

# **Economic Insecurity is a Sustainability Issue**

OpEd by Ose E. Imoukhuede

At the 2026 Munich Security Conference, speakers warned of democratic erosion and the rising appeal of authoritarian leadership across parts of the world.

Many explanations focused on geopolitical rivalry, populist politics or the ambitions of strongmen. But democratic erosion rarely begins with tanks in the streets. It begins when large segments of the population feel economically displaced by the systems designed to govern them.

Across advanced economies, a paradox is unfolding. In the United States for instance, financial markets have reached record levels while many households face mounting pressure from the rising costs of housing, healthcare and everyday necessities. At the same time, artificial intelligence and automation are rapidly reshaping labor markets.

Capital markets thrive, yet the wages of the middle class that power those markets lag behind. For the most vulnerable, economic security becomes increasingly fragile.

This widening divergence is not merely an economic trend. It is a structural imbalance with profound implications for democratic governance and long-term sustainability.

When inequality widens, social mobility narrows and public trust declines. Citizens under prolonged financial strain grow impatient with the procedural complexities of democratic systems and become more receptive to leaders who promise swift and decisive solutions.

In such moments, the distinction between decisive leadership and concentrated authority begins to blur and economic pressure becomes combustible fuel for institutional instability.



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Sustainability discussions often center on environmental protection and climate change. These are essential concerns. Yet no society can remain environmentally sustainable while socially fractured. Economic inequality erodes the civic foundation upon which democratic governance depends.

Technological acceleration is intensifying this dynamic. Capital is being redirected at unprecedented speed toward artificial intelligence and advanced technologies that promise productivity gains but also risk displacing large segments of the workforce. The transformation of labor markets is unfolding faster than the social systems designed to absorb its consequences.

Meanwhile governments convene international forums on sustainability, often treating environmental policy as if it exists independently of these broader economic tensions. It does not.

If democracy is to endure, economic architecture must evolve. Policies that expand access to ownership, reconnect productivity to wages, and modernize education for emerging industries are no longer ideological preferences. They are structural necessities.

Trust itself is a public resource. Once eroded, it is extraordinarily difficult to restore.

Economic inequality is therefore not merely a social concern. It is a national security issue and a sustainability challenge.

When citizens lose faith in economic fairness, democratic stability weakens and the foundations of sustainable societies begin to fracture.

The path forward is neither stagnation nor authoritarian consolidation. It is disciplined economic alignment: pairing growth with inclusion, innovation with accountability, and technological progress with social balance.



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Achieving this alignment requires a deeper recognition of the purpose of the societies we build.

Human beings naturally pursue expansion, mastery and improvement.

Technological acceleration reflects that impulse, but societies endure only when innovation remains guided by responsibility.

The internal order of those who design economic systems and govern institutions therefore becomes decisive.

Internal order means aligning human intention with responsibility. It means ensuring that innovation is guided by conscience, that economic design reflects restraint, and that policy remains attentive to the lived condition of the citizens it serves.

When acceleration; technological, financial or geopolitical outruns this interior grounding, imbalance follows, inequality widens, economic pressure intensifies and political volatility emerges.

The sustainability of democratic societies ultimately depends not only on policies or technologies, but on the condition of those who design and lead them. In that sense, the future of democracy and sustainability are inseparable.

Economic insecurity is not a peripheral issue. It is the fault line upon which the stability of modern societies increasingly rests.

