



REPORT

Democracy at risk & Africa in the world: A people's perspective

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Context:

On June 3rd 2025, a public event was held by ECDPM, featuring Afrobarometer, a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network. Afrobarometer is known for delivering reliable data on African citizens' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. The event was part of Afrobarometer's Round 10 data collection cycle, which was launched in January 2024 and is set to run through mid-2025.

Moderator: Kathleen Van Hove, ECDPM

Speakers:

Boniface Dulani – Director of surveys, Afrobarometer

Maame Akua Amoah Twun - Communications Manager, Afrobarometer

Amandine Sabourin - Policy Analyst, ECDPM

Salahudeen Saeed - Finance Manager, Afrobarometer

Democracy and Risks - A People's Perspective

The first panel explored African citizens' views on democracy, their satisfaction with governance, and how they perceive political risks. According to the data, support for democracy remains solid. A large majority of citizens, across 39 countries, express strong opposition to authoritarian forms of governance. However, fewer than half of respondents believe their country is truly democratic, and only 37% are satisfied with how democracy is functioning. Despite widespread democratic aspirations, dissatisfaction is rising, largely driven by perceptions of weak political accountability, underwhelming service delivery, and broader socio-economic challenges. Interestingly, more than half of respondents indicate that they would be open to military intervention in cases where elected leaders abuse their power. This suggests a growing tension between democratic ideals and frustrations with how democracy is implemented on the ground.

Africa in the World - Perceptions of International Partners

The second panel focused on how African citizens perceive external actors influencing their countries. These include China, the European Union, the United States, the African Union, regional organisations, and former colonial powers. Survey results from 29 countries in 2024–2025 reveal that China is seen most positively, with 60% of respondents reporting a favorable impression. Regional organisations, the African Union, and the United States follow. The European Union, with an average positive perception of 49%, ranks lower, although perceptions vary widely: for example, Liberia, Cabo Verde, and Morocco view the EU most favorably, while Tunisia and Mali show the least favorable opinions.

The EU's influence is seen as complex. While initiatives like the Global Gateway aim to deepen partnerships and offer alternatives to Chinese engagement, Africans often see China's cooperation as faster, more transparent, and more practical. The session also noted how African citizens are aware of competition among global powers for influence on the continent, with delivery and inclusion being key criteria in how citizens assess partnerships.



About migration, respondents, particularly in countries like Gambia, are considering emigration, mostly for economic reasons. The primary motivation is the search for better jobs and work conditions, followed by economic hardship and poverty. Political freedoms and rights are rarely cited as the main reason for emigration, emphasising the economic basis of such decisions.

The Judicial Independence Fund

The last theme to be addressed was the issue of judicial independence across Africa and the introduction of a new fund aimed at strengthening legal institutions in 10 selected countries. A strong and independent judiciary is essential for protecting democracy and upholding the rule of law, especially in contexts vulnerable to authoritarian influence.

However, judicial systems across the continent face significant challenges. These include political interference, lack of financial and institutional autonomy, non-compliance with court rulings, and poor working conditions. Regional protection mechanisms are often weak or missing, compounding the threats to judicial independence. To respond to these challenges, the Judicial Independence Fund will support several interventions: strategic policy research and engagement, judicial training and mentoring programs, and advocacy for legal reforms and stronger frameworks to defend judicial autonomy.

Conclusion

The event confirmed that while support for democratic governance remains high in Africa, satisfaction is falling due to poor performance by institutions and governments. The role of international partners, particularly the EU, remains important but increasingly contested. African citizens are pragmatic in their evaluations, valuing delivery, inclusion, and economic opportunities. Strengthening democratic institutions, particularly the judiciary, remains key for long-term governance and rule of law. Partnerships must focus on reforms that matter to citizens: transparency, employment, service delivery, and justice.