaire des Africains, et donc leur échec?”, *Le Monde*, 6 September 2023.

¹³ Address by the President of the Republic before his visit to Central Africa, Paris, 27 February 2023.

constituencies, such a reading misses the point. Disinformation is real, but it amplifies anti-French agitation; it does not cause it.¹⁴ For Paris, facing up to its own conflicted past and present in Africa remains difficult and domestically controversial. Partly as a result, there is a tendency among some decision-makers to look at their country's current challenges in Africa as a consequence of international competitors intent on weakening France's place on the continent.

The problem with this attitude is that it does not go unnoticed in Africa. French unwillingness to publicly concede past mistakes only confirms to activists, decision-makers and wider audiences in the Sahel what they have suspected all along, i.e. that France is unwilling or unable to undertake critical introspection regarding its own role there. In this view, Paris confirms a disingenuous posture, refuses to listen to Sahelian partners and is therefore unable to adjust, much less change its approach. Evidently, provoking such reactions by denial is not a good basis to improve France's public standing in the Sahel.

Outlook and Implications for Africa, France and Europe

France has become a liability for its traditional partners, both African and European. The power of anti-French narratives and their mobilisation by populist leaders is such that too close an association with France becomes politically dangerous for leaders in West Africa. The same is true for European partners. Often tacitly critical of the French lead in the Sahel since 2013, most European partners have been willing to accept French leadership in the region on account of its expertise, networks and strong national interests there. Since the fall-out with Mali and subsequent events, European partners have been more willing to disagree with Paris and make their own choices. In Mali, for

¹⁴ M. Audinet and E. Dreyfus, "A Foreign Policy by Proxies: The Two Sides of Russia's Presence in Mali", Paris, IRSEM Report no. 97, 2023.

example, some states have substantially reduced their presence, but no European state has embraced the French approach of total confrontation in an effort to isolate the Malian regime, rather opting for cautious engagement. A relatively converging approach existed on Niger prior to the coup. However, in its aftermath, important nuances have surfaced, as in the case of the US and France. To some extent correctly, Sahelian actors have tended to look at France as the leader of European and Western engagement in the region, with other states taking their cues from Paris and merely playing supporting roles. There are concerns in Western capitals that France's problems could also taint their own reputation and interests in the region. This is why European partners are increasingly prepared to argue with France over the Sahel, no longer taking superior French knowledge and interests for granted. In principle, a less asymmetrical and more balanced debate among Europeans should be good news. If others stepped up, European states and the EU itself should gain in credibility in the Sahel, rather than being perceived as mere extensions of French whims and interests. However, it remains to be seen how strong and durable a commitment European member states will show vis-à-vis the intractable crisis in the Sahel and increasingly difficult interlocutors there. In the wake of Russia's war on Ukraine, which absorbs a great deal of political attention, budgets and capacities, the Sahel will certainly not rank as highly for Europeans as it used to do for France. At the same time, the war on Ukraine, concomitant to Russia's inroads in the Sahel and other parts of Africa, may be precisely an argument to stay strongly engaged in the region.

For France, the rupture with Mali and subsequent events in Burkina Faso and Niger will enter the annals of French-African relations as a major turning point. As if under a burning glass, the crisis has exposed the weaknesses of French Africa policy, such as pervasive paternalism, the inconsistent handling of autocratic regimes, and a bias for military but politically ineffective intrusive approaches. Across the region, it has led

to an outburst of deep-seated political frustrations over the “blocked decolonisation” that has persisted since 1960, which are increasingly taking hold in other states in the region.¹⁵ France’s crisis therefore does not stop in Mali and probably not even at the shores of the Sahel. France will suffer a durable loss of influence in the region and there is very little it can do about it in the short run. Improved strategic communications and cosmetic changes will have little impact. A reduction in the number of French troops in Africa has already been announced, but an even more radical cut, such as the closure of several military bases, also seems possible.¹⁶ Completely severing the ties with the CFA franc currency, widely seen and criticised in West Africa and Central Africa as a relic of colonial days, should also be on the agenda. In the long run, the banalisation of relations with Francophone Africa will necessarily entail a greatly diminished French influence. This will be hard to swallow for a political class which has grown up with the idea that Africa is one of France’s three pillars of grandeur, alongside nuclear arms and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

¹⁵ H.W. French, “France’s Troubles in West Africa Go Well Beyond a Failed Counter-Insurgency”, *World Politics Review*, 5 January 2023

¹⁶ There are currently bases in Chad, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti and Senegal.

5. Africans' Views of the US and China

Robert Mattes, Peter Lewis

Is Africa turning against “the West”? It might appear that way, judging by the rhetoric of social media influencers, protestors, selected government leaders, or other self-styled spokespersons. But the picture that emerges from systematic Afrobarometer surveys of nationally representative samples of thousands of ordinary people across the continent is far more mixed.¹ If “the West” can be operationalised as the United States, continent-wide trends in ordinary citizens’ views of the US are quite limited. To the extent that there have been any cross-continent movements in public opinion over the past five years, it has been away from both superpowers in general, rather than the US in particular. And viewed over a longer period of time, views of the US might be only marginally worse than they were 20 years ago. But what these surveys do demonstrate, however, is a more severe long-term erosion in favourable views of the US (and concomitant gains in views of China) in a specific set of countries, including Mali, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, and South Africa. That the major changes in the relative balance of mass opinion toward the US and China have occurred in countries like these reflect the fact that while the predictors of awareness of international affairs, and of positive/negative views of either country are largely the same, there are also significant differences related to domestic

¹ For information of the Afrobarometer surveys, including methodological details, see www.afrobarometer.org.

partisan politics and respondents' commitments to democracy and accountability.

International Awareness

The starting point for any discussion of African citizens' views of the United States and other world powers must begin with the fact that substantial proportions of respondents either pay no attention to global issues, or lack sufficient information on which to base an opinion. Very few people, for instance, ever mention international or regional issues when Afrobarometer fieldworkers ask respondents about "the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" In the most recent round of Afrobarometer surveys, conducted across 37 countries in 2022-23, a period that included the Russian invasion of Ukraine, increased activities of the Russian Wagner Group in parts of the region, as well as increased tension between the US and many African governing parties over their positions on the Russia-Ukraine war, just around one percent of all respondents mentioned global issues such as "climate change" (0.6%), or "international war" (0.1%), and an additional one percent mentioned "civil war" (1.3%). Other than that, no issue with any clear regional or international connotation was mentioned. This pattern has been evident in Afrobarometer surveys for the past 25 years.

Beyond the fact that few people spontaneously mention international issues, many people also struggle to provide responses when asked for their opinions about international actors, including regional African institutions. In Round 8 Afrobarometer surveys, for instance, conducted in 2019-21, one-in-four respondents (25%) across 34 countries said they "haven't heard enough to say" whether the African Union had a positive or negative impact on their own country.

In the most recent round of Afrobarometer surveys, interviewers asked: "Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on [your

country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?". Twenty-six percent of all respondents across 37 countries were unable to provide a response about the US (and 20% were unable to do so with regard to China). Lack of awareness of the role of the US was especially high in Botswana (60%), Seychelles (57%) and Malawi (50%). On the other hand, at least nine out of ten were able to answer this question in Liberia, Cameroon, Benin, Mauritania, Gabon, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso (see Figure 5.1).

The question then emerges as to whether this lack of awareness has its roots in respondents' lack of interest (possibly rooted in low levels of formal education, or interpersonal political discussion), or in domestic news media which pay limited attention to Africa-wide or world affairs.²

In order to shed light on this question, we test the effect of a series of demographic and informational variables on respondents' ability to provide either a positive or negative evaluation of the US and China (see Table 5.1 at the end of the chapter). In terms of personal demographic characteristics (Model 1), we find that men are substantially more likely to offer a substantive answer (either positive or negative) than women: the "odds ratio" statistic displayed in the table suggests that male respondents are 46% more likely to offer an opinion about the US than females. While levels of political interest and formal education increase people's ability to answer, the extent to which people engage in political discussion is more important than the number of years in school (those who engage in frequent discussion are 22% more likely to offer an opinion about the US than those who never discuss politics; while those with any postgraduate qualifications are only 14% more likely to give an answer than those with no formal education). But in contrast to the social media images of the radical youth or alienated urban poor leading an "anti-West" charge, we find no statistically significant effect of urban residence, lived poverty

² Africa No Filter, *How African Media Cover Africa*. Johannesburg 2021.

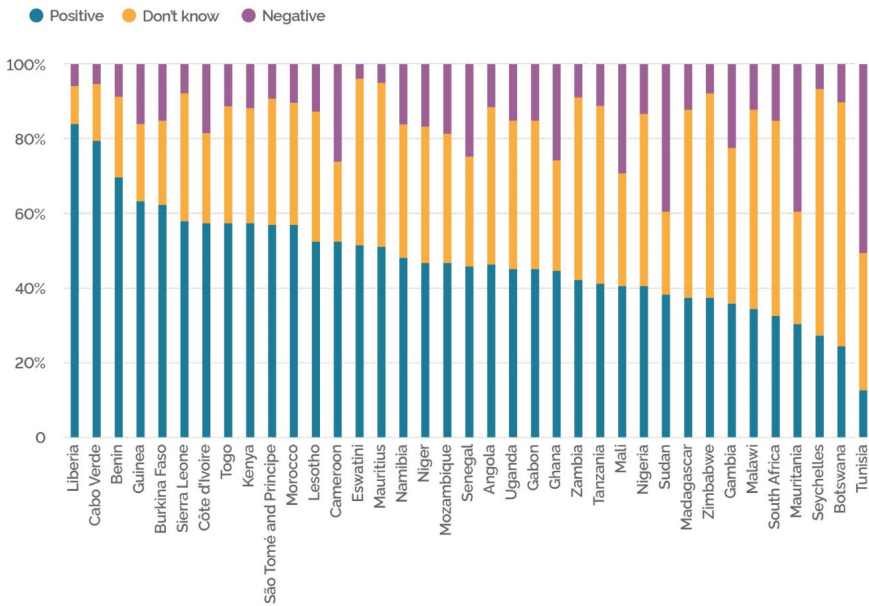
(an index that measures the frequency with which people go without basic needs), or age. Indeed, older respondents are slightly more likely to provide an answer about China than younger ones.

When we add in the impact of news media consumption (Model 2), we find statistically significant, but modest contributions of all forms (radio, television, newspapers, internet and social media, though internet news has no effect on awareness of the US, and television news use does not help the formation of opinions about China). The bigger picture that emerges from this second model, however, is that those who consume high levels of news content from either traditional or online news are not substantially better able to provide answers to questions about the role of the US or China.

Views of the US and China

We now move from the question of whether Africans are able to provide an opinion about the impact of either superpower and turn to examine the positive or negative valence of the opinions of those who do provide an answer. As of 2022-23, less than one half of all respondents across 37 countries thought the “economic and political influence” of the United States on their country was either “positive” (28%) or “very positive” (20%). However, there is a huge variation in positive images of the US, running from at least six out of ten in Liberia (84%), Cabo Verde (79%), Benin (70%), Guinea (63%) and Burkina Faso (62%), to fewer than three out of ten in Seychelles (28%), Botswana (25%) and Tunisia (13%). Because of the large proportions of people in some countries who were not able to offer an opinion, one should not infer that remainder of the responses were negative. While explicitly negative views of the US are substantial in Tunisia (51%), Sudan (40%), Mauritania (40 percent), Mali (29%), Ghana (26%), Cameroon (26%) and Senegal (25%), they are relatively limited across the rest of the sample.

FIG. 5.1 - AFRICAN VIEWS OF US INFLUENCE ON THEIR COUNTRY (2022-23)

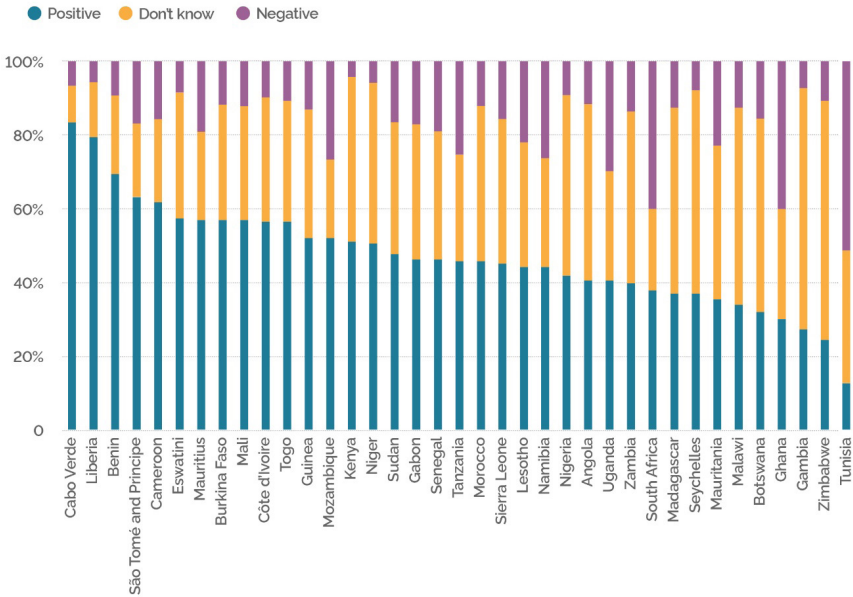


Note: "Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on [your country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?" - "United States?" (% "Very Positive/Positive" and % "Very Negative/Negative")

In comparison to the 48% who had a favourable view of US influence, a slightly higher 51% though that the “economic and political influence” of China on their country was “positive” (27%) or “very positive” (24%) across countries. While one might expect that China is viewed more favourably in countries where the US is seen in a negative light (and vice versa), the striking finding is the remarkable similarity in terms of the relative views of both powers across Africa. While there are notable exceptions (discussed below), there is no general inverse, negative relationship in the relative views of the two powers. Indeed, the relationship is strongly

positive, both at country and individual level. In general, countries where people feel the US plays a positive role also feel the same way about China (and conversely, where the US is seen to play a negative role, people feel the same way about China).³

FIG. 5.2 - AFRICAN VIEWS OF CHINESE INFLUENCE ON THEIR COUNTRY (2022-23)



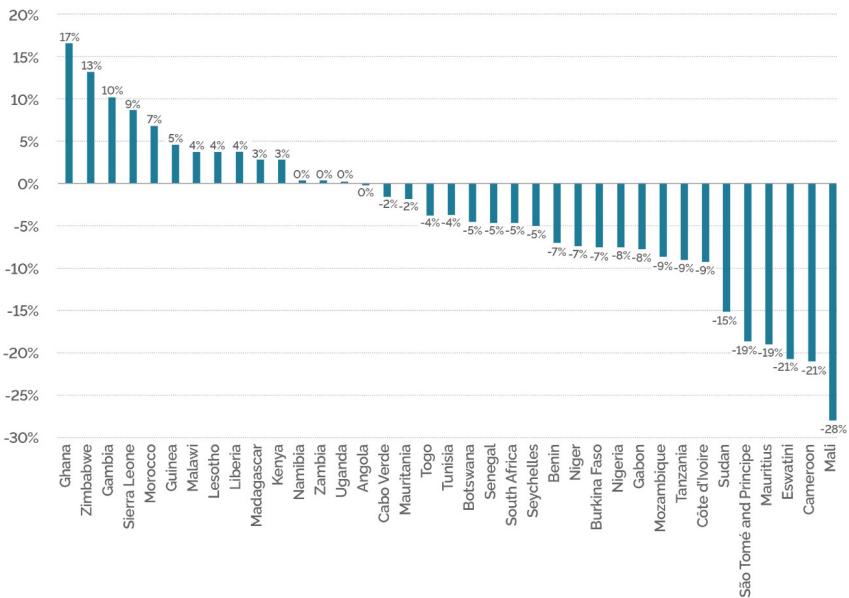
Note: "Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on [your country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?" - "China?"
(% "Very Positive/Positive" and % "Very Negative/Negative")

But, as just mentioned, there were some significant exceptions. Positive views of the US lag far behind those of China in Mali by -28 percentage points, with other substantial relative deficits in

³ At individual level, the relationship between respondent ratings of the influence of both countries is strong (Pearson's $r = .497$, $p = .000$).

Eswatini and Cameroon (-21 points each), Mauritius and São Tomé & Príncipe (-19 points each), and Sudan (-15 points). At the same time, the US enjoys considerable advantages in some countries, including Ghana (+19 points), Zimbabwe (+ 13 points) and Gambia (+10 points), though the average margin is smaller. Indeed, China is favoured in 20 of the 37 countries, while the US tops China in only 11.

FIG. 5.3 - RELATIVE DIFFERENCES IN POSITIVE VIEWS OF US AND CHINA (2021-23)



In order to understand the micro-level sources of Africans' evaluations, we regress three different dependent variables on a range of demographic, informational, and attitudinal variables (see Table 5.2 at the end of the chapter). In the first two models, the dependent variable is the respondent's negative or positive opinion about the influence of the US and China, measured on a scale of 0 to 4, excluding those respondents who could not offer a substantive opinion. In the third model,

the dependent variable subtracts respondent ratings of China from their rating of the US, producing a scale that runs from +4 to -4 with positive values indicating a relative balance of opinion in favour of the US. The independent variables include all those demographic and news media variables used in the models of awareness in Table 5.1. But we also add variables that measure respondents' religious affiliation (Muslim), level of commitment to democracy (an index of preference for democracy and rejection of one-party rule, military rule and presidential dictatorship), and preference for accountable over effective government. And in order to test the interaction of respondents' partisanship and the stances of domestic political parties toward both global powers, we also add variables that measure whether respondents trust the governing party only, or opposition parties only.

In terms of respondents' absolute ratings of each country, we find that older respondents are slightly more favourable (and younger respondents less favourable) toward the United States. But the *same* patterns also hold for views of China. We also find that poorer and urban respondents have more negative views of *both* the US and China. And while radio news use promotes more positive views of both countries, newspaper readership has the opposite effect for both. Neither television nor online news have significant effects. Education promotes more positive views of both countries. And perhaps most surprisingly, Muslim respondents offer *more positive* ratings of both the US and China (compared to those who belong to Christian denominations or who are not religious).

We do find differing effects with regard to respondents' regime attitudes and partisan alignments. While the level of respondent commitment to democracy or preference for accountable government makes no difference to their ratings of the US, respondents who favour democracy and accountability offer more negative views of China. And while trust in the governing party promotes more positive views of either country, trust in opposition parties generates more critical views of China (but not the US).

As discussed earlier, most respondents who offered an opinion provided identical (60 percent) or very similar ratings of both global powers. But the model of relative ratings does find some indicators of which respondents are more likely to favour the US over China (or vice versa). Men (compared to women), Muslim respondents, and internet news consumers are more likely to give somewhat higher ratings to China, while poorer and more educated respondents tend to give slightly higher ratings to the US. While those who trust the governing party in their country are more likely to rate China, respondents who trust the opposition, who support democracy and prefer accountability give higher ratings to the US.

Changes Over Time?

We now know something about Africans' awareness of great power influence in their country, and their evaluation of that influence, as of 2022-23. But the larger question of whether Africans are turning "against the West" requires comparison over time. Fortunately, we are able to look at results from an identical question asked by Afrobarometer in its Round 8 surveys (conducted between 2019 and 2021). Based on this comparison, it appears, at least at first glance, as if they have. Across the 33 countries interviewed in *both* Round 8 (2019-21) and Round 9 (2022-23), the overall percentage who said the US played a positive role in their country fell from 60% to 48%, suggesting a very sharp downturn in Africans' views of the United States that appears to run counter to trends in comparative surveys in the "global North" that have shown a recovery in popular views of the US following the departure of Donald Trump.⁴

Yet views of China did not improve. In fact, African perceptions of Chinese influence also declined over the same period by an almost identical margin, from 63% (in Round 8) to 52% (in

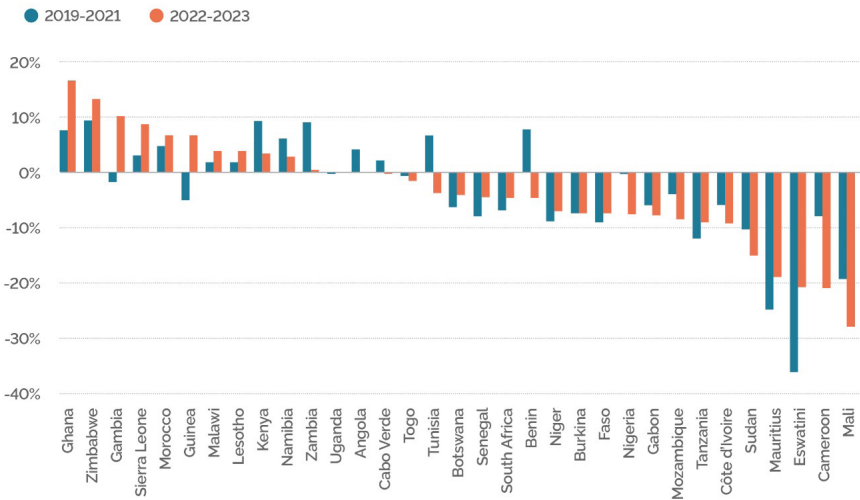
⁴ R. Wike, J. Fetterolf, M. Fagan, and S. Gubbala, *International Public Opinion of the US Remains Positive*, Pew Research Centre, 22 June 2022.

Round 9). These trends may reflect a relative disengagement of both powers in terms of foreign assistance, and foreign direct investment as they moved to concentrate on other regions or address domestic economic problems. But there is also at least some evidence to suggest an ordering effect in the Round 8 questionnaire that produced larger proportions of substantive responses, and more positive responses, that were not present in the Round 9 questionnaire.⁵ However, holding constant for the absolute proportion of positive ratings, and focusing on the relative proportions of positive rankings of the US compared to China, we find that positive images of the US, relative to China, improved over this two to four year interval in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Mauritius and Eswatini. Yet its position worsened in South Africa, Togo, Nigeria, Sudan, Cameroon and Mali.

Unfortunately, Afrobarometer did not ask this question in identical form at any previous points, so it is not possible to obtain an exact, longer-term comparison. However, in Round 4 (2008-09), Afrobarometer did ask respondents in 20 countries a very similar question which read: "In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say?". In total, 55% said the US helped their country "somewhat," or "a lot" and 50% felt the same way about China.

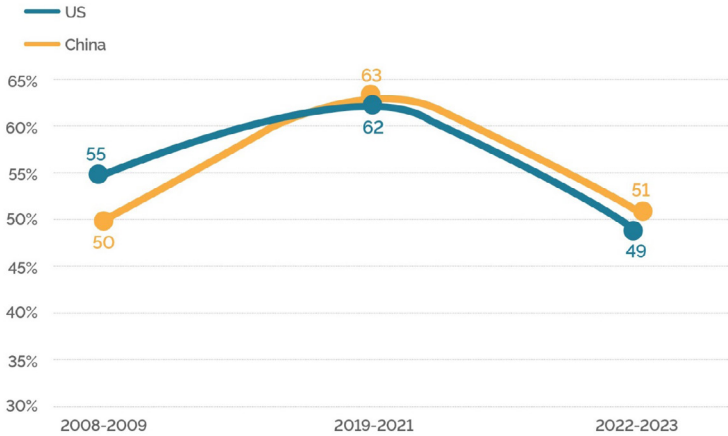
⁵ In the Round 8 questionnaire, this bank of questions was immediately preceded by 13 separate questions on various aspects of international movement, international trade, international development assistance, and economic assistance specifically from China, that may have helped some respondents select an answer (the proportions who could not offer an opinion were lower than in Round 9), and prompted at least some respondents to offer a positive opinion. While the Round 9 module was immediately preceded by an anodyne set of questions on news media use, an immediately prior set of questions asked about climate change and responsibility for climate change, and natural resource extraction, all of which may have led at least some respondents to think about international powers in a more negative frame. For more on questionnaire ordering effects, see N. Bradburn, S. Sudman, and B. Winsink, *Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design – for Market Research, Political Polls, and Social and Health Questionnaires*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2004.

FIG. 5.4 - CHANGES IN RELATIVE POSITIVE VIEWS OF US AND CHINA (2019-22 TO 2022-23)



Putting these responses together with those to the question reviewed above, and looking only at *the same 19 countries interviewed in all three rounds*, positive responses concerning the role of the US went from 55 percent (2008-09) to 62% (2019-21), and then back down to 49% (2022-23). The trends in views of China follow the same basic trajectory, from 50 (2008-09), to 63% (2019-21) to 51% (2022-23). When viewed broadly as an indicator of positive sentiment, views of China across these 19 countries are on average the same as they were 15 years ago, while optimistic views of the US have receded only marginally.

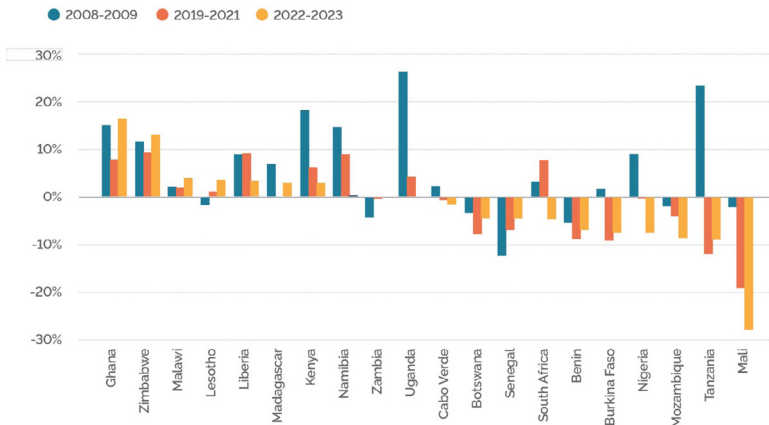
FIG. 5.5 - POSITIVE SENTIMENT TOWARD THE US AND CHINA OVER TIME



Note: 2008-2009: "In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say?" (% "A lot/Somewhat")
 2019-2021/2022-2023: "Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on [your country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?" (% "Very Positive/Positive")

However, the relative balance of pro-American sentiment has changed in a sharply negative direction in a subset of specific countries. In Uganda, for instance, a +26-point pro-American advantage over China in 2008-09 has turned into a "dead heat" of equal ratings in the most recent survey. In Mali, the difference in positive views of the US vs China has gone from -2 points in 2009-10 to -19 points in 2019-21 to -27 points in the most recent survey. In Tanzania, a +24-point difference in the 2008-09 question has turned into a -9-point differential in 2022-23. Smaller, but still significant relative declines have also occurred in Mozambique, Nigeria, Kenya, and Namibia.

FIG. 5.6 - LONGER-TERM CHANGES IN RELATIVE POSITIVE VIEWS OF US AND CHINA (2008-09 TO 2022-23)



Tentative Conclusions

In a region characterised by a limited supply of good data, it is easy for scholars and policy-makers to overemphasise the available information provided by official pronouncements, social media, or protestors. This review of systematically collected data from representative samples of African citizens suggest this is one such occasion. First of all, ordinary people concentrate on domestic problems and give little priority to regional or international issues. And significant minorities are unable to offer an opinion on how their country is affected by global powers such as the United States or China.

Second, there is no evidence for many of the current tropes and common wisdoms about changing international alignments. The data provide no evidence of a profile of an alienated urban youth, or angry Muslim respondents, hostile to the West (in this case the US), or in awe of China.

Third, beyond the micro-level impacts reviewed above, there is little evidence of the impact of varying levels of Chinese (or American) economic involvement. In general, the current levels of Chinese foreign direct investment or Chinese exports have no systematic relationship with public attitudes (not shown). And in particular, examples like South Africa show that even where both powers are heavily engaged, neither country attracts particularly positive ratings.

Thus, explanations of why the United States has lost relative ground to China in terms of public ratings in some countries should be rooted in domestic, country-specific factors. For instance, the greatest declines in relative US-China rankings have tended to occur in many of the same countries where public support for democracy is low and or declining. In other instances, US fortunes may have receded because it is seen as hostile to the local regime or local leaders because of its criticisms of authoritarianism, support for free and fair elections, or threats to remove the country from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade pact (e.g. Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Niger, Gabon, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire). And in still others, China may look like an increasingly favourable partner where US support for counter-terrorism efforts puts it on the wrong side of domestic politics by supporting a locally unpopular government (e.g. Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Niger).

Finally, there is no evidence of a zero-sum trade-off in public views of the US and China. *Both* countries can be viewed very favourably in some countries (such as Liberia) or relatively negatively in others (such as Tunisia). Thus, there is no necessary need for those involved in public diplomacy to see things in terms of a head-to-head competition where building one's positive image amongst local publics requires reducing the other country's image.

Tab. 5.1 - EXPLAINING AWARENESS OF US AND CHINESE INFLUENCE

	Ability to Offer Opinion About US (0-1)				Ability to Offer Opinion About China (0-1)			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds Ratio	Significance	Odds Ratio	Significance	Odds Ratio	Significance	Odds Ratio	Significance
Intercept	.262	NS	-.051	NS	.542	.017	.188	NS
Age	1.000	NS	1.001	NS	1.001	NS	1.004	.028
Gender (Male)	1.539	<.001	1.456	<.001	1.595	<.001	1.501	<.001
Residence (Urban)	1.126	NS	.969	NS	1.171	NS	1.004	NS
Lived Poverty	.950	NS	.983	NS	.944	NS	.976	NS
Education	1.214	<.001	1.142	<.001	1.244	<.001	1.165	<.001
Political Discussion	1.276	<.001	1.216	<.001	1.284	<.001	1.220	<.001
Radio News Use			1.064	<.001			1.083	<.001
TV News Use			1.049	.024			1.040	NS
Newspaper Use			1.124	<.001			1.092	.001
Internet News Use			1.045	NS			1.060	.035
Social Media News Use			1.082	.003			1.098	.004
Fixed Country Effects	√		√		√		√	
Classification Rate	76.7%		77.1%		81.7%		82.0%	
Classification Rate / Aware	94.6%		94.2%		97.2%		96.9%	
Countries	37		37		37		37	
Weighted Respondents	42,622		42,585		42,646		42,609	

Multilevel Logistic Regression

Tab. 5.2 - EXPLAINING POSITIVE / NEGATIVE VALENCE TOWARD US AND CHINA

	Favourable View of US (0-4)		Favourable View of China (0-4)		US Relative China (-4 - +4)	
Intercept	2.480	<.001	2.541	<.001	.041	NS
Age	.001	.031	.002	.003	-.001	NS
Gender (Male)	-.022	NS	.041	.004	-.038	.015
Residence (Urban)	-.052	.001	-.065	<.001	.002	NS
Lived Poverty	-.018	.025	-.049	<.001	.018	.046
Religion (Ikazim)	.049	.038	.082	.001	-.052	.051
Education	.010	.011	.008	.034	.009	.048
Political Discussion	.008	NS	-.002	NS	-.001	NS
Radio News Use	.031	<.001	.018	<.001	.007	NS
TV News Use	.010	NS	.004	NS	.004	NS
Newspaper Use	-.026	<.001	-.028	<.001	-.003	NS
Internet News Use	-.005	NS	.009	NS	-.018	.050
Social Media News Use	-.005	NS	-.011	NS	.006	NS
Committed Democrat	.000	NS	-.017	.012	.015	.048
Prefers Accountable Government	-.003	NS	-.016	<.001	.011	.027
Trusts Governing Party Only	.086	<.001	.110	<.001	-.021	<.001
Trusts Opposition Party Only	.031	NS	-.073	.001	.023	<.001
Fixed Country Effects	√		√		√	
Countries						
Weighted Respondents	31,695		34,227		30,906	

Multilevel Ordinary Least Squares. Model excludes respondents who were unable to offer a substantive opinion.

6. The “Rise of the Rest” in Global Media and Competition Over News Narratives in Africa

Dani Madrid-Morales, Herman Wasserman

Shortly after the military seized control of power in Niger in July 2023, the ruling junta issued orders blocking broadcasts of Radio France International (RFI) and FRANCE 24, which are subsidiaries of the French government-owned France Médias Monde.¹ The move followed a similar suspension of the same two news organisations in Mali in 2022 for what the military junta described as “a premeditated strategy aimed at destabilising the political transition, demoralising the Malian people and discrediting the Malian army”.² A year earlier, amidst armed conflict in the Tigray Region, the Ethiopian Media Authority issued a “final warning” to four news organisations from the United States (Associated Press and CNN) and the United Kingdom (BBC and Reuters) for “news that sow seeds of animosity among people and compromise the sovereignty of the country”. The warning received little media attention globally, but was reported by CGTN (China Global Television Network),³ a state-run multilingual broadcaster headquartered

¹ FRANCE 24, [RFI and FRANCE 24 condemn the suspension of their broadcasts in Niger](#), 3 August 2023.

² “Mali to suspend French broadcasters France 24 and RFI”, *Reuters*, 17 March 2022.

³ “Warning letters to BBC, CNN, Reuters, AP: Ethiopian Media Authority”, *CGTN*, 20 November 2021.

in Beijing, which has been increasing its presence in Africa since the mid-2010s. Chinese state-owned media organisations are not the only ones to have tried to increase their footprint on the continent. Others, including Sputnik, RT, and Ruptly (all of which are under the control of the Russian government), Al Jazeera (a subsidiary of a state-owned public media conglomerate in Qatar) and TRT (also funded by the Turkish government), have also been making inroads across Africa.⁴

One of the consequences of the simultaneous occurrence of these two phenomena on the continent – growing pressure and scrutiny over the content of once-dominant “Western” news media organisations on the one hand and the proliferation of new (and old) media actors on the other – is that African audiences are increasingly exposed to a wider range of views, perspectives and narratives on current affairs, which in turn may contribute to shaping their views of foreign countries, their governments and their people.⁵ These new media actors are predominantly supported by governments in countries that once belonged to the periphery and semi-periphery of the world system, and are now at (or close to) the core. Their growing geopolitical weight, which has been sometimes described as the “Rise of the Rest”,⁶ is reflected in their willingness to be more active in global media discussions. Some of these “new” actors, such as Russia or China, have had a long-standing relationship with the African continent, and their media played a significant role during liberation struggles in the XX century, providing

⁴ A. Michalowska-Kubś and J. Kubś, “Kremlin spent 1.9 billion USD on propaganda last year, the budget exceeded by a quarter”, Debunk.org, 4 May 2023; “TRT Afrika: Türkiye’s public broadcaster launches Africa edition”, TRT, 2023; KAS. 2021. “It’s about Their Story: How China, Turkey and Russia Try to Influence Media in Africa”, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), 2023.

⁵ D. Madrid-Morales and H. Wasserman, “How Effective Are Chinese Media in Shaping Audiences’ Attitudes Towards China? A Survey Analysis in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa”, *Online Media and Global Communication*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2022, pp. 1-26.

⁶ F. Zakaria, *The Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest*, New York, Penguin, 2011.

a platform for the dissemination of political views that were largely absent in colonial media.⁷ Now, after several decades of a quasi-monopoly by US and European media globally, in what many called an extended period of media imperialism,⁸ the “Rest” are actively engaged in the African media ecosystem, bringing attention to issues not often covered by US/European media, and offering a set of worldviews that seem to resonate with existing anti-imperialist and anti-US/Europe sentiment on the continent.

In this chapter we question the extent to which the ongoing changes in the media environment in a range of African countries can be connected to perceived changes in public attitudes towards the “West”, which are discussed in other chapters in this report. We draw on recent survey data we collected in Angola, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zambia⁹ to demonstrate the diversity of audience engagement with and opinions towards foreign media. In addition, we elaborate on the ongoing scramble between global powers to influence the way African audiences perceive their policies, political actions, and engagement with the African continent. Our analysis of hundreds of news websites over a period of 10 months further highlights the importance of de-homogenising the continent, given the existence of significant differences in how news media in different parts of the continent narrate “Western” countries.

⁷ J.S. Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

⁸ O. Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism*, London, SAGE Publications, 2015.

⁹ We collected data between November and December 2022 through online surveys. We collected 998 responses in Angola, 1,203 in Ethiopia, 1,203 in South Africa and 1,209 in Zambia. In all countries our sample has quasi parity of male and female respondents. The majority of respondents are under 45, and live in Urban areas.

The Slow “De-Westernisation” of Africa’s News Media Landscape

The African media landscape has always been shaped by geopolitical forces. Foreign influence through the media started during colonialism, when news media were both a foreign policy tool and a means to “win the hearts and minds” of Africans.¹⁰ In the aftermath of colonialism, former colonial powers retained an influence over the African media sphere which was otherwise widely controlled by postcolonial governments. Much foreign influence on public opinion at the time was exerted through radio. The Cold War, which lasted from the late 1940s to the early 1990s, was characterised by ideological and geopolitical competition between the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR), and Africa became a battleground for influence. At the time, radio channels such as the BBC, Voice of America (VOA) and RFI served as prominent vehicles of “Western” influence, competing with their adversaries from the Communist Bloc, like the USSR’s Radio Moscow, China’s Radio Peking and Czechoslovakia’s Prague Radio, all of which supported the struggle for liberalisation in countries controlled by white minorities (Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa).¹¹

When African media started a process of liberalisation in the 1990s, many European and North American media houses continued to exert influence through partnerships with local media, providing media development and training programmes.¹² In a liberalised media market, the constant flow of content (news and entertainment) from Europe and North America to the continent led many to talk about a new

¹⁰ A. Fiedler and M.-S. Frère, “Radio France Internationale and Deutsche Welle in Francophone Africa: International Broadcasters in a Time of Change”, *Communication, Culture and Critique*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1 March 2016, pp. 68-85.

¹¹ L. Mosia, C. Riddle, and J. Zaffiro, “From Revolutionary to Regime Radio: Three Decades of Nationalist Broadcasting in Southern Africa”, *Africa Media Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1994, pp. 1-24.

¹² Fiedler and Frère (2016).

stage of media and cultural imperialism. This thesis held that foreign media, particularly US media, undermined the cultural autonomy of African states¹³ and that the global media system was organised along an unequal, centre-periphery structure.¹⁴ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, conceptualisations of media imperialism became outdated as global programming formats became localised in Africa¹⁵ and rival media outlets from elsewhere in the world started to compete for dominance over the globalised African media space. This competition was accelerated by the development of new satellite and digital technologies. African satellite broadcasters such as the South African company Multichoice’s satellite channel DStv and Nigeria’s HiTV competed against each other and with international channels from outside the continent such as French-owned Canal+.¹⁶

The process that started with the liberalisation and digitalisation of the media space has led to a process of slow but sure “de-Westernisation” in African media. Recent years have seen the arrival of new players (Türkiye, Qatar, Iran) and the return of old ones (Russia, China), whose primary aim is to shape public opinion and local media narratives. Today, the contest between different geopolitical interests for influence is no longer limited to the broadcasting arena, but also extends into the digital space, in particular on social media.¹⁷ With mobile phone use on the rise and news media organisations increasingly distributing their content cross-platforms, the possibilities for African media consumers to access content representing a plurality of points of view is growing. That

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ M.N. Ndlela, “Global Television Formats in Africa: Localizing Idol”, in T. Oren and S. Shahaf (eds.), *Global Television Formats*, London, Routledge, 2012, pp. 242-259.

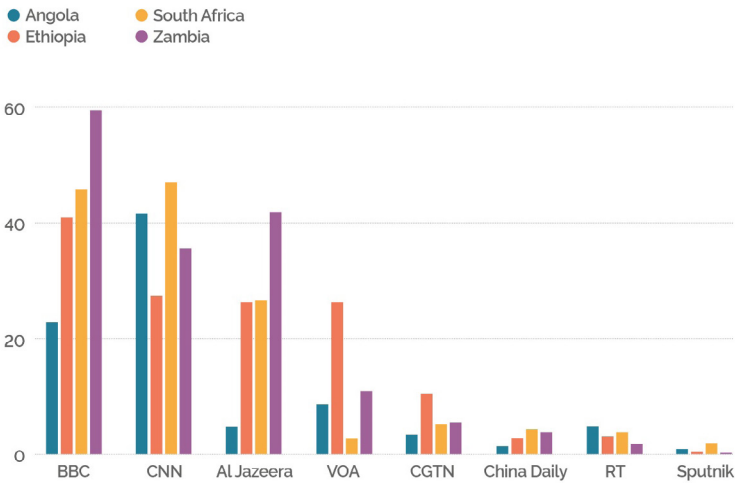
¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ F. Douzet, K. Limonier, S. Mihoubi, and E. René, “Mapping the spread of Russian and Chinese contents on the French-speaking African web”, *Journal of Cyber Policy*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2021, pp. 50-67.

said, the penetration and reach of many of these new actors is still much lower than for well-established news organisations, particularly those based in former colonial powers. This can be seen in Figure 6.1, which presents data from a survey of four African countries in late 2022 focused on understanding media consumption habits. In three of the countries we surveyed, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zambia, over 40% of respondents said they had got news from the BBC in the previous week. Figures were above 20% in all countries for CNN. Angola revealed itself as a consistent outlier in the survey, probably due to the fact that most of the international media outlets we asked people about do not have a Portuguese version.¹⁸

FIG. 6.1 - HAVE YOU GOT NEWS FROM ANY OF THESE SOURCES IN THE LAST 7 DAYS?



Compared to “Western” media, and leaving Al Jazeera aside, broadcasters like China’s CGTN and Russia’s RT enjoy a very small following. Except for Ethiopia, where around 10% of

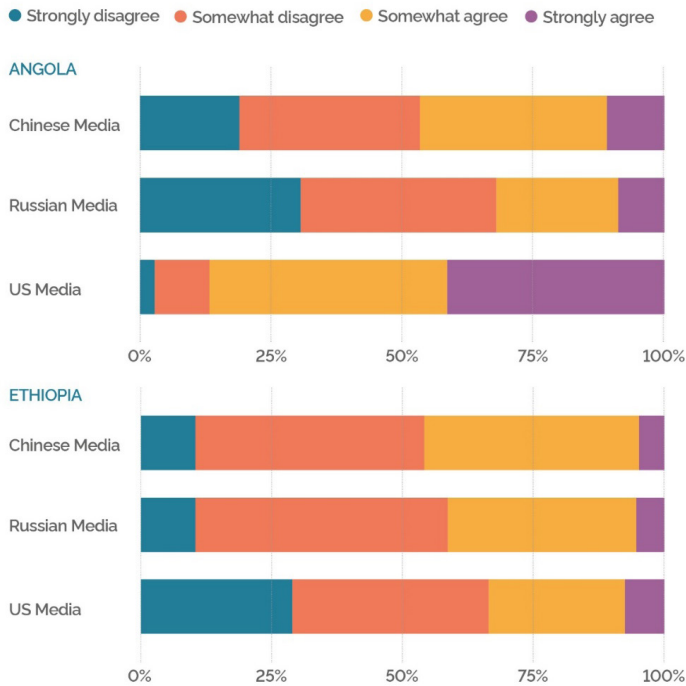
¹⁸ The exception being CNN Portugal, which is available through satellite TV in Angola.

respondents said they had got news from the Chinese-owned TV station in the previous week, figures for other countries were around 5%. We see even lower readership/viewership values for the other emerging news outlets like Sputnik, a Russian news agency with a very large presence on social media, or *China Daily*, a Chinese English-language newspaper that is widely distributed for free in large African cities, such as Addis Ababa, Lusaka and Johannesburg. The differences across countries that we see in Figure 6.1 are the first indication of the very different nature of media consumption patterns across the continent, which might in turn indicate that, in their efforts to reshape news narratives across the continent, different foreign actors might have different outcomes due to a variety of factors. Adding French-speaking countries to our sample, for example, may further expand the range of variation.

In the same survey where news consumption data were collected, we asked people about their views of the media in China, Russia and the US. We present a summary of the responses in Figure 6.2. As with viewership/readership data, differences between countries are clear here too. For example, in Angola 86% of respondents said they strongly or somewhat agree with the statement "The media in the US are free and objective". In Ethiopia, that figure is just 33%. These values reflect, in part, the growing anti-US sentiment in Ethiopia, which appeared to peak during the most recent military conflict in Tigray. Not only were Ethiopians more critical of US media, but also of the US government (only 54% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The US is competently governed", compared to 87% in Angola, 73% in South Africa and 74% in Zambia). When taken together, data in Figure 6.2 point at what could be one of the weakest points in efforts by Beijing and Moscow to shape public opinion on the continent: audiences appear to see the media in these countries as neither free nor objective. We find more evidence of the gap in perceptions across countries in Figure 3.3, where we present responses to the question "What country is the main source of

foreign propaganda in your country?”. The US scores extremely high in Ethiopia, where 85% of respondents list it as their top choice. The US is also the top choice in Zambia (35%) and South Africa (37%), underscoring, perhaps, the persistence of views regarding US transnational media as agents of media and cultural imperialism.

FIG. 6.2 - HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT: “THE MEDIA IN CHINA/RUSSIA/US ARE FREE AND OBJECTIVE”?



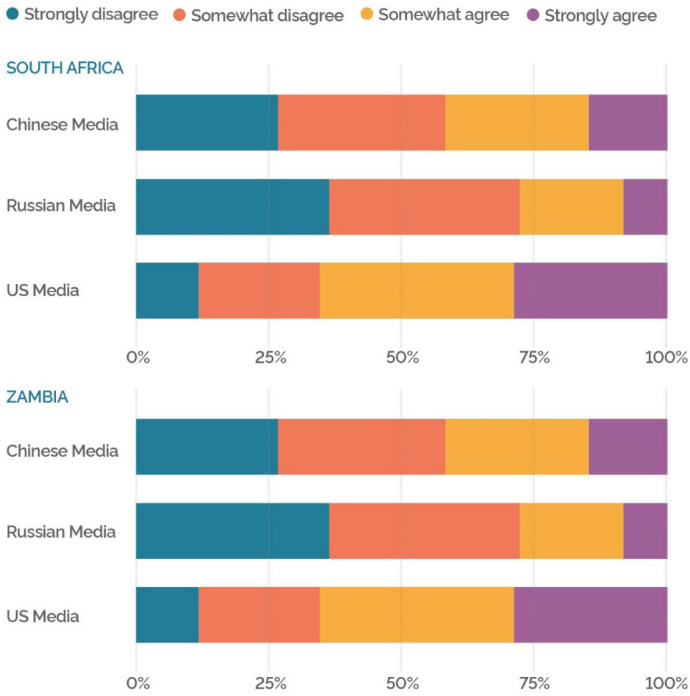
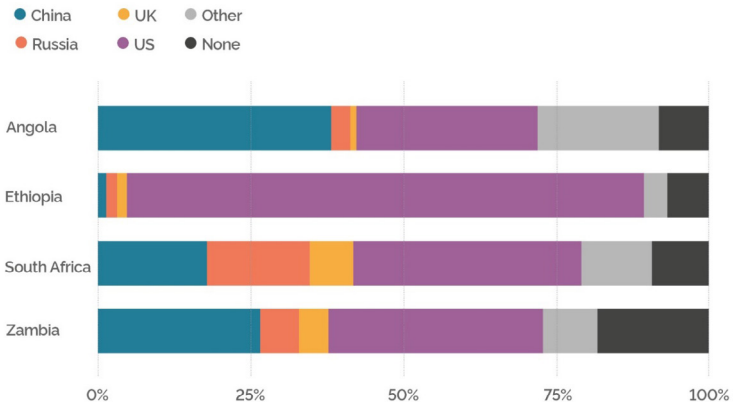


FIG. 6.3 – WHAT COUNTRY IS THE MAIN SOURCE OF FOREIGN PROPAGANDA IN YOUR COUNTRY?



The Scramble to Shape African Public Opinion

One of the reasons why governments invest in the internationalisation of their news media might be that academic research has shown that people rely extensively on the media to make sense of what is happening outside of their country.¹⁹ For a long time (and some might say still today), it was predominantly European news agencies such as Reuters or Agence France-Presse (AFP) that were able to shape public opinion through the news media. In Africa, these agencies were not only sources of information but also instruments of influence and propaganda, thereby shaping international perceptions of events on the continent and contributing to the broader geopolitical dynamics.²⁰ Their reports were (are) used by newspapers, radio and television stations worldwide. Some African countries launched their own agencies in the postcolonial period, but these were often not trusted because they were considered to be mere propaganda outlets.²¹ In an attempt to counter the influence of Western news agencies which had been accused of presenting a biased and unfair image of Africa, a continent-wide news agency, the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) was established in 1983.²² Today, other foreign agencies have grown their presence on the continent, including Xinhua (China), Ruptly (Russia) and Anadolu (Türkiye). These agencies are subsidised by the government and provide content for free or at a reduced cost to African newsrooms, as opposed to commercially oriented Western agencies like AFP.²³ Xinhua,

¹⁹ W. Wanta, G. Golan, and C. Lee, “[Agenda Setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations](#)”, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 81, no. 2, 2004, pp. 364-77.

²⁰ C. Paterson, *The international television news agencies: The world from London*, Peter Lang, 2011.

²¹ U. Kivikuru, “From State Socialism to Deregulation”, in O. Boyd-Barrett and T. Rantanen (eds.), *The Globalization of News*. London, Routledge, 1998, pp. 137-53.

²² C. Wauthier, PANA: The Voice of Africa, *Africa Report*, 32(2), 1987, p. 65.

²³ X. Xin, “[Xinhua News Agency in Africa](#)”, *Journal of African Media Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2009, pp. 363-77.

alongside other Chinese media with a strong footprint on the continent, are important vehicles through which the Chinese government has tried to influence the news agenda in Africa.

China, in fact, offers a good example of the multitude of efforts by countries outside the West to flag their viewpoints on African media. Over the last decade, the Chinese government has facilitated and financed activities including a) the distribution of favourable media content through, for example, signing agreements with national broadcasters to distribute Chinese content locally; b) building telecommunications infrastructure, including the provision of digital TV access to rural communities; c) exchange and training programmes for media professionals, who get an opportunity to visit and report China first-hand; and, d) public opinion management activities, such as the direct engagement with audiences via social media.²⁴ This latter aspect, the "management" of African public opinion, has seen the most significant shift in recent times as Beijing responded to several crises like its handling of the outbreak of Covid-19,²⁵ a wave of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and accusations of genocide in Xinjiang.²⁶ When projecting its voice on these issues globally, China has adopted a range of anti-US narratives. Some of these might resonate well in Africa and in other parts of the Global South, where years of colonial abuse and military interventions have left strong anti-imperialist attitudes amongst parts of the population.

Two other episodes, the latest outbreak in the long-running Russian occupation of Ukraine and France's failures in the Sahel region, further illustrate the potential appeal among African audiences of narratives that focus on highlighting what some

²⁴ D. Madrid-Morales, "Sino-African Media Cooperation? An Overview of a Longstanding Asymmetric Relationship", in *It's about their story: How China, Turkey and Russia try to influence media in Africa*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), pp. 9-70.

²⁵ J.T. Jacob, "To Tell China's Story Well. China's International Messaging during the COVID-19 pandemic", *China Report* vol. 56, no. 3, 2020, pp. 374-92.

²⁶ E. Olander, "China launches full-scale media blitz in Africa to counter mounting US-European Pressure on Xinjiang", *The China-Africa Project*, 3 February 2021.

see as the shortcomings of “Western” liberal democracies. These narratives, largely absent in reports by media outlets like BBC, CNN or Reuters, do get significant attention on Chinese and Russian outlets, for example. With regard to the war in Ukraine, Beijing has contributed to spreading Russian propaganda, stifled criticism of Russia’s invasion and amplifying anti-US disinformation, such as the existence of US-run bioweapon labs in Ukraine.²⁷ Using its large media presence across most of Africa, China has promoted narratives that portray the ‘West’ as holding equal (if not more) responsibility in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.²⁸ The rivalry between China and the US (and the US-EU partnership) may therefore also play out in public attitudes towards these two countries among African citizens. There is evidence, for example, that China has been focusing its messaging towards African publics on social media on these issues.²⁹ Russia itself can also still count on historic loyalties in Africa. In Moscow’s attempts to bolster its support in Africa, the Kremlin often draws on its role in the liberation struggle, a practice that is sometimes referred to as “memory diplomacy”.³⁰

While the war in Ukraine has focused a lot of the attention on Russia’s information manipulation efforts globally, in Africa, the Sahel region has seen the most intense competition over narratives (particularly between France and Russia) in recent years. France has long insisted that its military presence in the region is to counter extremist groups. However, the lack of tangible progress combined with a spate of military coups have led to increased tensions between France and its

²⁷ M. Curet, “China repeats false claim that US has biolabs in Ukraine”, *Politifact*, 9 March 2022.

²⁸ L. Pike, “How China uses global media to spread its views – and misinformation”, *Grid*, 18 May 2022.

²⁹ M. Repnikova and K.A. Chen, “Asymmetrical discursive competition: China-United States digital diplomacy in Africa”, *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 85, no. 1, 2023, pp. 15-31.

³⁰ J. McGlynn, “Moscow is using memory diplomacy to export its narrative to the world”, *Foreign Policy*, 25 June 2021.

former colonies.³¹ Russia, for its part, has been accused of playing a covert role in exacerbating this sentiment through disinformation campaigns. At the centre of these campaigns is the paramilitary group Wagner, founded by the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, once an ally of the Kremlin.³² While anti-French sentiment cannot solely be blamed on Wagner's actions, the role of information manipulation in the Sahel underscores Russia's broader strategy to gain a foothold on the continent by drawing on historical ties. Lingering resentment against former colonial powers can be exploited through wider anti-Western rhetoric, while historic loyalties towards Russia can be reactivated by framing its actions as "anti-imperialist". These narratives are then amplified through local influencers³³ and supportive media outlets in what has been referred to as 'information laundering',³⁴ and through political parties who trade on anti-imperialist rhetoric, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa.³⁵

News Narratives of the "West" and the "Rest"

So far, this chapter has described the ongoing changes in the African media landscape, and it has highlighted how these changes might be connected to the growing competition by foreign actors to try to shape African public opinion. Unfortunately, most of the debates around foreign disinformation, information manipulation and interference leave African agency out of the

³¹ I. Mules, "Why is anti-French sentiment on the rise in West Africa?", *Deutsche Welle*, 12 December 2019.

³² J. Irish, E. Pineau, and B. Felix, "France targets Russian and Wagner disinformation in Africa", *Reuters*, 21 June 2023.

³³ A. Coakley and F. Vetch, "Russia is using African influencers to spread its lies on Twitter", *.coda*, 16 December 2022.

³⁴ H. Wasserman, "Media capture and information laundering – China and Russia's propaganda assault on Africa", *Daily Maverick* 27 March 2023.

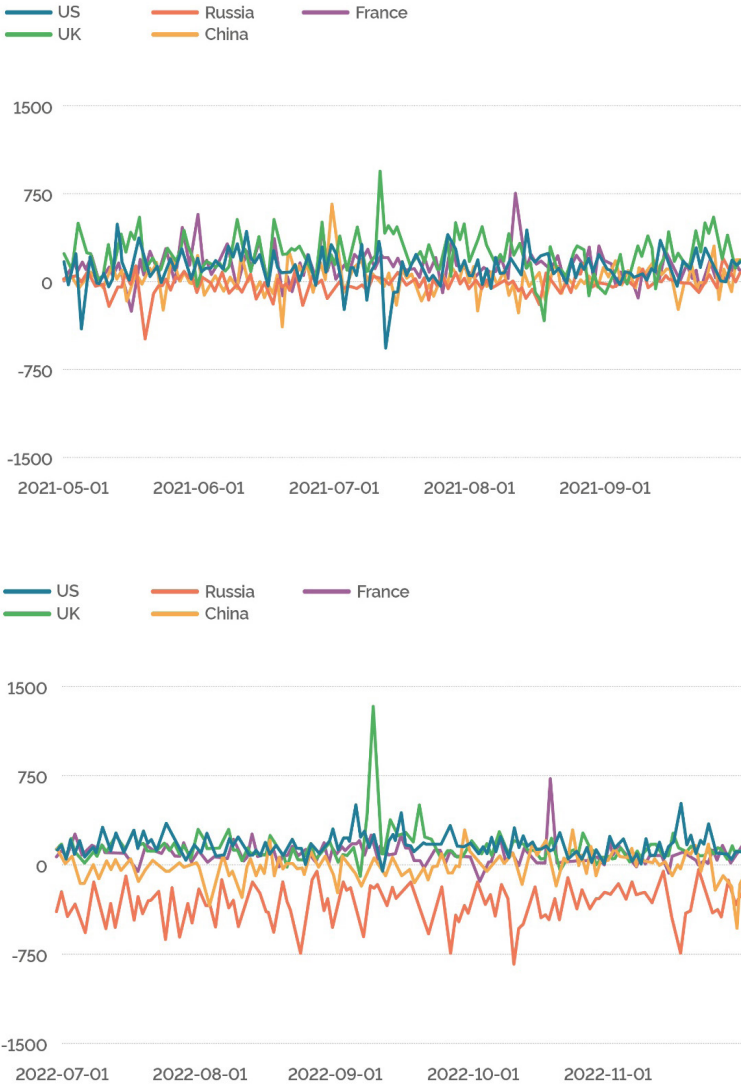
³⁵ E. Wanjala, "I would arm Russia since it's fighting imperialism – Malema", *The Star*, 24 May 2023.

equation. That is, not enough attention is paid to the active role that African media consumers and professionals play when “decoding” media content. For example, the fact that a growing number of countries are actively seeking to influence editorial news agendas through a range of strategies, does not preclude African media and journalists from exercising their agency in selecting the points of view they prefer to highlight based on their professional judgement and, potentially, their own views. In this final section, we will try to disentangle agency from the structural changes we have described above as we use a range of computer-assisted techniques³⁶ to analyse a large dataset of more than 500,000 news articles published in roughly 1,200 news websites from 40 countries covering two five-month periods between May 2021 and November 2022.³⁷

³⁶ We ran a sentiment analysis around instances of the names of the countries. That is, we looked for words like “China”, “Chinese”, “France” and “French” and, within a window of 15 words, we counted how many positive and negative words there were. For more details of the approach and the list of positive/negative words we used, see L. Young and S. Soroka, “[Affective News: The Automated Coding of Sentiment in Political Texts](#)”, *Political Communication*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2012, pp. 205-31.

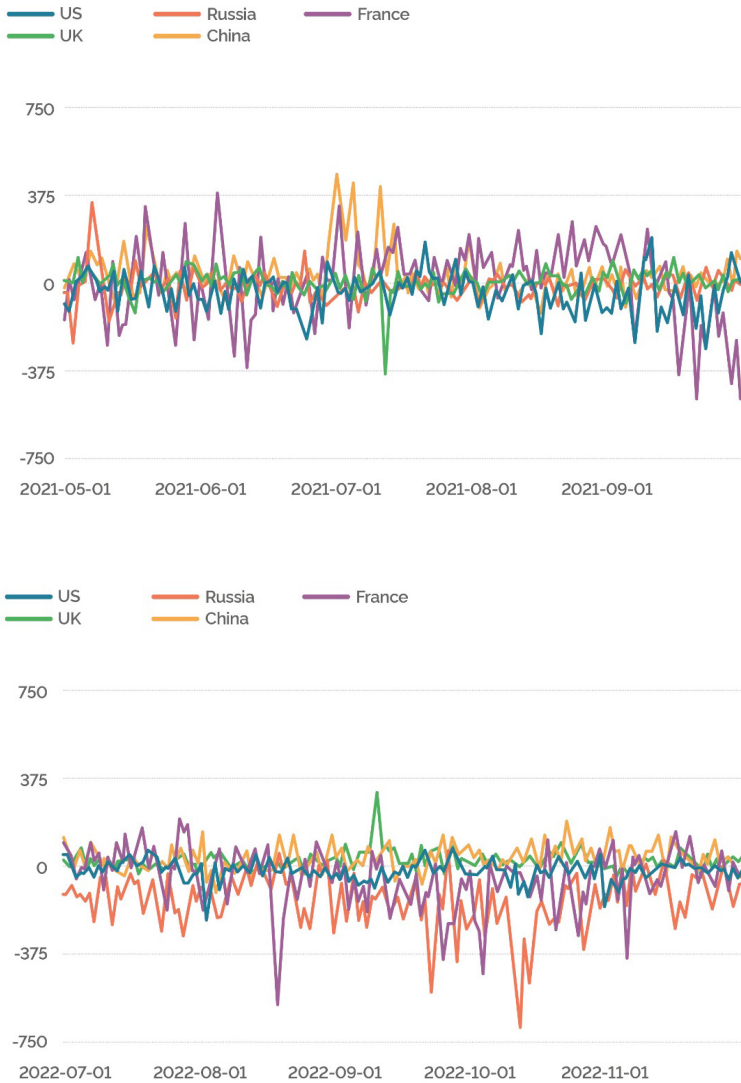
³⁷ For further information about the dataset, the countries that are included in it, and for a sample of the data, see D. Madrid-Morales, P. Lindner, and M. Periyasamy, *Corpus of African Digital News from 600 Websites Formatted for Text Mining / Computational Text Analysis* [dataset], Texas Data Repository, 2021.

FIG. 6.4 - SENTIMENT ANALYSIS TOWARDS THE "WEST" AND THE "REST" IN AFRICAN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA (MAY TO SEPTEMBER 2021 AND JULY TO NOVEMBER 2022)



In Figures 6.4 and 6.5, we plot the net sentiment (computed as number of positive words – number of negative words) over time. Overall, the sentiment towards Russia on the news media appears to have deteriorated between mid-2021 and mid-2022. The change in overall sentiment is undoubtedly connected to the Kremlin's decision to invade eastern Ukraine in February 2022, the coverage of which dominates mentions of Russia in African media from that point onwards. During the five months in 2022 that we examined, Russia is consistently mentioned alongside words such as “conflict”, “invasion” and “killing”. In 2021, while some of these words with negative connotations persist – after all, Russia's campaign in east Ukraine has been ongoing since 2014 – there are a good number of positive words associated with Russia, such as “cooperation”, “peace” and “(strong) power”. The predominance of conflict-related language seems to suggest that information about Russia is limited, apart from news stories about the war in Ukraine, thus severely limiting the range of images of the country that audiences can construct. Moreover, because the vast majority of reports on the war in Ukraine comes from Western news agencies, there is limited space for Russian narratives to become prevalent, other than the odd favourable commentary or editorial.

FIG. 6.5 - SENTIMENT ANALYSIS TOWARDS THE "WEST" AND THE "REST" IN AFRICAN FRENCH-LANGUAGE MEDIA (MAY TO SEPTEMBER 2021 AND JULY TO NOVEMBER 2022)



We can also see a downward trend in sentiment towards France, particularly in French-language media. There are, however, some differences worth pointing out when compared to news about Russia. First, in the case of Russia, the prevalence of negative sentiment words applies to both French-language and English-language media. When it comes to France, the trend is predominantly only in French-language media. This is seen most clearly during the one week in August 2022 when sentiment towards France reached its lowest point in our analysis (see Figure 6.5). In French-speaking media, France was discussed in news about the worsening security situation in the Sahel, the diplomatic spat between Paris and the Malian military junta and the football games in Ligue 1 for the week. In English-language media, sports coverage monopolises news related to France. This is reflected by the predominance of words such as “winning”, “champions” and “victory” in English-language media, as opposed to “*crise*” (crisis), “*rupture*” and “*guerre*” (war) and “*violations*” in French-speaking media.

To conclude: there is little doubt that the media landscape in Africa has in the last decade become a space where geopolitical struggles are reflected. Old notions of core and periphery in global media have become outdated as the media from the “Rest” have been posing a strong challenge to the entrenched interests of the old colonial powers in the continent’s media. Notions of media imperialism have had to be revised to reflect a new scramble for African audiences’ attention by a range of new actors. These are active across a full range of media that includes legacy platforms such as television and radio, but also, increasingly, digital media. And while the contest still plays out in the traditional news arena, journalistic discourses compete for attention with the output of influencers and disinformation. In all this, it is important to remember that the African media is a shifting, fluid space, with new actors entering to alter the dynamic and interact with older players. While recognising this growing diversity of global players, the agency of African media producers and audiences has to be

taken seriously. The mere presence of global players does not necessarily equate with impact and influence, as our analysis has shown. The overall picture that emerges from the analysis of news content highlights the heterogeneity of the African media landscape, the difficulties faced by the "Rest" in challenging the dominance of news narratives by the "West", and the need for nuance in understanding the slow-moving structural changes we describe in the earlier part of this chapter.

7. Anti-Western Narratives in East Africa

Haggai Matsiko

Over the past few years, East Africa has become a major front for growing anti-western sentiment on a wide range of topical issues: from the global discussion on human rights (such as, in particular, LGBTQ+ rights) to the war in Ukraine, from international justice to climate change.

Anti-Western Rhetoric in East Africa

There is a growing sense of resentment in East Africa against the West because of what certain East African leaders and commentators perceive as hypocrisy in the ways Western powers, academia and media engage with the region. Fuelled by the reactions of East African political elites and commentators, this resentment has revealed itself through a range of issues (LGBTQ+ rights and human rights, aid, democracy, climate change and the war on Ukraine, are particularly topical examples) on which the West interacts with the region. It is clear, however, that the root cause is deep-seated anger linked with the West's colonial history and hegemonic tendencies. Importantly, this sentiment is not unique to East Africa but is widespread across the continent, as illustrated by recent developments in West Africa and particularly in the Sahel, that are outlined elsewhere in this report. While the West is acutely aware of the issue and attempts to address it, these efforts have been insufficient and often drowned in the sea of other contradictions emanating

from Western powers and institutions. Aware that they have an alternative to the West in China and Russia, regional leaders and commentators are actively voicing their resentment, which China and Russia are happily fuelling in many instances.

A recent and particularly striking manifestation of the anti-Western dynamic was the reaction to the World Bank's announcement in early August 2023 of its decision to suspend lending to Uganda following the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.¹ In contradiction of the Bank's values and ethics, the Act introduces a harsh regime of penalties for homosexuality, including the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality". Uganda's President, Yoweri Museveni, accused the World Bank of wielding its loans as a cudgel to coerce the country into "abandoning [its] faith, culture, principles and sovereignty [by] using money".²

Even some of Museveni's critics expressed consternation that Western countries and the World Bank habitually suspend aid, which they usually claim is for fighting poverty, whenever African countries defy their core values and/or interests. "Who does the World Bank really work for, and for whose good, ultimately?"³ wondered Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, a scholar and researcher based in Uganda and Rwanda, shortly after the World Bank announced its decision.

Perceived as a disguised instrument of Western soft power, the World Bank's decision might have sparked renewed interest in the BRICS block (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), which is seen as an emerging, alternative counterpart to the dominance of the West. For instance, Uganda's leading anti-gay rights activist, Pastor Martin Ssempe, declared on social media that World Bank's decision had given new significance to the BRICS.⁴ While it is arguable that LGBTQ+ legislation has a role in defining a country's international positioning,

¹ "World Bank Group Statement on Uganda" *World Bank*, 8 August 2023.

² Yoweri Museveni, *X Post*, 9 August 2023.

³ F. Golooba-Mutebi, *X Post*, 10 August 2023.

⁴ M. Ssempe, *X Post*, 9 August 2023.

such legislation tends to reflect national feeling. Museveni did not attend August's BRICS Summit of heads of state in South Africa, but Uganda's Vice President, Jessica Alupo, reiterated her country's willingness to join the group, which Museveni has defined as a means of fighting against "600 years of slave trade, colonialism, genocides, imperialism, neo-colonialism, aggression".⁵ Previously, in March, Kenyan President William Ruto, a self-confessed admirer of Museveni, had also invoked faith and tradition when pushing back against LGBTQ+ rights.⁶

While homosexuality was much more tolerated in pre-colonial African societies, including some in Uganda,⁷ anti-gay groups tend to falsely associate homosexuality with Westernism, and LGBTQ+ activists with Western agents.⁸ Ironically, some conservative, anti-gay activists are funded by, or linked to Western institutions. David Bahati, a member of the Ugandan parliament who introduced the 2014 bill that ultimately led to the new law, drew inspiration from the Fellowship Foundation (also known as "the Family"), an influential US conservative group that spent over 20 million dollars in Africa between 2008 and 2019, more than 80% of it in Uganda.⁹ The Fellowship Foundation (known as "The Family") is seen as a major driver of the wave of homophobia that led to the drafting of the 2013 anti-gay law, before a Ugandan court struck it down in 2014. This partly explains why critics blame growing homophobia on the financial and ideological over-reach of Western anti-rights groups.¹⁰

⁵ Speech By President Museveni at the 15th BRICS Summit, *Uganda Broadcasting Corporation*, 24 August 2023.

⁶ "Ruto, Raila united in dismissing Supreme Court LGBTQ ruling", *Daily Monitor*, 3 March 2023.

⁷ "The 'Deviant' African Genders That Colonialism Condemned", *Jastor Daily*, 29 April 2021.

⁸ "When The U.S. Backs Gay and Lesbian Rights In Africa, Is There A Backlash?", *npr*, 30 August 2016.

⁹ K.S. Wepukhulu, "The World Bank funding freeze will harm the queer Ugandans it claims to defend" *openDemocracy*, 15 August 2023.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

How Deep Is Anti-Western Sentiment in East Africa?

While anti-Western rhetoric finds its roots in Western contradictions, Museveni, Ruto and other politicians across the region have also been keen to seize on these inconsistencies to whip up anti-western sentiment as a political lightning rod in having to shield themselves from accusations of human rights violations and other governance excesses.

In the run-up to the 2021 elections, for instance, Museveni, who had been in power for 35 years, faced his toughest challenger in a musician-turned-politician, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, known as Bobi Wine. In his attempts to hinder his opponent, among other things, the President exploited homosexuality as a political lever, by accusing his challenger of receiving support from “western elements” promoting homosexuality. “He gets quite a lot of encouragement from foreigners and homosexuals. Homosexuals are very happy with Bobi Wine. I think they even send him support”, Museveni told *The Guardian* in January 2021.¹¹ These accusations, however, contrast with the fact that Bobi Wine had been denied a visa to visit the UK in 2014 after LGBTQ+ rights campaigners accused him of inciting homophobic attacks in his song lyrics.¹²

Other elements, however, fed into the narrative of Bobi Wine being connected to and supported by Western powers. For instance the musician, who was still a legislator at the time, had benefited from the services of a Canadian lawyer, Robert Amsterdam, who arranged meetings with members of the US Congress and an international press conference for him in Washington D.C. in 2018 after he fell foul of President Museveni’s government for, among other things, challenging the lifting of constitutional age limits to allow the old Ugandan

¹¹ L. Hilsom, “Agent of foreign interests’: Museveni lashes out at Uganda election rival”, *The Guardian*, 11 January 2021.

¹² B. bwa Mwesigire, “Ugandan pop star Bobi Wine ‘denied UK visa over homophobic stance’”, *The Guardian*, 13 August 2014.

leader to remain in power. Another Western-based lawyer, Bruce Afran, is leading a case before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in which Museveni and his son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, were accused by Bobi Wine and his supporters of sponsoring violence and the torture of dissenters. Commenting on the case, Uganda's Attorney General, Kiryowa Kiwanuka, dismissed the case as "just politics", saying that he only knew that a US attorney had pressured the ICC to investigate the 2021 election violence.

Across Africa, the ICC is indeed seen as part of the institutional toolkit of Western imperialism,¹³ and trials to – *de facto*, almost exclusively – African leaders have exacerbated anti-Western sentiment among African public opinion. In 2014, when Ruto was deputy President and was battling ICC charges for the 2007 post electoral violence, along with then President Uhuru Kenyatta, Museveni was a prominent voice of the African Union's criticism of the institution and its chief prosecutor at the time, Fatou Bensouda. As Museveni claimed, the ICC had no right to summon a sitting president and his deputy, as this revealed "the hegemonic post-colonial agenda targeting Africa leaders".¹⁴ The Court later dropped the cases against Ruto and Kenyatta, but criticism against the institution, of which Museveni has continued to be a leading voice, has only grown. During his swearing-in speech in 2016, the Ugandan leader described the ICC as "a bunch of useless people".¹⁵ Present at the ceremony was Omar Al-Bashir, at the time the President of Sudan, against whom the ICC had issued an arrest warrant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2009.

But this issue is much more nuanced. Despite the bashing of western powers and institutions, Museveni and some of his counterparts in the region are also perceived as allies of Western powers, who have been able to stay in power partly because of

¹³ D. Hoile, "Is the ICC a tool to recolonise Africa?", *NewAfrican*, 31 March 2017.

¹⁴ "Museveni attack on ICC dominates independence celebrations", *Daily Monitor*, 9 October 2014.

¹⁵ "ICC a bunch of useless people-Museveni", *NewVision*, 12 May 2016.

the support of Western institutions, including the IMF and the World Bank, and tend to pick and choose when to bash the West and when to exploit it to cling onto power.

In a context of widespread suspicion and diffidence towards the ICC, an institution perceived as an expression of Western priorities pushing an imperialist agenda, Ruto came to power with a promise to ignore the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and purportedly to implement a pro-people agenda for Kenyans.

Ruto has been leading an invective against the World Bank and IMF, arguing that the two institutions are hostage to rich nations, and calling for a new non-aligned bank to close a shortfall of trillions of dollars needed to halt global warming.¹⁶ Specifically, the Kenyan President asked African leaders to ditch the US dollar by signing up to a pan-African payments system, the Pan-African Payments and Settlement System (PAPSS), launched in January 2022.¹⁷

Another hot button in the Africa-West debate in East Africa revolves around the issue of global warming and paths to addressing it. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have been discovering commercially viable oil and gas resources since the early 2000s.¹⁸ As a route to the market, Uganda has been trying to develop an oil pipeline, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline.¹⁹ However, a group of international NGOs and local activists have campaigned to block the facility, arguing that it threatens to “harming local communities, endangering wildlife and tipping the world closer to climate catastrophe”.²⁰ In light of the many complaints and warnings, the European Union

¹⁶ Attracta Mooney and Kenza Bryan, “Kenyan leader says World Bank and IMF are ‘hostage’ to rich nations”, *Financial Times*, 23 June 2023.

¹⁷ “Kenya revives push by African nations to ditch the dollar”, *The EastAfrican*, 30 May 2023.

¹⁸ P. Purcell, “Oil and Gas Exploration in East Africa: A Brief History” *GeoExpro*, 9 December 2014.

¹⁹ “Unlocking East Africa’s Potential”, *East African Crude Oil Pipeline*.

²⁰ <https://www.stopeacop.net/home>

made a resolution calling for the pipeline project to be delayed by at least one year, citing, among other things, violations of human rights in Uganda and Tanzania and environmental pollution.²¹ In response, President Museveni has criticised “Western hypocrisy”, highlighting the fact that countries like Germany were reverting to coal.²² These comments are part of a broader thread of accusations concerning the positioning of African and Western countries with regard to the question of how to manage the exploitation of fossil fuel reserves *vis à vis* the need for action to counter climate change. In line with these observations, Museveni has underlined that African countries like Uganda have the right to exploit their fossil fuels as a path to economic development, just as rich nations have done for hundreds of years.²³

The subtle balance between Human Rights and Democratic Values and hypocrisy

Rwanda’s President, Paul Kagame, has probably been the most prominent accuser of the hypocrisy of Western powers in the region. In April 2022, during the commemoration of the 28th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, President Kagame eloquently synthesised what he saw as the duplicity of the West: “as far as I know, there are three systems that govern the world. One is the so-called democracy. The other is what they call autocracy. The third, in between – that is silent and powerful – is hypocrisy”.²⁴

²¹ E. Karuhanga, “EU Parliament and economic sabotage”, *Daily Monitor*, 18 September 2022.

²² N. Princewill, “Uganda’s President Museveni slams ‘Western double standards over coal mine plans’”, *CNN*, 14 November 2022.

²³ D. Olewe, “Cop 27: Uganda-Tanzania oil pipeline sparks climate row”, *BBC*, 24 October 2022.

²⁴ Paul Kagame, “28th Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi – Kwibuka28 remarks”, *paulkagame.com*, 7 April 2022.

Tensions between Kagame and the West have been arising with repeated accusations by Western media, international human rights organisations, and some governments over supporting the M23 rebel group and fuelling conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Kagame has denied any responsibility and has raised concerns that while the West had been complaining about Rwanda's posture towards the M23, it was also ignoring evidence about collaboration between the DRC's national army and the rebels of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), active on Rwandan territory.²⁵

More recently, Kagame clashed with the West over the case of Paul Rusesabagina,²⁶ the inspirational figure behind the "Hotel Rwanda" movie. Rusesabagina and 20 others, all members of the National Liberation Front (FLN), the armed wing of the Rwanda Movement for Democratic Change (MRCD), were found guilty by a Rwandan court of carrying out attacks on Rwanda's territory, between 2018 and 2019. While many of the accused were charged, and affirmed Rusesabagina as their leader, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken exerted pressure for Rusesabagina to be released. Once again, Kagame replied by arguing that "there isn't anybody, going to come from anywhere, to bully us into something to do with our lives and we accept it", and that Rwanda would not have given in to external pressure.²⁷ Other Rwandan personalities have voiced similar views on the same issue.²⁸

The perceived existence of "double standards" from the West, and the pressure of "being bullied" towards particular political choices, is closely linked to the touchy subject of democratic

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ F. Kimenyi, "Rusesabagina gets 25-year sentence over FLN terror attacks", 20 September 2021.

²⁷ E. Kagire, "Not Rwanda's Problem - President Kagame Speaks Out On DRC Situation, Rusesabagina In U.S. Interview", *KT Press*, 15 December 2022.

²⁸ G. Mbanda, "How the mainstream media in the West gets it wrong on Rwanda", *The East African*, 22 August 2017.

and human rights. A recent example is the inflammatory debate on the agreement between Rwanda and the United Kingdom on the resettlement of irregular migrants. During the 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, between 24 and 25 June 2022, Anne Soy, the BBC Deputy Editor & Senior Africa Correspondent, asked Kagame, as Chairman of CHOGM, what his priorities would be in terms of upholding these values in the face of Rwanda's deal with the UK and the country's human rights record of detaining critics, opposition politicians and journalists.²⁹ In reaction, Kagame said it was a mistake for the Global North to assume sole responsibility for and a monopoly on defining values, especially when the Global North itself has been part and parcel, and in some cases, the cause of the problems the continent faces. In this respect, he cited the example of how the colonial administration in Rwanda was responsible in planting the seeds of genocide by cultivating divisions within the Rwandan society, and the 20 million people murdered in Congo under Belgian colonisation: "These issues of upholding values, as far as I am concerned, as far as I know Rwandans are concerned, we do not need any lessons from BBC or from any one", Kagame said.³⁰

According to Ugandan scholar and columnist Yusuf Serunkuma, "this conversation continues in a colonial-racialised paradigm and hierarchy, African political actors have to constantly explain themselves to the Western world from a point of disadvantage – because theirs is the primordial position". At the same time, the author laments the many pressures that the Global North imposes on African political actors to respect values that are not always guaranteed in Western countries themselves.³¹

²⁹ "Kagame responding to BBC's question on upholding values of democracy & human rights", *Kigali Today*, 26 June 2022.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Y. Serunkuma, "Beyond Culture Shock: African and Western Values Revisited", *The Elephant*, 16 September 2022.

Similar comments on deep-seated anger against the West's colonial history, along with expressions of disappointment towards the structural inequalities of the United Nations Security Council, were expressed in occasion of the latest edition of the Kigali Global Dialogue.³² Both Russia and China, the leading opponents of the West, have been keen to take advantage of these sentiments, the latter even calling on countries of the Global South to "form a united front against colonialism".³³ While hosting a visit from Congolese President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi, for example, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised that the two countries had established "a profound traditional friendship in the historical process of striving for national liberation and opposing colonial aggression"³⁴, seizing upon the simmering anti-Western sentiments in the country. The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has lately been under attack. In the country since 1999, Congolese critics of the mission have accused it of conniving with neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda to sustain armed groups in the eastern part of the country.³⁵ In July 2022, local anger culminated in violent anti-UN protests, in which MONUSCO bases in Goma, the capital of North Kivu, were raided. A total of 36 people, including UN peacekeeping staff, were killed over several days of tensions.³⁶ Calls for the departure of MONUSCO have been ongoing since 2019, while the withdrawal decision was announced in June 2023 and discussion is underway to accelerate the withdrawal of UN forces from December 2024, as initially stated, to December 2023.

³² H. Akita, "Will anti-Westernism sweep Global South?", *Nikkei Asia*, 5 August 2023.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Xi Jinping Holds Talks with DRC President Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo", Permanent mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations and other international organizations in Vienna, 26 May 2023.

³⁵ J. Burke, "Death toll reaches 36 in eastern DRC as protesters turn on UN peacekeepers", *The Guardian*, 5 August 2022.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The abovementioned anti-MONUSCO sentiment partly stemmed from a sense that, rather than keeping peace, MONUSCO has contributed to the violence in the country. In 2012, a member of MONUSCO staff was arrested as he was trying to smuggle a consignment of 24 packages of cassiterite (tin ore), each weighing 50 kg, on board of a UN jeep. The blue helmets are perceived as part of a Western structure of resource extraction that has fuelled violence in the region. A similar role is attributed to several western actors from the industrial, financial, trade and manufacturing sectors, who enrich themselves through extractive practices – from monopolies in extractive industries to land grabbing – whose consequences in terms of the lives and wellbeing of local populations and severity echoes practices of colonial times. Similarly, accusations of exploiting African resources by replicating colonial dynamics of power have been moved against Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) forced onto the Global South by the World Bank and the IMF.

Similarly, Western scholars and media focusing on Africa have attracted indignation for reproducing demeaning ways of portraying African realities and leaders, with modalities not as crude as the openly racist and abusive ones of colonial times, but equally dangerous. Serunkuma has described these intellectuals as “intellectuals of empire”,³⁷ referring to how books such as *Do Not Disturb*, by British journalist and author Michella Wrong and other intellectual works he examines are part of a disturbing pattern in which Western media present African presidents as monsters.³⁸ While these leaders are not necessarily innocent individuals, Serunkuma has argued, their monstrosity ought to be understood in the context of the corrupting nature of power, a dynamic that is not limited to Africa. Interestingly, these characters have tended to exhibit an unwillingness to “allow modern imperial plunder disguised as free trade, and often

³⁷ Y. Serunkuma, “The New Intellectuals of Empire”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 1 July 2021.

³⁸ J. Wiegratz and L. Zeilig, “The West and Its African Monsters Syndrome”, *The Elephant*, 18 June 2021.

packaged in the slick language of human rights”, showing how a defiant positioning towards Western values and rhetoric reaches not only political consequences, but also deep cultural ones.

A Window of Opportunity for the West’s Geopolitical Competitors?

These contradictions have created an opportunity for the West’s opponents to whip up anti-western sentiments. Most recently, when the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Uganda and Kenya in July 2023, he accused the West of “trying to promote the idea of homosexuality and by promoting homosexuality they are trying to end the generation of human beings”.³⁹ Raisi’s visits were the first to the continent by an Iranian President in more than a decade as Iran, under heavy US economic sanctions, seeks to deepen other partnerships around the world.

Before Iran, it was Russia’s turn. Russian Minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov visited Uganda in May 2022 and Kenya in May 2023. In March 2023, after Kenya’s President Ruto and his deputy Rigathi Gachagua publicly stated that “homosexuality has no place in Kenya”, the Russian Embassy in Kenya warned on social media that the West was threatening traditional values.⁴⁰ When Russia is not directly bashing the West, it is deploying memory diplomacy to present itself as Africa’s long-term ally and the West as imperialistic.⁴¹ Russia recurrently points out that it has never colonised an African country or participated in the slave trade, while it tends to emphasise the fact that the Soviet Union supported different anti-colonial struggles in the region during the cold war.⁴²

³⁹ “In Uganda, Iran president attacks West on LGBTQ rights”, *France 24*, 13 July 2023.

⁴⁰ J. Mueni, “Russia lauds Kenya for shunning ‘western values’ in gay rights debate”, *AllAfrica, Capital News*, 3 March 2023.

⁴¹ J. Caballero, “How Russia is fighting for allies among the Brics countries using ‘memory diplomacy’”, *The Conversation*, 25 August 2023.

⁴² *Ibid.*

At the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), several African nations have either voted against or abstained from condemning Russia's war in Ukraine. Kampala's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict is particularly interesting. Uganda was among the 17 African countries that abstained as the UNGA voted by a large majority to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 2 March 2023.⁴³ Four days after the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, launched his invasion of Ukraine, and despite Uganda's long-standing association with the West, Museveni's son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, stated on social media that Putin was "absolutely right" and that "the majority of mankind (that are non-white) supports Russia's stand in Ukraine".⁴⁴ Uganda's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Okello Oryem, had to clarify that Muhoozi's statement did not represent Uganda's position on the Russia-Ukraine war.⁴⁵ Yet, Museveni insisted that Uganda would not be Russia's enemy on the dictates of the West.

Even on X (formerly Twitter), the Ugandan audience has tended to manifest anti-western sentiments by taking a pro-Russian posture. The posts on X by Agather Atuhaire, a Ugandan journalist who had just returned from a reporting trip in Ukraine, showed the devastation of the war on the Ukrainian people but largely attracted criticism, with some tweets claiming she had been paid to propagandise for the imperialists or other common pro-Russia arguments, like that the root cause of the war was NATO expansion.⁴⁶ Across East Africa, other critics have pointed out that Western powers and media have executed a near-total blockade of alternative views and suffocated open debate, thereby suppressing the very liberal ideas they claim to be trying to defend in the war with Putin.⁴⁷

⁴³ A. Mutambo, "17 African countries abstain from UN vote to condemn Russia invasion", *The EastAfrican*, 3 March 2022.

⁴⁴ "Ugandan leader's pro-Putin son touted for presidency, may face tricky ride", *Reuters*, 19 May 2022.

⁴⁵ "Disregard Muhoozi's tweet backing Russia on Ukraine: Minister Oryem", *The Independent*, 3 March 2022.

⁴⁶ Ibid; A. Atuhaire, *X Post*, 20 August 2023.

⁴⁷ A. Mwenda, "The real threat to liberalism", *The Independent*, 23 September 2023.

In conclusion, while anti-Western sentiments in East Africa manifest themselves in different ways and through different issues, the most enduring thread of it all seems to be deep-seated resentment linked to the West's colonial history and hegemonic tendencies. That is exactly what both critics looking to push back against western influence in the region tap into and what the West's competing powers – primarily China and Russia – continue to weaponise in East Africa.

8. Anti-Chinese Resentment in Africa

Hagan Sibiri

In contemporary African external relations, few relationships have captured critical attention as much as the one between China and Africa. Although China has a long history of engagement in Africa, the past two decades have seen an allure and intensity of China's engagement in the region never previously witnessed. Chinese economic interests have benefited resource-rich African countries by increasing global commodity prices, providing direct investment, and market access. At both the micro and macro levels, the positive effect on the economic transformation of African nations is profound. In return, African governments have welcomed Chinese ventures into all sectors and diplomatically embraced China. For instance, the triennial summits between Chinese and African leaders have become the largest in Africa's history of external relations, overshadowing every other multilateral summit with Africa.¹

However, not all is rosy, and the aphorism "all that glitters is not gold" holds relevance to China's current engagement in Africa. While China's involvement across the continent has brought about numerous positive structural socio-economic changes, it has also resulted in adverse consequences, leading to a noticeable

¹ The 2018 China-Africa summit, for example, assembled twice as many African leaders than the 73rd UN General Assembly held two weeks later. 51 African leaders attended the summit in Beijing compared with only 27 at the UN General Assembly. See A. Dahir, "Twice as Many African Presidents Made it to China's Africa Summit than to the UN General Assembly", *Quartz Africa*, 5 October 2018.

wave of “anti-Chinese resentment”. In many African countries, citizens, activists, and political actors have openly protested and expressed their resentment towards the presence, activities, and influence of China in their country. Some have gone to the extent of seeking to cancel agreements or partnerships between their respective countries and Beijing. Indeed, a recent study conducted in the continent reveals a compelling correlation. The study indicates that regions with a higher concentration of Chinese-aided projects tend to experience more frequent protests.² Furthermore, the study identified a significant shift in perception in these areas. As the number of Chinese projects increased, there was a corresponding increase in the perception that China’s influence on the domestic economy was growing. This perception, in turn, appeared closely linked to the increased frequency of protests. This reflects growing concerns, opposition, discontent, or pushback towards China’s intractable engagement across Africa.

To shed light on the complexities of the above issue, this chapter centres on China’s involvement in Africa and its implications, specifically focusing on the evolving attitudes of Africans towards Chinese engagement and the ensuing rise in anti-Chinese resentment. The chapter is structured into three parts. The first part delves into China’s engagement in Africa, exploring its impact and examining how it has also contributed to widespread resentment among African communities. The second part explores the various manifestations of anti-Chinese resentment, shedding light on the root causes and how this resentment is expressed across Africa. The final part discusses the implications of these developments for European cooperation in Africa, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach and strategic considerations when engaging with Africa.

² F. Lacoella, B. Martorano, L. Metzger, and M. Sanfilippo, “Chinese official finance and political participation in Africa”, *European Economic Review*, vol. 136, 2021, 103741.

China's Engagement in Africa: Interests, Impact, and Costs

China's policy towards Africa has passed through a series of stages over the past half-century. However, since the start of the XXI century, China has strengthened its African policy and strategically engaged with African countries to bolster its foreign policy interests. China's core interest in Africa is unambiguous and can be categorised in four thematic areas: political, economic, security, and ideological appeal. The political interest centres on gaining Africa's support for its "One-China Policy" and its international policy agendas, particularly at the United Nations.³ The economic interest seeks access to Africa's resources and market opportunities. The security interest entails the protection of Chinese investment interests. Finally, the ideological interest centres on promoting Chinese socio-political and economic ideas in African countries.⁴

One of the most significant steps taken to achieve these interests occurred with the formation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 as a multilateral platform for cooperation and dialogue between China and African countries. Through the FOCAC processes, China published its first-ever African policy paper in 2006, outlining its general objectives, commitments, and desired engagement with Africa in response to changing global dynamics. FOCAC is the most significant and often-cited milestone that jumpstarted and consolidated China's extensive involvement in Africa.⁵

³ Accepting and adhering to the One-China Policy, which acknowledges the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate and sovereign government representing the entire Chinese nation, is the primary condition for China's diplomatic engagement with any state or entity. Accepting this principle acknowledges that there is only one China, and Taiwan is considered an integral part of China.

⁴ Y. Sun, "Africa in China's foreign policy", Brookings, 14 April 2014.

⁵ H. Sibiri, "FOCAC at Twenty: A 'Bargained Institutional Framework' for Shared Impacts", *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2021, pp. 199-217.

The deeper engagement achieved through FOCAC processes has had a profound and ongoing impact on China and Africa. China, for instance, has successfully won over almost every remaining sovereign African country to sever political and diplomatic ties with Taiwan, achieving its core political objective in Africa.⁶ It has also garnered significant African support and votes for its interests and positions at the UN and other multilateral forums. Also, some African countries have ideologically turned to China, seeking alternative economic and development strategies and embracing China's influence.⁷ On the security front, China's presence in Africa has expanded, as evidenced by the establishment of its first-ever military base on the continent and its active involvement as a peacekeeping force.⁸ Economically, Africa provides China with investment opportunities, a market for Chinese goods and services, and access to crucial natural resources. This is reflected in the substantial trade volumes between China and Africa, surpassing US\$2 trillion in the past decade, and China's emergence as one of Africa's leading investors, with investments exceeding US\$30 billion in the past decade.⁹ China also contributes significantly to Africa's socio-economic development through aid provisions, infrastructure financing, and participation in projects like

⁶ The exception is the Kingdom of Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (Western Sahara). Whereas the former maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the latter is a de facto sovereign state fully recognised by the African Union but not the United Nations. As of today, Western Sahara has no official relation with either China or Taiwan.

⁷ Ethiopian elites, for instance, have been cited as embracing and attempting to emulate the Chinese economic model. For more on this claim, see E. Fourie, "China's Example for Meles' Ethiopia: When Development 'Models' Land", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2015, pp. 289-316; O. Hodzi, "African Political Elites and the Making(s) of the China Model in Africa", *Politics & Policy*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1-21; E. Ziso, "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia", *Politics & Policy*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1-24.

⁸ H. Sibiri, "Demystifying China's Involvement in African Peace and Security Architecture", *Chinese Journal of International Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-19.

⁹ "Graphics: How Belt and Road has impacted China-Africa cooperation", *CGTN*, 29 June 2023.

the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁰ China's infrastructure contribution in the past decade includes the construction of over 12,000 kilometres of railways and roads, the development of approximately 20 ports, and the establishment of more than 80 large power facilities across the continent.¹¹

As a result of the above, the impact of China-Africa engagement is palpable and has received widespread recognition. The relationship has shaped both China's and African countries' foreign policy landscapes and influenced changes in Africa's relations with the rest of the world. Indeed, the successes of China in Africa have compelled other prominent external actors, who once held a central position in Africa, to acknowledge the shifting dynamics and China's prominence. These actors are now intensifying their engagement in Africa, strategically seeking influence by implementing counter-policy approaches to pursue similar or different interests. This trend is evident in the flurry of the "New African Strategy" and the proliferation of "Africa+1" summits aimed at competing with China's FOCAC.¹²

However, despite the seemingly harmonious China-Africa relationship, there have been moments of contention. China's extensive influence in Africa has led to adverse consequences, most notably resentment towards its presence and activities. Media outlets often report on discontent directed at Chinese activities and investments in Africa, making it a recurring topic in the news. These increasing resentments have recently sparked a backlash and deep-seated concerns across Africa, occasionally resulting in public protests, dangerous anti-Chinese rhetoric,

¹⁰ Regarding aid provision, almost half of China's total foreign aid goes to Africa. See China's State Council White Paper on Foreign Aid, "[China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era](#)", 10 January 2021.

¹¹ "[Graphics: How Belt and Road has impacted China-Africa cooperation](#)"..., cit.

¹² Examples of such summits: are the EU-AU summit, US-Africa leaders' summit; Russia-Africa summit; Korea-Africa Forum; Türkiye-Africa summit; and India-Africa Forum summit.

violent clashes, and, in some cases, brutal attacks on Chinese workers and properties. Zambia, for example, is a well-known example where anti-Chinese resentment is entrenched and has been frequently cited in the media and by scholars alike as a test case for China's African engagement.

The Growing Manifestation of Anti-Chinese Resentment in Africa

As mentioned, while Chinese involvement in Africa has been instrumental in fostering infrastructure development and economic growth, resentment towards the Chinese presence has also begun to manifest itself across the African continent. Several reported incidents of attacks on Chinese workers and business owners have been reported by locals in almost all parts of the continent. Also, Chinese activities in the extractive industry have sparked violent protests and become a major social and political issue in some African countries.¹³ Various factors fuel this animosity, each contributing to resentment towards China (see Table 8.1). From perceptions of an unequal partnership and unfavourable deals to concerns over illegal activities, environmental issues, and community resistance, the issues at hand are multifaceted and require closer examination. Moreover, the unorthodox investment approach and labour practices employed by Chinese entities and apprehensions regarding China's political influence and support for corrupt regimes have further stoked the flames of discontent.

This wave of anti-Chinese resentment is further exacerbated by the new phenomenon of "anti-Chinese populism", with some political actors exploiting the public's resentment towards China for political purposes.¹⁴ In countries like Zambia, Ghana,

¹³ H. Sibiri, "Politicians Are Taking Advantage of Anti-Chinese Sentiments for Electoral Purposes", *Harvard Kennedy School Review*, 26 March 2020.

¹⁴ H. Sibiri, "The Emerging Phenomenon of Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa: Evidence from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Ghana", *Insight on Africa*, vol. 13, no. 1,

and Zimbabwe, prominent politicians, primarily driven by a desire for political office, have identified and exploited the issues fuelling anti-Chinese resentments on electioneering platforms. As a result, the “China question”, which addresses the perceived overreach of Chinese engagement, has emerged as a prominent theme that governments and political hopefuls must confront and tackle. The following sections delve into this intricate issue, mainly focusing on the reasons behind the growing resentment over China’s presence and activities in various African countries. From the outset, it is essential to note that the underlying causes of increasing anti-Chinese resentment vary from country to country, with their significance differing in regions where such sentiment is prevalent. Ultimately, the contributing factors depend on the specific region or area and are influenced by the nature of China’s engagement.

The concern of unfair and imbalanced partnerships

Concern over the apparent opacity and lack of transparency in bilateral agreements, which are frequently viewed as unfair to African countries, is a key factor in rising anti-Chinese resentment in Africa. This scepticism has sparked debate and widespread opposition to major agreements between China and African countries. In Guinea, for example, the source of anti-Chinese resentment revolves around China’s stake in the country’s iron ore industry. The Simandou mining project, for instance, has attracted significant Chinese investment and involvement.¹⁵ However, there has been a growing sentiment of dissatisfaction, community resistance, and opposition towards such involvement due to the perception of an unfavourable deal with China’s largest state-owned steelmaker, the Baowu Steel Group Corp. Ltd., which acquired an undisclosed share to develop the Simandou iron mines.¹⁶ Critics argue that the deal,

2021, pp. 7-27.

¹⁵ “Simandou is China’s poisoned chalice”, East Asia Forum, 16 October 2021.

¹⁶ “Baowu Spearheads Fund to Develop World’s Largest Untapped Iron Reserve”,

which is shrouded in secrecy, heavily favours the Chinese state firm, resulting in minimal benefits and economic opportunities for the Guinean people.

Angola provides another classic example where resentment towards China has grown due to the perception of unfair deals between the Luanda and Beijing. Angola's significant oil reserves have captured the interest of China, who has invested more than US\$20 billion in this oil-rich country, consequently becoming its largest creditor and a major commercial partner.¹⁷ However, a recent multi-billion-dollar loan agreement between the two countries has sparked anger among Angolans who feel left behind as politicians and China benefit.¹⁸ The lack of transparency surrounding such deals is another major issue. In a rare display of disapproval, for instance, in 2015 Angolan opposition lawmakers boycotted parliamentary debate and votes, accusing the government with hiding information about new loan agreements made with the People's Republic.¹⁹

In Ghana, the announcement in 2018 of a deal to trade bauxite for Chinese infrastructure financing also sparked intense political debate and widespread public outrage.²⁰ The agreement was seen by many as yet another bad deal aimed at exploiting the country's natural resources. A similar concern in Kenya prompted President William Ruto to make a promise during the election campaign in 2022. He vowed to publish all government contracts between Kenya and China if he became president, a promise that resonated largely with the voters.²¹ In response to similar concerns, the President and the National

Caixin Global, 22 June 2020.

¹⁷ "Chinese investment in Angola exceeds \$20 billion", *CGTN*, 27 September 2019.

¹⁸ "Angolans resentful as China tightens its grip", *Reuters*, 9 July 2015.

¹⁹ "Angolan opposition boycotts vote over transparency, China loans", *Reuters*, 23 July 2015.

²⁰ "Government must clarify a whole lot in bauxite-barter deal with China", *IMANI, Ghana Web*, 11 September 2018.

²¹ "Kenya presidential hopeful Ruto promises to publish contracts with China", *Reuters*, 20 July 2022.

Assembly of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have called for and initiated a review and audit of unfair mining agreements with Chinese companies. These agreements were signed under the previous government and are perceived as more favourable to China.²²

Chinese immersion in the local economy, job market, and land acquisition

In a literal case of “majorities with a minority complex”, some African communities increasingly see themselves as disadvantaged or at risk due to the growing Chinese presence, fearing that China might take over their country. “Majorities with a minority complex” refers to a psychological or social phenomenon in which a group constitutes the majority of a country’s population but perceives itself as disadvantaged or harbours grievances and concerns usually associated with marginalized or minority groups. Several factors can contribute to this phenomenon, including historical experiences, cultural influences, and perceptions of discrimination. In the context of China’s presence in Africa, the predominant African population is increasingly feeling threatened by the presence of the minority Chinese. This perception is primarily based on the increasing number of Chinese workers and immigrants and concerns that Chinese entities dominate the local economy through various economic activities, land grabbing, and the displacement of local workers by bringing in labour force instead of hiring locally. These factors have triggered deep-seated concerns about Beijing. Although empirical evidence suggests that most workers at Chinese firms in Africa are locals, the widespread perception has stirred up significant anti-Chinese resentment.²³ In 2016,

²² “DR Congo to audit and review ‘unfair’ Chinese mining contracts”, *The East African*, 11 April 2023.

²³ B. Sautman and H. Yan, “Localising Chinese Enterprises in Africa: From Myths to Policies”, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)/Institute for Emerging Market Studies (IEMS), Thought Leadership Brief No. 5, 2015.

for instance, hundreds of local youths in Kenya demanded a share of jobs at a railway construction site, leading to the attack and injury of over a dozen Chinese nationals.²⁴

The influx of Chinese investment and traders is also viewed by some as economic competition and, therefore, a direct threat to local businesses and job opportunities, leading to worries about China “taking over the local economy”. Resentment revolves around competition in the retail sector involving Chinese merchants or products. The influx of cheaper and often poor-quality products into the local market makes it impossible for locally produced or foreign products to compete. A classic example can be found in the DRC, where the flooding of Chinese textiles has effectively collapsed the local textile industry, resulting in hundreds of lost jobs.²⁵ In Kenya, the perception that an influx of Chinese businesses was driving out local companies prompted a Kenyan lawmaker to propose restrictions on foreign involvement in public contracts. The proposed amendment to the country’s Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act aimed to prohibit all foreigners from bidding for contracts valued at up to one billion shillings (US\$9.83 million).²⁶ In the case of Lesotho, there have been instances where rioters targeted and vandalised Chinese-owned businesses, accompanied by anti-Chinese slogans. Traders in the country have attributed their retail misfortunes to the presence of Chinese retail activities. Additionally, an increasing number of people in Lesotho hold Chinese immigrants responsible for the country’s poverty level.²⁷

Many critics also argue that the numerous large-scale Chinese infrastructure and investment projects have failed to improve

²⁴ “14 Chinese rail workers nursing injuries after attack”, *Nation Africa*, 2 August 2016.

²⁵ L. Chutel, “How DR Congo lost control of the fabric of its culture and economy”, *Quartz Africa*, 13 December 2017.

²⁶ “Kenya lawmaker targets foreign firms, decries China ‘invasion’”, *Reuters*, 8 November 2018.

²⁷ “Anti-Chinese resentment flares”, *The New Humanitarian*, 24 January 2008.

the existing dire economic conditions, despite the promise of Chinese involvement to improve the condition of people and the economy. While these promises are frequently articulated by government officials arranging such deals rather than by the Chinese firms themselves, disenchanted populace often vent their frustrations at both the Chinese firms and the ruling elites. The latter are often accused of colluding with the Chinese for their personal gain rather than for the public good. One example is the Merowe Dam project in Sudan, funded and constructed by China. The project displaced tens of thousands of people and resulted in the impoverishment of local communities in the dam's catchment area. Residents have expressed resentment towards the Chinese companies involved, accusing them of unfair land acquisitions, inadequate compensation for displaced communities, and causing environmental damage.²⁸ The issue of land grabbing has aroused passions. In Madagascar, where citizens have occasionally openly expressed their resentment towards the growing presence of China, protests were held for several months against a 40-year lease of their farmland to a Chinese gold-mining company.²⁹

Chinese extractive activities and their environmental impact

Africa possesses vast reserves of extractive resources, with mineral resources accounting for 70% of its exports and approximately 28% of its collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³⁰ This has attracted the interest of China, which has made substantial investments in the continent's extractive industry and continues to do so. Despite repeated denials

²⁸ P. Bosshard, "New Chinese Dam Project to Fuel Ethnic Conflict in Sudan", *HuffPost*, 6 January 2011.

²⁹ "How a gold mining deal in Africa inflamed hostility toward Chinese", *South China Morning Post*, 19 December 2016.

³⁰ "African Natural Resources Center: Catalysing growth and development through effective natural resources management", Abidjan, African Development Bank, 2016.

from China that it focuses solely on extracting Africa's natural resources, most of its investments are concentrated in resource-rich African countries. For example, the top ten destinations for Chinese foreign direct investments as of 2020 were South Africa, the DRC, Zambia, Ethiopia, Angola, Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Algeria, and Ghana. A significant number of these countries are rich in natural resources.³¹ For instance, in the DRC, Chinese investors dominate the copper and cobalt-rich region, controlling nearly 70% of the country's mining portfolio.³² This heavy concentration of Chinese investment in the extractive sector has thus reinforced people's perception that Beijing is exploiting their natural resources.

Another notable case is Ghana, where anti-Chinese resentment has peaked over the past decade. This resentment largely stems from Chinese gold-mining activities and environmental destruction. Ghana is well known for its gold production, of which an essential aspect is the large contribution of small-scale mining, which employs millions of local artisans. The relevant laws in Ghana explicitly prohibit foreigners from engaging in small-scale mining. However, Ghana has become an appealing destination for Chinese miners recently, which have attracted intense opposition and resentment from the Ghanaian public. In particular, Chinese miners have faced accusations of displacing and outcompeting local alluvial gold miners, contributing to widespread corruption, and engaging in gold smuggling. This social conflict has led to violent clashes against them, and even the arrest and deportation of thousands of Chinese miners from Ghana.³³ Besides Ghana, there have also been instances of local residents leading uprisings against Chinese-operated mine sites

³¹ "Chinese Investment in Africa (2022): China-Africa Cooperation from a Supply Chain Perspective", Beijing, China-Africa Business Council, 2022.

³² "Chinese dominance of DRC mining sector increases economic dependence: Mines Chamber", S&P Global, 12 January 2020.

³³ H. Sibiri, "Present and Emerging Issues Detrimental to Ghana-China Relations", in L.G. Amoah (ed.), *Sixty Years of Ghana-China Relations: Friendship, Friction, and the Future*, Accra, University of Ghana Press, 2021, pp. 145-64.

in the Central African Republic, including the storming and killing of Chinese miners by gunmen in March 2023.³⁴

The negative environmental impact of Chinese extractive activities has also raised serious concerns and sparked protests and local resentment towards Beijing across Africa. In Zambia, Chinese mining companies have been closed down due to their detrimental impact on the environment and water bodies.³⁵ In Kenya, local communities and environmental activists joined forces to lead a protest against a proposed plan to construct a coal-powered plant supported by Chinese aid. The protest was prompted by concerns surrounding potential environmental risks associated with the project.³⁶ In the Gambia, local residents have recently staged protests against the environmental pollution caused by fishmeal plants owned by Chinese companies.³⁷ In the Kenyan and Gambian cases, local communities initiated the legal process because they did not trust their government's ability to address the issue, as many believe their governments fail to take action due to fear of hampering Chinese investments in their countries.

The eccentric investment and labour practices of Chinese firms

The eccentric business practices and working conditions in Chinese-owned activities are major sources of concern and resentment across Africa. In almost every African country with a significant Chinese presence, there have been reports of major outcries and protests over the working conditions and the disregard for human rights at Chinese-operated firms. In Kenya, for example, concerns have been raised about the unjust

³⁴ “Gunmen kill 9 Chinese at mine in Central African Republic”, *Association Press (AP) News*, 19 March 2023.

³⁵ “Zema Shuts Chingola Leaching Plant”, *AllAfrica*, 10 September 2015.

³⁶ Y. Shi, “Kenyan coal project shows why Chinese investors need to take environmental risks seriously”, *China Dialogue*, 9 March 2021.

³⁷ H.E. Ryan, “Protests in the Gambia highlight tensions over Chinese investment in Africa”, *The Conversation*, 27 June 2019.

and unfavourable labour policies implemented by Chinese companies, sparking public outrage and criticism surrounding the presence of Chinese entities in the country.³⁸ Similar negative perceptions have also increased hostility towards Chinese in South Africa.³⁹

These concerns are even more entrenched in Zambia. The country hosts hundreds of Chinese-invested businesses, focusing primarily on copper extraction. The People's Republic entered the Zambian copper industry in 1998, when its state-owned Non-Ferrous Metals Corporation (CNMC) acquired an 85% stake in the Chambishi copper mines. In 2018, CNMC made a fresh investment of US\$832 million, extending the mines' lifespan by more than 20 years.⁴⁰ While Zambians initially welcomed Chinese involvement in the mining sector, as it prevented the closure of the Chambishi mines and provided job opportunities, anger began to grow over poor labour practices and reports of human rights abuses in the Chinese-controlled fields.⁴¹ A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on the labour practices of Chinese state-owned companies in Zambia indicated that safety and labour conditions at Chinese mines were worse than at other foreign-owned mines.⁴² As the discontent has grown, the sentiment against the Chinese presence in Zambia has intensified, leading to more frequent protests and acts of violence targeting Chinese establishments and individuals. An incident at a coal mine in 2012, where a Chinese manager lost his life, is a stark example of how tension has escalated to dangerous levels.⁴³

³⁸ "Revealed: SGR Workers Treated Badly by Chinese Masters", *The Standard Media*, 8 July 2018.

³⁹ L. Kuo, "Chinese migrants have changed the face of South Africa. Now they're leaving", *Quartz Africa*, 30 April 2017.

⁴⁰ "Chinese firm launches US\$832m Zambia copper mine", *Reuters*, 22 August 2018.

⁴¹ "African resentment against China grows", *NBC News*, 9 August 2006.

⁴² "You'll Be Fired if You Refuse: Labour Abuses in Zambia's Chinese State-owned Copper Mines", Human Rights Watch (HRW), 3 November 2011.

⁴³ "Zambian miners kill Chinese manager during pay protest", *BBC News*, 5

Concerns of Chinese finances propping up corrupt regimes

One key area of concern centres on China's alleged support for perceived corrupt and authoritarian regimes in Africa. Opposition parties in various African countries see Chinese investments as a means of propping up corrupt and brutal regimes. As controversies pile up surrounding the magnitude of unconditional loans and infrastructure finance provided to governments with a reputation for corruption, China's extensive engagement with governments perceived as dubious, like those of Angola, the DRC, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, has further fuelled concerns.

In the case of the DRC, for instance, a recent report revealed how a Chinese-run company moved millions of dollars to the family and allies of former President Joseph Kabila.⁴⁴ Likewise, China's involvement in Angola's oil sector was facilitated by questionable deals with individuals closely associated with former President Eduardo Dos Santos, who governed the country for nearly forty years. Before he stepped down in 2017, it was widely believed that he presided over one of the most corrupt governments in the world, with power concentrated in the hands of a small group of family members who controlled the state's oil revenue and Chinese credit lines. In both the countries mentioned, there is a growing public resentment towards China's influence.

The issue of "debt entrapment" has become a critical part of the debate. In several other African countries, such as Uganda, Kenya, and Zambia (the latter recently defaulted on their debts), there is a sense of anxiety regarding the mounting debt to China and the fear of China expropriating assets.⁴⁵ In the case

August 2012.

⁴⁴ "China Cash Flowed Through Congo Bank to Former President's Cronies", *Bloomberg*, 28 November 2021.

⁴⁵ C. Mboya, "China won't seize assets from African countries, but won't forget the debts", *The Africa Report*, 24 December 2021.

of Uganda, China was forced to deny recent widespread media and social media allegations that it may seize the Ugandan international airport if the country defaults on its debt to China.⁴⁶ These issues have gained significant traction on social media platforms, leading to the dissemination of criticism and discussions and memes that amplify concerns.

TAB. 8.1 - ANTI-CHINESE RESENTMENT AND MANIFESTATIONS:
MAIN FACTORS, CASES AND MANIFESTATIONS

Factors	Main Countries	Type of manifestation
Concern of Unfair and Imbalanced Partnerships	Angola, DRC, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized public protests against Chinese firms. • Intense political debate, public outrage, resistance, and opposition towards Chinese businesses and agreements involving China. • Public criticism and anxiety over mounting debt to China. • Hostilities, violent clashes, and attacks against Chinese businesses and nationals. • Legal process to stop the operation of Chinese firms.
Chinese Immersion in the Local Economy, Job Market, and Land Acquisition	DRC, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Chinese slogans. • Organized public protests against Chinese firms. • Intense political debate, public outrage, resistance, and opposition towards Chinese businesses and agreements involving China. • Hostilities, violent clashes, and attacks against Chinese businesses and nationals. • Parliamentary boycott by opposition parties.
Chinese Extractive Activities and their Environmental Impact	DRC, Ghana, Central African Republic, Zambia, Kenya, Gambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized public protests against Chinese firms. • Intense political debate, public outrage, resistance, and opposition towards Chinese businesses and agreements involving China. • Hostilities, violent clashes, and attacks against Chinese businesses and nationals. • Legal process to stop the operation of Chinese firms.
Eccentric Investments and Labour Practices of Chinese Firms	Kenya, South Africa, Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized public protests against Chinese firms. • Intense political debate, public outrage, resistance, and opposition towards Chinese businesses and agreements involving China. • Public criticism and anxiety over mounting debt to China. • Hostilities, violent clashes, and attacks against Chinese businesses and nationals.
Concerns of Chinese Finances Propping up Corrupt Regimes	Angola, DRC, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized public protests against Chinese firms. • Intense political debate, public outrage, resistance, and opposition towards Chinese businesses and agreements involving China. • Public criticism and anxiety over mounting debt to China. • Hostilities, violent clashes, and attacks against Chinese businesses and nationals. • Legal process to stop the operation of Chinese firms.

Source: Author's compilation from various media and literature sources

⁴⁶ “China rejects allegations it may grab Ugandan airport if the country defaults on the loan”, *Reuters*, 29 November 2021.

Conclusion and Implications for European Cooperation with Africa

China's deepening engagement in Africa has had a major and ongoing impact on both China and African countries. However, it has also had some unintended consequences. As demonstrated, anti-Chinese resentment has emerged across Africa, primarily stemming from the economic and social conflicts caused by China's far-reaching presence and influence across the continent. Specifically, concerns stemming from the perception of China's unfair economic practices in investment and trade, illegal extraction activities and their associated environmental externalities, and threats to local employment have shaped a wave of anti-Chinese resentment. Consequently, as Chinese investments, companies, and workers become more visible across Africa, their actions attract substantial attention and controversy. This wave of resentment reflects the mounting global concerns about China's rising influence in the present time, along with the fear of potential shifts in the global status quo due to China's rising economic and political dominance.

The implication is that China's current global engagement is intricate, and its effect on China's business interests, global image, and foreign policy cannot be underestimated. The Chinese experience in Africa thus shows the need for a nuanced approach and strategic considerations when engaging with African countries. Regarding the implications for the European Union, Africans' growing frustration with China's engagement, particularly its extractive activities in Africa, presents an opening for Europe to foster cooperative efforts, prioritising principled and sustainable practices. By building partnerships with African countries and proactively addressing environmental and social concerns, Europe can demonstrate a commitment to responsible sourcing and equitable practices in extracting critical raw materials. This is essential to the EU's plan for securing a sustainable supply of "critical raw materials"

in light of the current global risks to supply chains.⁴⁷ Finally, while European engagement in Africa is generally welcomed, some criticise the perceived conditionality of European aid. Europe must continue promoting responsible and sustainable investments while balancing its cooperation with Africa and aligning it with the development priorities outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063. The challenges facing China underscore the need for European cooperation to navigate the complex dynamics at play.

⁴⁷ European Commission, "Critical Raw Materials: ensuring secure and sustainable supply chains for EU's green and digital future", 16 March 2023.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Giovanni Carbone, Lucia Ragazzi

Global politics has recently been dominated by major events that have shaken and reshaped international priorities, focusing the attention of world powers on the management of emergencies perceived as existential challenges. First the Covid-19 pandemic and then, shortly afterwards, the war in Ukraine exploded onto the international agenda and immediately came to dominate it, accelerating the move towards a scenario of multi-polarity and increased polarisation that primarily revolves around a division between a more or less united “West”, on one side, and Russia and China on the other.

As one of the poorest and most vulnerable regions in the world, sub-Saharan countries mostly found themselves on the receiving end of overarching geopolitical dynamics and the related debates on global challenges. This was despite the major impact of external shocks on the continent’s economies (when, for example, European countries rushed to the region in search of energy alternatives to break their dependence on Russian gas) and societies (particularly visible with the food inflation caused by the wheat crisis triggered by the Ukraine war).

Yet, African countries have shown a willingness to raise their voices to start changing the current state of affairs. Since developments in the region have long been heavily influenced by the West, African countries have seemingly tried to turn their new external partnerships with emerging nations into an opportunity for questioning established ties and downsizing the role of Europeans and Americans in African matters.

Frustration, distrust and, occasionally, even anger have been on the rise, fuelling growing manifestations of anti-Westernism across different parts of the continent through, for example, popular protests, social media campaigns and government discourse. Even democratic mechanisms and values came under pressure, increasingly questioned by some African publics and elites, in line with the interests of the world's major autocracies. For Western countries, a piercing alarm bell was rung in early 2022 when many African countries failed to lend their support to a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine – such voting behaviour surprised many as it highlighted an international stance that was more distant from the West than had previously been assumed. Meanwhile, military juntas were seizing power across central-western Sahelian states, kicking out French troops and ambassadors, and repositioning regimes closer to Russia. The West's repeated calls for African countries to more openly distance themselves from Moscow have mostly fallen on deaf ears. South Africa was a glaring example, as Pretoria defended its right to keep active relations both with the West and with Russia and China, while acknowledging the “extraordinary pressures” brought to bear on the government to take sides. Ethiopia, too, tried to strike a balance, strongly condemning American and European interference in its domestic affairs and successfully bidding to become part of BRICS (starting in January 2024), the group of countries that most strongly voices the rejection of Western global dominance that is increasingly shared across the Global South. At various latitudes in Africa, the questioning and reshaping of external partnerships appears to be underway.

Western countries are faced with the challenge of recovering the hearts and minds of African public opinion, rather than a supposed “lost ground”. While recent developments, particularly in the 2020s, have brought such phenomena into the spotlight, the complex nature of these issues calls for a thoughtful analysis of long-term trends, a critical reflection on the responsibilities and priorities of the West (as well as of

other major international players), and careful monitoring of the instances voiced by countries in a region that is striving for an innovative vision of its place in the world.

This Report shows how the anti-Westernism currently on the rise across parts of Africa is taking place in a complex scenario. Just as Africa is not a uniform bloc, neither is “the West” and nor are the grievances directed at it always the same and always consistent. For many in Africa, Europe and America remain admired models and valuable partners, while other external actors too, including Beijing, have been the target of some of the irritation and scepticism found across the continent. In some countries, public distrust of Western and non-Western partners may not be mutually exclusive. Moreover, grievances against the West may also be linked to growing mistrust of African political leaders, dissatisfaction with the Western-derived democratic mechanisms that are used to elect such leaders, and government responsibility for accepting international partnerships that all too often produce, or are perceived to produce, limited returns in terms of improved welfare for African populations. Yet, recognising that the unease, frustration and aversion that many Africans are expressing is also directed at other domestic and external targets should not distract Western countries from the urgent need to seek to fully understand such grievances and to address them, where appropriate, by correcting course.

Policy Recommendations

A combination of long-term dynamics, shifts in geopolitical power balances, and recent global crises have paved the way for a period in which the external relations of sub-Saharan Africa have become more fluid and unpredictable. The changing international scenario, in particular, means African countries have more room to manoeuvre and question established relations with the West. This conjuncture is a wake-up call for the European Union and its member states, both of which have engaged for quite some time in redefining their partnerships

with Africa. But it can also become an opportunity to promote a better understanding of the reasons behind the growing distrust of Africans and to respond. European efforts have so far been insufficient. The following are some possible starting points in the search for the way forward:

- *Correct the external perspectives and attitudes that Africans legitimately find unfair or offensive.* Many of the tropes and representations of Africa that arguably still dominate across Europe (and across the West in general) have a long history and are deeply entrenched. Despite some efforts to change this, a simplistic tendency to reduce Africa to a region in need of external aid and advice remains predominant. This is despite the fact that both Brussels and many EU member states are officially pursuing closer and higher-level cooperation with the continent,¹ based on broader strategic and economic ambitions. Maintaining and strengthening relations with African countries requires moving beyond oversimplifications and paternalistic language and practices.
- *Set the relationship in a perspective of recognition of priorities that are not always shared.* The range of economic and political partnerships of African countries has widened significantly, creating the conditions for greater agency for African governments to determine and pursue their own political and development priorities and agendas, and, correspondingly, reducing their inclination to align with external dictates. Africans will increasingly and more forcefully defend their positions and interests in international fora and institutions as well as at summits with individual foreign partners. Established ties and practices are being questioned more often and more vigorously. Impatience with the West is often

¹ See, for example, *A Joint Vision for 2030*, 6th European Union - African Union Summit, 18 February 2022, and G. Carbone, *Europe: Team Play in Africa? The Africa Policies of EU Member States*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Berlin, 2020.

expressed, for example, over the conditionality of aid, trade agreements, energy transition policies, and the promotion of democracy and human rights. In order to maintain constructive relations with African counterparts, European countries need to become more fully aware of the existence of growing resentment, and they must adapt. They should build an approach that explicitly recognises respect and dignity for African priorities as an integral part of a new European *modus operandi*. This should not be limited to rhetorical changes – which are themselves important – but anchored in concrete proposals that take into account developmental agendas defined by Africans and African institutions, such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

- *Prepare for compromises by making choices.* Western countries have less freedom to define the terms of their relations with sub-Saharan states. Increasingly, obtaining results on certain dossiers will likely mean having to concede space on other fronts. This, in turn, will mean greater effort is needed in making choices to define what are European core priorities, distinguishing them from areas more open to negotiation and compromise with African counterparts.
- *Define what makes the EU-Africa partnership distinctive.* As Africa becomes more assertive on certain issues, the EU needs to define the nature of its relations with African countries in the long run. Against a backdrop of competition among external actors to establish or consolidate partnerships with the continent, the EU must reinforce the value of its cooperation model by striking a balance between Africa’s development needs and a focus on fair and responsible practices for environmental and social sustainability. This is particularly important in the energy and critical minerals sectors. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, European countries have invested heavily in expanding

cooperation with African energy exporters. The critical minerals sector is also receiving increasing attention. While all of this opens up new opportunities for Africa, it has also led to suspicion of renewed practices of resource extraction to the detriment of the continent – especially the development of its energy and manufacturing industries – and to accusations of “double standards” in the environmental protection criteria applied in Europe and those applied in Africa. More broadly, the balance in the distribution of costs and benefits between Europe and Africa, in the field of energy and mineral extraction, must change. Renewed cooperation based on these pillars would help Europe to differentiate itself from other partners that pay less attention to sustainability and values (including equity) in their Africa policies.

- *Live up to expectations.* The EU remains a key partner for Africa because of geographic proximity, trade and investment ties, and cooperation on governance, security, and development. To fulfil this role, it deploys large and ambitious long-term initiatives which have Africa at the centre: most notably, about half of the budget of the recently launched Global Gateway is, in principle, for the continent. At the Global Gateway Forum in October 2023, additional development projects in various fields were announced by the EU, hinting at the potential pervasiveness of the plan. After raising expectations about both the funding to be provided and the results that could be achieved, however, it will be crucial to deliver on the commitments made. The failure of major initiatives either to materialise or to achieve what was promised risks fuelling a vicious circle in which unfulfilled commitments generate more frustration, distrust and alienation, and eventually further damage the EU’s image as a reliable partner, rather than helping to mend and strengthen it as intended.

- *Respond to humanitarian calls.* Old and new humanitarian crises are ravaging parts of sub-Saharan Africa as a result of climate change (such as the succession of severe droughts in the Horn of Africa) or conflict-related emergencies (such as the spread of violence in Sudan since early 2023). In most cases, external interventions to cope with these emergencies are funded significantly below the estimated needs, in contrast to other crisis scenarios that receive far more attention and resources from the international community. For example, the West's immediate support for the refugees generated by the Ukrainian war was laudable, but it created grounds for accusations of Europe's double standards in the handling of serious crises and people on the move. If Europe has a genuine interest in and a concern for Africa, it must step up its commitment and, through European and multilateral mechanisms, provide concrete and meaningful support to African countries in their responses to humanitarian emergencies.
- *Make the management of migration acceptable to African partners.* The management of migration processes remains a controversial issue – and a particularly sensitive topic for African populations – that has contributed to straining Euro-African relations. The securitisation of migration is not the same as ensuring the safety and wellbeing of migrants. Efforts should be maximised to recognise the African view of migration as a legitimate process with high developmental potential. As much as it is a difficult task to change the dominant mood on migration in the context of European politics, compared to more value-laden issues, migration remains a subject where there is room for transaction in the search for more mutually acceptable compromises. European policies should be more responsive to African demands, including opening new channels for regular migration – and for circular migration –, managing returns in ways

that prioritise the wellbeing of migrants and investing in human capital formation in the countries of origin to create jobs.

- *Promote a dialogue conducive to a reform of the United Nations system.* The unequal access to global decision-making provided by the current multilateral order is a crucial element of the grievances that have been gaining ground across the Global South, including in Africa. The UN system – in particular the structure and functioning of the UN Security Council – is perceived both as a reflection of a bygone world and as the entrenchment of power asymmetries to the detriment of emerging and developing countries. A multilateral system that is structurally unjust and perceived to be so can hardly be effective, as the weakening of UN action and legitimacy in parts of the world demonstrates. The EU and its member states must engage in a global debate on the proposals for UN reform put forward by the countries of Africa and the Global South more generally.

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