



**America Votes 2024:  
The Transatlantic Impact**

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**US Interests and African Agendas: Africa  
Policy After the 2024 Elections**

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# US Interests and African Agendas: Africa Policy After the 2024 Elections

By Amandine Gnanguênon | September 27, 2024

The 2024 elections are unlikely to change the fundamentals of US Africa policy. Washington will remain focused on balancing economic interests and security concerns, as both Democrats and Republicans acknowledge Africa's strategic importance in the shifting geopolitical landscape. However, the parties' differing approaches may influence how US policy is perceived by African and European partners.

## Three Priorities of US Africa Policy Amid Global Strategic Competition

The first US priority is strengthening economic relations with Africa. This will require continuing the effort to bolster US-African business ties by expanding initiatives such as the [African Growth and Opportunity Act](#) (AGOA) that boost trade and investment. The Trump administration initiated [Prosper Africa](#), and President Biden rebooted it with an additional \$80 million for investments in infrastructure, clean energy, and healthcare. The program highlights the economic benefits of transparent markets and business practices, contrasting them with the state-backed approaches of China and Russia. While initially focused on countering these international competitors, the initiative also opened doors to mutually beneficial partnerships in Africa. The [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) (AfCFTA), officially launched in 2019 to foster economic integration throughout the continent, is another promising initiative to invest in African infrastructure and to encourage US companies to enter into public-private partnerships.

The second priority relates to Africa's importance as a key geopolitical player. While Democrats and Republicans share a bipartisan commitment to advancing US geopolitical interests on the continent, their views on competition with China and Russia may differ. Biden's administration continued Trump's approach to China but [did not communicate a clear and comprehensive strategy](#). While Trump openly framed US engagement in Africa as a rivalry with China, Biden has [avoided such direct competition](#). The next election's implications for the US approach to Russia will also be of enormous significance for US Africa policy, as the Russia-Ukraine war has already [spilled over into West Africa](#).

The third priority concerns protecting US interests in increasingly insecure regions such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, which requires balancing support for international norms and democracy with security interests. Instability in the [Sahel](#), combining worsening [insurgent violence](#) and [frequent coups](#), exposes a lack of strategic clarity in US Africa policy. Since 2021, the Biden administration has tried to shift US engagement with Africa from Trump's transactional approach to one emphasizing democratic values. However, these tangible shifts in US diplomatic priorities have been limited by the presence of [major and middle powers](#) that have a different vision of the [rules-based order](#), and by African leaders' increased selectivity when choosing long-term partners.

## Continuity and Change in the US Africa Trajectories

Looking back at the Trump and Biden administrations' foreign policies towards Africa provides valuable insights into potential future scenarios.

The Kamala Harris campaign has not released an Africa policy. But a Harris administration would likely continue the Biden administration's [Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa](#), which focuses on [multilateralism, addressing climate change, and fostering partnerships with African countries](#). Biden

advocated for the African Union to join the G20—it became a member in 2023—and for greater African representation on the UN Security Council. Climate-friendly [policies](#) would likely remain a priority, building on the Inflation Reduction Act and promoting energy transitions. Additionally, if Harris's [visits to Africa](#) in 2023 are any indication, [her policy](#) would probably maintain a focus on human rights, women's empowerment, and LGBTQ+ rights. This approach would align with broader US Africa policy goals of enhancing democracy, developing trade, combating extremism, and fostering peaceful political transitions.

Under the Trump administration, [US policy towards Africa](#) prioritized economic growth and private sector investment over traditional aid mechanisms, shifting towards trade-driven priorities. A second Trump term is likely to focus on transactional gains for the United States and to prioritize economic and strategic benefits over long-term partnerships based on shared values. This approach may involve promoting US businesses in critical sectors to counter China's influence. Trump's administration would likely continue to emphasize fossil fuel development, opposing climate-focused initiatives. In a second term the former president might challenge initiatives such as climate reparations, for example, seeing them as contrary to US interests. Additionally, a Trump administration could alter relations with international institutions, as for example the former president's 2018 withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council.

For many countries in Africa, the difference between Democratic and Republican administrations may seem [negligible in practice](#). To earn trust, the newly elected US president, whoever they may be, should implement a new way of collaborating with African leaders, civil society, businesses, and the diaspora and must take into consideration their immediate and long-term development aspirations. US Africa strategy of the next administration should extend [beyond traditional foci](#) such as governance, democracy, and security, and incorporate African agendas at the international level related to climate adaptation and post-pandemic economic recovery. For the United States to compete with other global powers in Africa, considering [African preferences](#) and policy priorities will be key.

### The EU Navigates US Politics in Africa

Both the United States and the EU are competing with China and Russia for access to resources in Africa. A Trump administration would likely emphasize immediate US interests, and its prioritization of strategic competition over long-term collaboration with Africa could strain relations with the EU, lead to a second withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, and exacerbate climate and environmental issues in Africa. Additionally, Trump's praise for strongmen such as Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán might also undermine EU support for democracy in the region.

Harris' approach is likely to prioritize diplomatic efforts to address shared challenges with African actors, and could foster closer EU collaboration with the continent on climate issues and on specific topics such as critical raw materials. The major risk for the US and the EU would be getting bogged down in geopolitical dynamics related to Africa. The EU and United States' geopolitical interests, such as countering competitors in Africa, should not be the sole factor in shaping their Africa policy, as this could give the impression that the interests of African countries are secondary.

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