



Africa in the World

Introduction

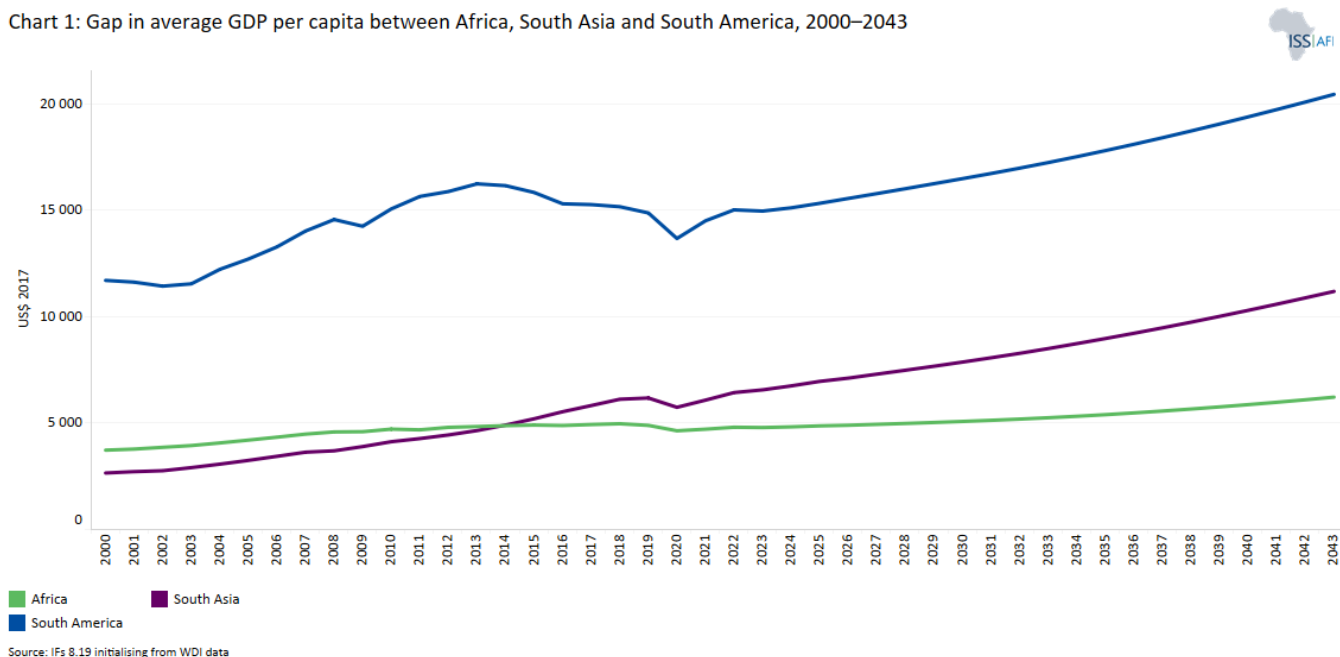
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Introduction

With some exceptions since independence, Africa has not been able to narrow the gulf between itself and averages for the rest of the world on key indicators of well-being such as infant mortality and life expectancy. Measures of income have done even worse. Using a crude measure such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity, the gap between Africa and the average for the rest of the world has steadily increased, reflected in [Chart 1 in the Current Path](#). Some countries, such as [Seychelles](#), [Mauritius](#) and [Botswana](#) have done well, with [Ethiopia](#) and [Rwanda](#) experiencing some of the fastest economic expansions in the world with an average of more than 7.5% per year in recent decades. Nevertheless, most African countries have stagnated or fallen further behind in key development indicators, even when compared to other developing regions such as South Asia and South America, reflected in [Chart 1 below](#) which includes data from 2000 and a forecast to 2043.

Chart 1: Gap in average GDP per capita between Africa, South Asia and South America, 2000–2043



So what would the future look like?

As background to this study, we used various [datasets and indices](#), including the [Global Power Index \(GPI\)](#), the [Diplomacy, Military and Economy \(DiME\)](#) index and the [Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity \(FBIC\)](#) index to explore the likely evolution of power and influence globally. The first two indices measure power potential, a slippery and challenging exercise. The third, FBIC, is a measure of the bilateral influence of one country over another, which is particularly complex to quantify.

Africa is deeply affected by what happens globally, as we demonstrate below.

Our forecasts indicate that, on its [current development trajectory](#), the growing divergence between Africa and the rest of the world, including other developing regions using GDP per capita, is likely to increase. Things are improving in Africa but more slowly than elsewhere, with large country-to-country variations.

Five recent successive shocks have accelerated that trend: the impact of the 2008/09 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the deteriorating relations between China and the West and the resurgence of hostilities in the Middle East with events in Gaza. The world is entering uncharted territory with the effects of climate change, which is a structural driver of scarcity, and the disruptive impact of artificial intelligence.

Given its dependence on imported food, Africa is especially at risk of food insecurity. The threat of a simultaneous harvest failure in the six global breadbaskets that produce 60% of the world's corn, rice, soy and wheat crops is rapidly increasing, among other risks.

Thus, the UN Secretary-General's report, [Our Common Agenda](#), notes that 'we are at an inflexion point in history' facing a stark choice between 'breakdown' and 'breakthrough'.

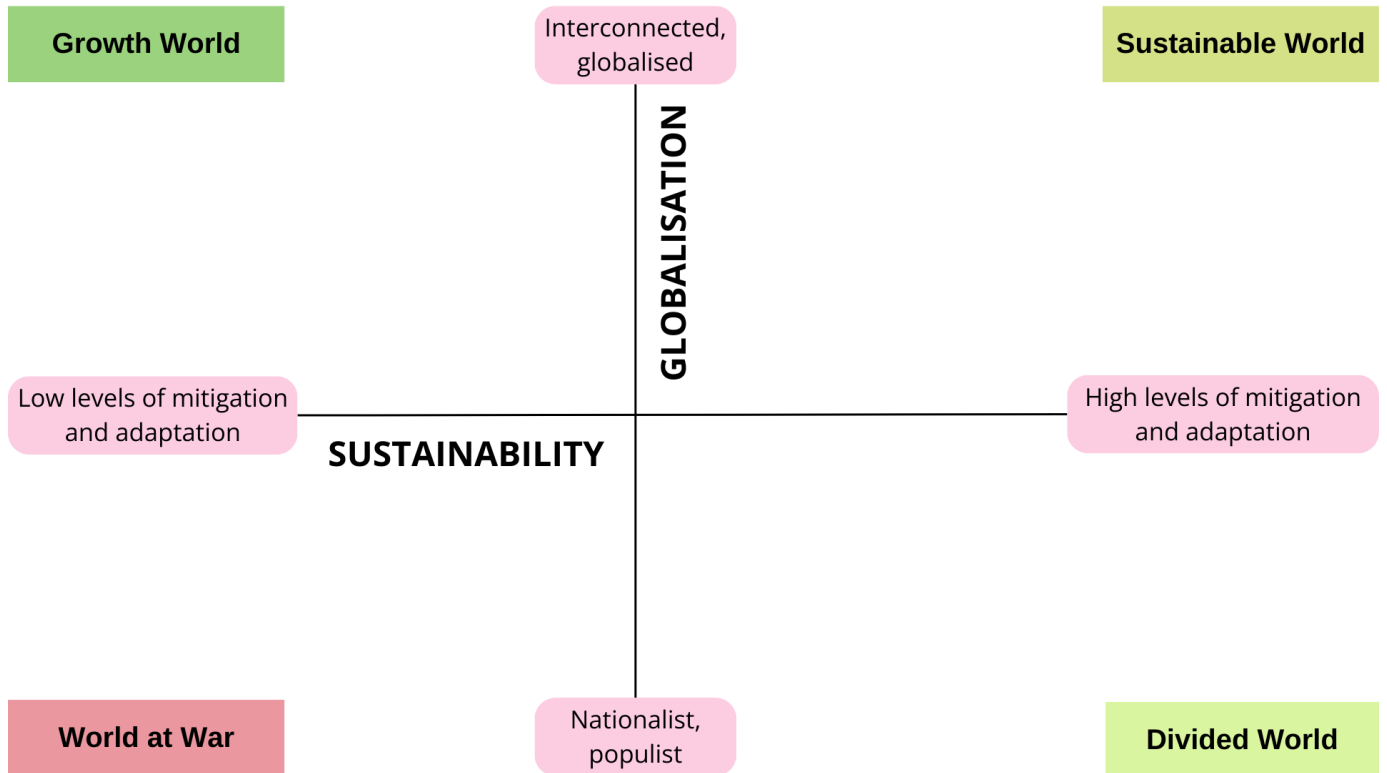
To what extent will the growing divergence between averages for Africa and the rest of the world impact global sustainability and stability, including increased migration to Europe and within the continent? Is it possible to envisage a stable world so starkly divided between Europe and Africa in wealth and quality of life? The average GDP per capita in Africa is only 12% of that in the European Union (EU), with a 15-year gap in average life expectancy. We expect both gaps to only close marginally over the next two decades.

Fixing these alarming discrepancies will require better governance in Africa, characterised by more robust, more capacitated states with fit-for-purpose institutions, more security, and improvements across various economic and human development sectors, much of which is within Africa's domestic policy space. We examine many of these considerations in this website's geographic and thematic analyses.

Rapid development in Africa will also require a facilitating global environment — the subject of this theme. Below, we model Africa's development potential in four future global scenarios. Therefore, we ask **what is the impact of global geopolitical dynamics on Africa's development**.

The first scenario, a **Sustainable World** scenario, is a world that prioritises sustainability, equity and the pursuit of the objectives set out in the Sustainable Development Goals. In a second **Growth World** scenario, countries focus on the rapid improvements in income and returns on investment, eschewing environmental concerns, but do so still within a global, rules-based context. While the two scenarios diverge and will impact Africa's development differently, they represent a more favourable and facilitating international order. The third indicative scenario is of a **Divided World** with a future characterised by a sense of global fracturing, populism, nationalism and a retreat from globalisation — effectively, the fraying of the rules-based system as we know it, with its complex lattice of norms and institutions. The final scenario is a **World at War**, where competition between the West and its competitors, led by China, dominates all aspects of the global economy, politics and relations with violent outcomes. In addition to fragmentation in Libya, Sudan and the Sahel, more African states fracture as competing armed groups vie for power. Shut out of the prospects for more rapid development, Africans suffer.

Chart 2: Scenario framework



An **African scenario** mainly based on trade integration effects complements each global scenario. The respective impacts of these four scenarios range from Africa's economic potential and poverty reduction being maximised (in the Sustainable World scenario) to Africa's prosperity being obstructed (in the World at War scenario).

Africa's economic, GDP per capita, and poverty levels are starkly different across these scenarios, highlighting the continent's diverse potential outcomes based on global trends and integration efforts.

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About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director of the ISS. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the ISS. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.