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What Will the Series of Pivotal Elections in 2024 Mean for Democracy?

This year, more than half the world's adults will have the chance to vote in major elections.

CIGI Article

Chris Tenove & Heidi Tworek

February 1, 2024

This will be an unprecedented year for democracy. More than half the world's adults will have the chance to vote in major elections. These include citizens of most of the largest democracies, including India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and the United States, not to mention those governed by the European Parliament. The United Kingdom and even Canada might also have elections this year.

While it's exciting that so many people will exercise their voting rights, there are widespread fears that elections in 2024 will contribute to democracy's global decline. Autocrats such as Russia's Vladimir Putin will surely "win" elections, and so could weak-on-democracy politicians such as Donald Trump. Why is there so much pessimism about democracy's health? While there are many factors, the polluted online information environment is often mentioned. As Nobel Prize-winner Maria Ressa puts it, provocatively, a "[tech-enabled Armageddon](#)" is undermining democracy everywhere.

Election campaigns are increasingly contested online, whether on platforms such as Facebook, mass messaging services such as Telegram or search engines such as Google, not to mention the backend ad markets and data repositories that shape so much campaign messaging. And that's even before we factor in the potentially disruptive role of generative artificial intelligence (AI). The [World Economic Forum](#) recently identified AI-enhanced misinformation and disinformation as the top source of catastrophic risk globally in the next two years.

The online component of this year's elections deserves scrutiny. Yet there is a danger that this attention will fall into the traps of hot takes, overblown assertions about the power of tech to affect election outcomes, and US-centrism.

To counter these shortcomings, we are collaborating with CIGI to produce a series of essays on key countries facing elections this year. The series will enable us to underscore three broader points about the global collision of technology and politics in 2024.

First, we need clearer-eyed evaluations of the use and misuse of digital technologies in election campaigns. It is too simplistic to blame platforms for an outcome that someone does not like. But it is also too simplistic to dismiss the role of platforms and online campaigning altogether. While online messages — even deepfake videos — are unlikely to single-handedly change voters' preferences, they can be used to manipulate voters.

Tech regulation can be used to counteract foreign interference, online violence and intentional falsehoods, and it can also be used to silence voices and amplify harm.

As an example, in the months prior to Bangladesh's recent election, an investigation found government-aligned [commentaries written by fake experts](#) and then widely referenced in news media, and another identified [a faked video message](#) of an opposition candidate declaring she had dropped out of the race.

Furthermore, it is important to analyze the political conflict over the information environment during campaigns. Preceding Taiwan's recent election, for instance, many Western publications emphasized the likelihood of China-backed influence operations, echoing the narrative of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). However, the other two major parties instead accused the DPP of being the primary originator of "fake news" during the campaign. Ultimately, the election was dominated by entrenched party allegiances and disagreements over fundamental domestic issues.

As Panthea Pourmalek, Yves Tiberghien and Heidi Tworek [suggested](#) in a CIGI piece comparing four elections in 2022, "social media and platforms can play a profound role in electoral disruption, but the ways this disruption plays out can vary significantly, and are both time- and context-specific." For that reason, our series will bring together analysts with deep knowledge of the countries in question.

Second, 2024 will reveal how new regulatory approaches shape the online environment during elections. Europe's Digital Services Act (DSA) is the world's most prominent effort to address online harms by large platforms and search engines. European regulators launched the first [DSA-based investigation into platform wrongdoing](#) in December, probing whether X (formerly Twitter) failed to adequately address illegal content and information manipulation. The European Parliament elections in June will present a major stress test for the DSA, perhaps revealing whether the European approach is one that other democracies should adopt.

Tech regulation can be used to counteract foreign interference, online violence and intentional falsehoods, and it can also be used to silence voices and amplify harm. Indeed, politicians in power may adopt "fake news" laws and other regulations to stifle criticism and undermine opponents, as [Jonathan Corpus Ong previously argued](#) in a CIGI commentary.

Analyzing the conflict over platform policies in elections can reveal how political power shapes our online environments. Cambodia provided a compelling illustration. In January 2023, the country's former prime minister Hun Sen threatened political opponents with violence in a livestream on Facebook. Although the video violated the company's policy, it remained online for five months before the independent [Oversight Board for Meta recommended Hun Sen's account be suspended](#). In retaliation, Hun Sen stopped using Facebook, threatened to ban the platform from Cambodia and led his party to an election win (Hun Sen's son is now prime minister). Ultimately, Meta [decided not to suspend his account](#). The episode illustrates the tension between platforms' aims to moderate content and to make money, particularly when facing an entrenched political leader.

Third, the US election is important but should not eclipse attention on the rest of the world. The [US-centrism of platform policies](#) has been well established. While Americans may be concerned about the state of content moderation, almost every other country receives far fewer resources and attention from online platforms. In 2020, for example, the United States accounted for [87 percent of the time](#) spent by Facebook contractors and employees on moderating false or misleading content.

Civil society groups have organized to address platform policies' neglect of many countries and communities. The [Global Coalition for Tech Justice](#) was created with the aim to “protect people and elections, not Big Tech” during this “year of democracy.” Convened by [Digital Action](#) (on whose board Heidi Tworek sits), the campaign is one of many efforts to ensure that decisions by tech companies — usually headquartered in the United States — are responsive to diverse countries and communities globally.

One year from now, people could inhabit very different political worlds than the ones that currently exist. This series will examine the role that platforms and digital tech have and will play, and the health of our online environment. Our hope is that these analyses will help us understand a most consequential year for democracy.

2024 Elections in the West

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2024 Elections in the West: Are They Helping the Extreme Right?

Kalicharan Veera Singam

2024 has been dubbed the “ultimate”¹ election year, with more than 60 countries and territories worldwide undertaking major elections. Some elections in many parts of the West come as the world is transiting through a post-COVID-19 phase amidst further intensifying Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts and a general economic slowdown. Across the West, the political centre has somewhat eroded, and a sizeable segment of the political right has shifted further to the right. Worryingly, extreme right-wing terrorist incidents in the United States (US) have increased in recent years,² and the threat has “remained significant” and stable in Western Europe.³ This article assesses how the extreme right-wing terrorist threat could evolve and take advantage of the inroads the right-wing political movement has made in the just concluded 2024 European Union (EU) parliamentary election and the upcoming US presidential election.

The Far-Right’s Complex Relationship with Mainstream Politics

Right-wing politics is a major and legitimate component of the political landscape in Western democracies, where political affiliations and positions are often broadly grouped as ‘left’ and ‘right’. Across the political spectrum, people with diverse value systems, beliefs and positions hold varying stances on a range of issues. Generally, right-leaning people and groups hold conservative and traditional views on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and fiscal policies. The far-right, in itself a broad category, is a subset of right-wing political ideologies that espouse “extreme nationalism, nativist ideologies, and authoritarian tendencies”.⁴ The far-right advocates for lesser (or in some cases no) immigration from non-Western countries and take anti-Islamic, anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ+ positions. Some Western far-right groups are also driven by and promote Christian nationalism to replace secular, liberal democracies.⁵

Given the diverse nature of the West’s right-wing political movements, there is often non-standardisation of the use of terms related to the far-right. This article adopts the definition by the political scientist and eminent scholar of the Western far-right, Cas Mudde. According to Mudde, the far-right comprises the radical and extreme right.⁶ While the radical right rejects liberal democracy and promotes an illiberal order, the extreme right rejects democracy altogether,⁷ although sometimes it is challenging to clearly demarcate the two. Some far-right parties have put forward very intolerant political views targeted at particular minority communities, especially Muslims and the LGBTQ+ community. Geertz Wilders, whose party won a shocking victory in the Dutch parliamentary elections in December 2023, for instance, had proposed banning mosques and the Quran in the Netherlands.⁸ The proposal was later retracted during considerations to form a political coalition with moderate parties.⁹ While Geertz later fell out of the running to become the Dutch prime minister, the agenda seemed rather extreme.

For its part, the extreme right can, on occasion, take things further by explicitly calling for violence against communities that it deems undesirable. Unlike the far-right political parties in the West, the extreme right takes an “anti-democratic position towards democracy”¹⁰ and seeks to upend the democratic and liberal order in the West through violence.

Extreme Right-Wing and the 2024 US Presidential Election

In the United States (US), former President Donald Trump’s legal troubles have not dampened his popularity, including among a few extreme right groups. The former president is set to be the Republican Party’s presidential nominee for the November 2024 election in a rematch with the incumbent Joseph Biden. The extreme right in the US gathered momentum during Trump’s first

term in office from 2016 to 2020.¹¹ This culminated in violent rioting by some Trump supporters and members of extreme right groups such as the Proud Boys, Three Percenters and No White Guilt, at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.¹² In the lead-up to the polls, Trump's rhetoric has been categorised in some quarters as more overtly authoritarian and polarising, raising concerns that if re-elected, his presidency could embolden the extreme right further.¹³

The Biden-Trump 2024 election rematch is galvanising the extreme right again, but there are some differences this time around. Curiously, there has been a drop in the public appearances and activities of the Proud Boys, which is unusual and uncharacteristic for a group that promotes and engages in political violence, and which played an important role in the US Capitol insurrection in 2021.¹⁴ The greater public scrutiny of the group and the conviction and jailing of its key leaders, such as Enrique Tarrio, who has been sentenced to decades in jail,¹⁵ could have motivated some to leave the group. Some who left the Proud Boys are believed to have joined other even more extremist groups that have since emerged, such as Active Chaos, Patriot Front and Blood Tribe.¹⁶

There is also potential for violence from the extreme right if Trump does not win the 2024 election.¹⁷ Trump's many legal civil and criminal civil cases and a possible conviction might erode the support of some relatively moderate Republicans.¹⁸ But these legal troubles, which the former president alleges are politically motivated and witch hunts, might end up further motivating his hardcore base. Extreme right groups and some of their followers who are serving long jail sentences for their involvement in the 2021 Capitol Hill riots might be banking on Trump's victory and a subsequent presidential pardon.¹⁹ Some commentators have gone as far as to claim that if the former president faces jailtime, amid his mounting legal troubles and conviction in the hush money trial,²⁰ some extreme right groups and hardcore supporters may even try to mount a jailbreak to free the former president.²¹ A few experts have also cautioned that, in a worst-case scenario, the US could be headed towards a civil war-like situation,²² and Trump's court cases and the 2024 presidential election might serve as inflection points.

The extreme right's conspiratorial narratives related to the election also need to be watched, given their apparent expanding reach. According to one estimate, around a quarter of Americans – an increase from previous years – believe in the QAnon conspiracy.²³ The QAnon conspiracy originated in 2017, and is centred upon the idea that the political opponents of Trump in the US' Democratic Party are running a secret cabal and child-trafficking ring and are conspiring against the former president. QAnon continues to inspire acts of violence,²⁴ raising concerns that more incidents might follow in the rest of the year. Another related conspiracy theory is the "Red Caesar", which promotes the idea that an authoritarian right-wing leader, i.e., Trump, is needed to restore the Republic.

Christian nationalism is also on the rise.²⁵ Some obscure groups and societies, such as the very secretive Society for the American Civic Renewal, have been advocating for a redefining of American politics with a greater role for Christianity.²⁶ This has not had wide traction previously. However, increasingly some actions and statements of former President Trump are directed at galvanising support from Christian groups,²⁷ to an extent unseen before. In a video pitch, believed to be for raising funds for his lawsuits and election campaign, he promoted the "God Bless the USA" Bible,²⁸ which contains religious scripture along with the American Constitution. Trump has also accused Democrats of being anti-Christian and called November 5, the date of the presidential election, as "Christian visibility day".²⁹

Extreme Right-Wing and the 2024 EU Parliamentary Elections

Unlike the US presidential system, which has become increasingly politically polarised, a number of countries in Western Europe operate as parliamentary democracies. Also, as the European Union (EU) is a regional bloc, there is no central figure in Europe like Trump who can galvanise the far-right, and the movement is thus more fragmented. But there are still concerns over the inroads the far-right has made in the recently concluded EU parliamentary elections and what that might mean for violence from the extreme right – according to some observers, the far-right's electoral gains can increase the possibility of violence.³⁰

There was a steady level of terrorist incidents from the extreme right even whilst far-right parties were making significant gains in their national politics in the past few years in the EU countries.³¹ While the data does not show a clear trend of a rise or fall in terrorist incidents and arrests, there was a steady level of activity that should warrant continued attention to the problem. The number of “completed”, “failed” and “foiled” attacks remained low in single digits.³² But there were a considerable number of arrests for “right-wing terrorist offences” in the EU member states, with France, Germany and Italy having the greatest number of arrests.³³

In a few countries in Europe, such as Hungary and Italy, far-right parties have become part of governing coalitions in recent years.³⁴ The far-right's capture of political power in these countries reflects a sea change in political sentiments, also noticeable to some degree in other parts of Western Europe. In France and Germany, far-right political parties have gained significant momentum in the political opposition. However, their rise is also being challenged by parties in the political centre and the left, which still constitute the core political base in these countries. The Alternative for Germany (AfD), a far-right political party which adopts some of the most hardline positions on immigration and minorities, has gained greater traction as a political force in recent years.³⁵ In the recently concluded EU parliamentary elections, it is expected to improve further on its performance from the 2019 election.³⁶ This is even while the AfD is suspected of supporting extremism.³⁷ Entities like the AfD also face significant opposition from civil society groups, who organise counter-movements and protests.

In other non-EU Western democracies, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, the far-right still operates very much on the fringes. But even in these countries, certain far-right narratives on immigration and conservative policies might be slipping into the political ‘mainstream’ as centrist parties try to appease voters leaning to the far-right.

Thus far, the far-right's impact has been largely seen in the national elections of individual countries in Europe. The surge by far-right coalitions Identity and Democracy (ID) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ERC) in the 2024 EU parliamentary elections on the other hand, could shape the character and influence the agenda of the regional bloc. There are, however, disagreements within the far-right parties and among their leaders over issues such as support for Vladimir Putin in Russia's war on Ukraine and the deportation of immigrants.

Concerns over the infiltration of state apparatuses, such as the police, the military services and other institutions by right-wing extremists have further increased recently. A “culture of extremism” with an increase in sympathy for far-right ideas and racism has developed among some segments of the UK and European police forces.³⁸ The situation is particularly acute in Germany, where at least 400 officers at various levels of government are currently being investigated for having right-wing extremist views or conspiracy ideas.³⁹ Some of these officials have been found to have spread extremist right-wing ideas, engage in racist rhetoric and “relativize Nazi crimes”.⁴⁰ The political inroads by the far-right in the EU bloc can make this threat even more pronounced.

It is as yet unclear how the inroads by the far-right political parties in the 2024 EU parliamentary elections will impact extreme right-linked terrorism in the member countries. It is possible that the political gains of the far-right can appease and placate some demands of the extreme right, as some policy positions of the far-right may appear to come close to what the extreme right seeks to achieve through violent acts. But there is also a limit to the far-right's influence in EU policies. Although the far-right parties have increased their numbers in the EU Parliament and would seek to steer the bloc,⁴¹ they may only be able to exert limited influence in major policies. The set-up of the EU Parliament, with an independent EU Council helming it, also makes it harder for a far-right takeover of the institution. Also, some centrist and left parties have formed a firewall to not work with the far-right parties. The far-right ID coalition excluded the AfD in the lead-up to the EU parliamentary elections, considered a major shake-up in right-wing politics in Europe, as a key leader of the latter sought to downplay the role of the SS, a Nazi paramilitary group, in manning concentration camps during World War II. It is therefore possible that while the far-right is gaining ground politically, some in the extreme right may not see it as a gain for their movement.

Countering the Extreme Right

Countering the extreme right is relatively under-explored. Given the increasing mainstream political association of some right-wing extremist sentiments, it is likely to become even harder to challenge the extreme right. However, some policy approaches can help limit the spread of extremist sentiments and violence associated with the ideology. In the UK context, for instance, where right-wing extremism among security forces has emerged as a concern, enhancing vetting processes, addressing “hypermasculinity and racism”, and improving accountability mechanisms have been highlighted as relevant approaches that can help manage the threat.⁴² While these approaches were derived based on the UK context, which is also set for a general election on July 4, they can also be applicable in the EU countries that share parallels with the UK. Also, “reducing motives”, “reducing means”, and “removing opportunities” for violent actors can be some ways through which law enforcement can lower the possibility of violence happening in and around the election period,⁴³ especially in the US, where the political landscape is extremely polarised.

Conclusion

The 2024 elections in the US and the EU might be watersheds. In the EU, they could usher in an era of a shift to the political right, one that has already happened at the national level in some countries. Trends in the US suggest there is a possibility that the presidential election in November could be a major inflection point. While it will be an important year for the far-right, it remains to be seen how it will impact the extreme right movement. Caveats apply, but the situation appears to be more polarised and volatile in the US than in the EU, with a potentially greater degree of large-scale violence from the extreme right in the former.

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²⁸ Rachel Treisman, "Cash-Strapped Trump Is Now Selling \$60 Bibles, U.S. Constitution Included," *NPR*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/27/1241186975/donald-trump-bible-god-bless-usa>.

²⁹ Sarah Posner, "Trump's 'Christian Day of Visibility' Tantrum Is Also a Warning," *MSNBC*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/trump-christian-day-of-visibility-trans-rights-rcna146225>.

³⁰ Maik Baumgärtner et al., "Why Are Attacks and Incitement on the Rise in Germany?" *SPIEGEL International*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/new-hatred-for-politicians-why-are-attacks-and-incitement-on-the-rise-in-germany-a-06bdd32d-d64e-4446-9b34-440fe06703ec>.

³¹ Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023 (TE-SAT)*, p. 43.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁴ Mudde, "The Far-Right Threat to Liberal Democracy in Europe, Explained."

³⁵ Julie VanDusky, "A Far-Right Political Group Is Gaining Popularity in Germany – But So, Too, Are Protests Against It," *The Conversation*, March 7, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/a-far-right-political-group-is-gaining-popularity-in-germany-but-so-too-are-protests-against-it-223151>.

³⁶ Nette Nostlinger, "German conservatives first, far-right AfD second in EU election," *Politico*, June 9, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/conservatives-finish-first-germany-eu-election-early-projection-cdu-csu/>.

³⁷ Damien McGuinness, "Germany: Court Says Far-Right AfD Is Suspected of Extremism," *BBC News*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-69003733>.

³⁸ Mark Townsend, "Growing 'Culture of Extremism' Among UK and European Police Forces, Report Warns," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/10/growing-culture-of-extremism-among-uk-and-european-police-forces-report-warns>.

³⁹ Oliver Towfigh Nia, "Hundreds of Far-Right Extremists Have Infiltrated German Police System: Report," *Anadolu Ajansı*, April 4, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/hundreds-of-far-right-extremists-have-infiltrated-german-police-system-report/3183816>.

⁴⁰ Ayhan Şimşek, "14 German Police Officers Under Investigation for Suspected Far-Right Ties," *Anadolu Ajansı*, February 21, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/14-german-police-officers-under-investigation-for-suspected-far-right-ties/3144173>.

⁴¹ Philip Blenkinsop, Europe's far right seeks policy influence to match seat gains, *Reuters*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europes-far-right-seeks-policy-influence-match-seat-gains-2024-06-09/>.

⁴² Claudia Wallner, Jessica White and Simon Copeland, *Defending Our Defenders: Preventing Far-Right Extremism in UK Security Forces* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2024), <https://static.rusi.org/defending-our-defenders-final-proof.pdf>.

⁴³ Jacob Ware, "Preventing U.S. Election Violence in 2024," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/report/preventing-us-election-violence-2024>.

Five Worrying Signs of Africa's Poor Election Quality

Globally and in Africa, many electoral processes suffer from a lack of transparency, trust and oversight.

ISS Today

Enoch Randy Aikins & Maram Mahdi

May 7, 2024

This is a crucial election year for Africa, with 180 million eligible [voters](#) making their mark in 17 polls across the continent. Over the past three decades, many African countries have transitioned to multiparty liberal democracies – and political power is generally now garnered through the ballot box rather than the barrel of a gun.

However, despite decades of democracy, many countries still struggle to have free, fair and transparent polls, and seamless power changes. While a highly contested election is a sign of a working democracy, five concerning trends undermine the integrity of Africa's electoral processes and quality of elections.

First is the lack of trust among political parties and voters in election management bodies. According to Afrobarometer, the number of citizens in Africa with little or no confidence in their national electoral commission [rose](#) from 41% to 55% between 2011/13 to 2021/23.

This mistrust is deeply rooted in how election management bodies are constituted. Their appointment processes are often not consultative and largely exclude opposition parties and other stakeholders. For example, the bodies in [Ghana](#), [Nigeria](#), [Liberia](#) and [Zimbabwe](#) have been accused of being dominated by ruling party loyalists.

Second, polls in Africa are undermined by weak transparency surrounding electoral processes. Electoral management bodies' inability to build consensus across political divides on key aspects such as timelines, campaign restrictions and party funding raises suspicion and mistrust. This is worsened by incumbents' control of these processes.

In countries that have experienced electoral disputes, e.g. Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, concerns are often sparked by allegations of abuse of power by those in office and accusations of electoral commission bias against opposition parties. Mistrust is usually exacerbated by the ruling party's influence over dispute resolution mechanisms or courts.

The third concerning trend is cost. The average price of an election in Africa (US\$4.20 per capita) is [twice](#) the world's average and higher than the US\$4 spent in Europe, North America and Australia. Estimates show that sub-Saharan Africa spent almost US\$50 billion on polls from 2000-2018.

Coupled with expensive election filing fees, excessive campaign budgets and funds used to buy illicit votes, these high costs undermine the integrity of polls. In Ghana, the estimated [cost](#) of running for president is US\$100 million – a major limit on less-resourced political parties and individuals wishing to contest elections

The fourth factor is fierce presidential and legislative campaigns that increase the threat of electoral violence. The rise of militant and armed vigilantes associated with political parties, such as in [Ghana](#), has become a significant disruption to free and fair voting and the integrity of election outcomes. These armed groups are often used to intimidate voters and suppress their choices, especially in opponents' strongholds.

In some cases, ruling parties use the state security service to intimidate voters, as witnessed in the 2023 elections in Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Madagascar, among others.

Finally, using misinformation and disinformation to undermine elections is a growing global trend, exacerbated by fake news and its links to artificial intelligence. For instance, ahead of South Africa's election on 29 May, various [disinformation](#) campaigns on social media have used artificial intelligence. Previous polls in [Kenya](#), Nigeria and other parts of Africa have witnessed similar incidents.

These negative trends jeopardise democracy across the continent. In countries such as Gabon and Guinea, the lack of free and fair elections has been used as a justification or decoy for military coups. In others, the poor quality of elections often leads to protracted election petitions affecting the smooth running of the state.

Afrobarometer [reveals](#) that the number of African citizens who believe elections effectively ensure adequate representation has dropped by seven percentage points since 2008. Similarly, although elections are still widely preferred, citizens' support for polls as a way to choose leaders has dwindled by an average of eight percentage points since [2011](#) across 29 African countries. And the number of Africans who didn't vote in their recent national elections rose from 18.2% in 2001 to 24.7% in 2023.

To improve election quality, election management bodies must be truly independent of external control and manipulation. This can be achieved by appointing competent people through consultative processes, ensuring their security of tenure, and providing them with adequate resources needed to function.

The bodies themselves should work on securing public trust and confidence by building consensus on electoral reforms across the political divide in a transparent manner.

To avoid accusations about election management bodies' lack of independence, best practices could be drawn from cases such as Mozambique, where the law provides for equitable representation of political parties in the election management body. Interventions would of course need to take each country's context and history into account.

Curtailing the rising cost of polls means enacting and implementing laws on campaign periods and expenditure ceilings, prohibiting and punishing vote-buying, and ensuring election management bodies are judicious about their spending.

To deal with electoral violence, governments must ensure that professional police and national security services are adequately resourced to perform their duties. Apolitical leaders are needed for these institutions, along with parliamentary oversight to help reduce executive interference.

Finally, African countries must raise awareness about misinformation and disinformation in the digital age among the media, the public and state communication departments. Laws dealing with the problem also need to be enacted and enforced.

These measures are vital to restore African citizens' belief in the electoral democratic process and its dividends.



The Aftermath of the 2024 European Parliament Elections: Who Won, Who Lost, and What's Next?

Fulya Kocukoğlu

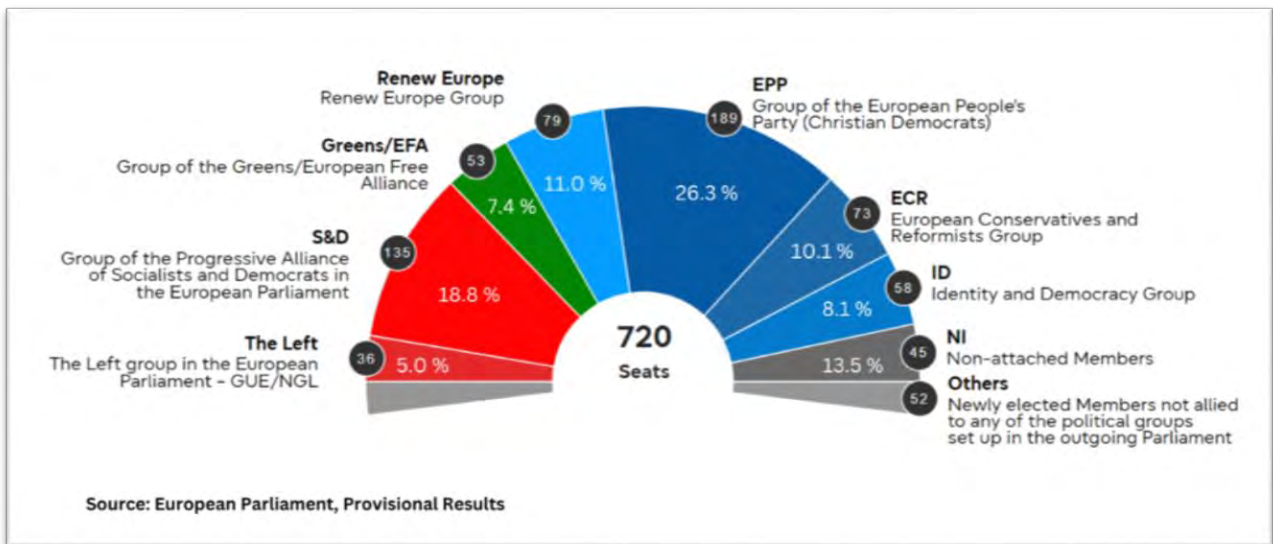
Program Director
Global Relations Forum

**15.06.2024
(updated on 18.06.2024)**

- ✦ The 2024 European Parliament elections had the highest voter turnout in 30 years at 51.01%, demonstrating strong EU citizen engagement amid global geopolitical and economic challenges.
- ✦ The center-right European People's Party (EPP) won the most seats with 189, while right-wing and eurosceptic parties gained ground, particularly in France, Germany, and Italy, reflecting a shift in voter sentiments.
- ✦ The rivalry between European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel intensified, with Michel seeking to exclude von der Leyen from leadership discussions, highlighting internal EU power struggles.
- ✦ The elections have significant implications for EU policies, including the Green Deal and enlargement agenda, with challenges posed by right-wing gains and the need for strategic leadership and robust policy frameworks to navigate these dynamics.
- ✦ Regardless of the leadership in these institutions, EU-Turkey relations are not expected to change. Interactions with third countries are likely to continue in a transactional manner.

of law across Europe, indicating widespread approval of EU membership. While opinions vary among member states, a majority believe their countries have benefited from EU membership. **Europeans also agree on the EU's crucial role in enhancing defense and security, achieving energy independence, and ensuring food security globally.**

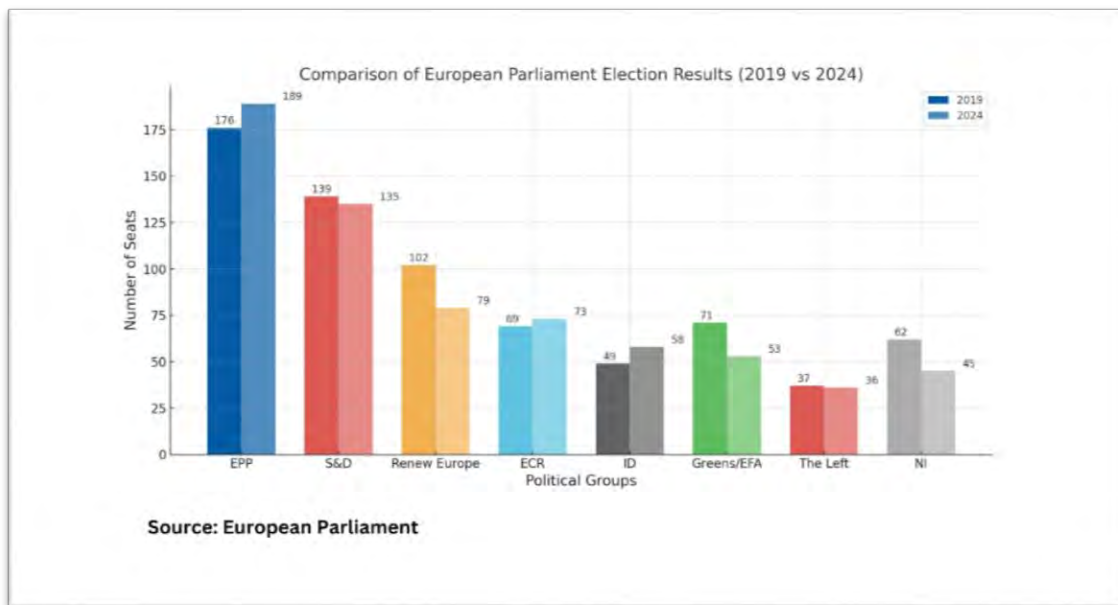
Although there has not been a dramatic change in the results compared to the 2019 elections, national political crises have surfaced prominently after the June elections. This marks the first time that the outcomes of EU elections have had such significant implications at the national level. The extreme right surged in France after Marine Le Pen's Rally National (RN) victory led by Jordan Bardella, resulting in the dissolution of parliament by President Emmanuel Macron. In Germany, the far-right populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) emerged as the second-largest party, and in Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (FDI) secured a significant victory.



The center-right European People's Party (EPP) emerged as the largest group with 189 seats, increasing from 176 seats in 2019. They were followed by the center-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), which saw a slight decrease from 139 seats to 135, and the liberal Renew Europe group securing 79 seats. Compared to the 2019 results, Renew Europe experienced a significant drop, going from 102 seats. Right-wing and eurosceptic parties also made notable gains, with the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) groups obtaining 73 and 58 seats respectively. The Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) garnered 53 seats, reflecting strong voter concern for environmental issues. Meanwhile, The Left group maintained a presence with 36 seats, and a significant

number of non-attached and newly elected members not allied to any political group totaled 97 seats.

The elections showed varied results across Europe, with green parties gaining in Nordic countries, centrists holding ground in Portugal and Spain, and nationalist movements advancing in France, Germany, as well as Austria, Southern Cyprus, Greece, the Netherlands. Despite headlines suggesting a surge of the far right, pro-EU centrist parties still command a majority, albeit slightly reduced.³



One step behind...

Leading up to the EP elections, three main topics dominated the discussions. Firstly, the longstanding rivalry between the heads of two key EU institutions: the European Commission and the Council of the EU, and how this would affect the new structure. Traditionally, the Council handles external relations, security, and defense policies, while the Commission oversees trade relations and partnerships with third countries. However, Ursula von der Leyen has emerged as a prominent figure in security matters, emphasizing in her speeches the humanitarian situation in the Middle East, ongoing support for Ukraine, and the prosperity and

³ European Parliament, 2024 European election results, Last Update: 14.06.2024, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/>

security of the Union. This prominence has potentially contributed to the escalating tension between the two leaders, leaving Charles Michel sometimes feeling sidelined.

The rivalry between Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen is often seen as involving **personal friction and strategic maneuvering. Before the elections, criticizing Von der Leyen's** term in office, Michel accused her leadership of the European Commission of damaging Europe's reputation, claiming the Commission has become overly politicized by making statements without member states' consensus.⁴ Recently, Michel reportedly proposed excluding Ursula von der Leyen from discussions regarding her own job and future prospects in an upcoming meeting on June 17.⁵ However, European countries have resisted Michel's efforts to undermine von der Leyen and she will be joining the meeting next week. This move is seen as Michel's effort to influence EU leadership decisions, sparking controversy and highlighting their ongoing power struggle within European politics. This dynamic will be crucial to observe in the post-elections period.

Secondly, the rule of law issues, especially concerning Hungary, were prominently debated. Concerns about significant deficiencies in justice, anti-corruption efforts, media freedom, and civil society prompted MEPs to urge **the European Commission to suspend Hungary's** controversial laws affecting elections. MEPs also criticized the Commission's decision to release frozen EU funds to Hungary, calling for a reversal. The Parliament has initiated legal action against the European **Commission over the release of €10.2 billion in frozen funds to Hungary.**⁶ Indeed, the lawsuit added pressure on Von der Leyen as she was navigating her reelection bid.

This also has raised concerns about Hungary's ability to effectively hold the EU Council **presidency in the second half of 2024, especially given Germany's concerns over alleged rule-**of-law violations and Hungary's stance on the Ukraine war.⁷ Despite criticisms, Hungary is set to assume the EU presidency soon on July 1st. In the upcoming period, Hungary's relations with the EU are expected to be significantly affected. It is indicated that the EU plans to sideline Hungary from high-profile roles in the next European Commission due to Hungarian Prime

⁴ A. Biçer, EU Council's Michel criticizes European Commission chief von der Leyen over pro-Israel stance, Anadolu Agency, 05.06.2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/eu-councils-michel-criticizes-european-commission-chief-von-der-leyen-over-pro-israel-stance/3240285>

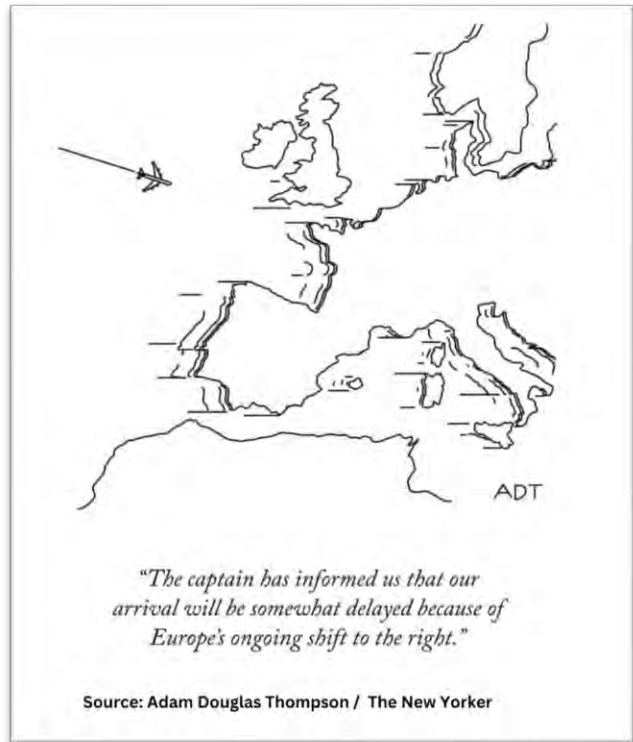
⁵ B. Moens, J. Barigazzi, Charles Michel wants to ban Ursula von der Leyen from top job talks, Politico, 11.06.2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-charles-michel-ban-ursula-von-der-leyen-top-job-commission-president-talks/>

⁶ J. Liboreiro, European Parliament sues Commission over the release of €10.2 billion in frozen funds to Hungary, Euronews, 14.03.2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/03/14/european-parliament-sues-commission-over-the-release-of-102-billion-in-frozen-funds-to-hun>

⁷ G. Sorgi, Germany questions Hungary's ability to hold EU's rotating presidency in 2024, Politico, 30.05.2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-hungary-viktor-orban-eu-presidency-democracy-backsliding/>

Minister Viktor Orbán’s obstructionism regarding Ukraine.⁸ Consequently, the EU is unlikely to allow Hungary to retain influential positions, particularly the role of European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement currently held by Olivér Várhelyi. Várhelyi, who has been in the role since 2019, has been criticized for undermining EU policies and creating confusion in diplomatic standoffs, such as with Georgia.

There was also significant discussion about the rise of right-wing and Eurosceptic sentiments, particularly in reaction to new projects launched during Von der Leyen’s mandate, such as the European Green Deal, integration policies, and enlargement efforts. Hence, even before the EP elections, it was expected that the 2024 elections would witness a major shift to the right in many countries: Right-wing parties have gained support based on public perception that the **EU’s** green transformation agenda is overly ambitious and that climate regulations are driving up inflation and the cost of living. Developments in recent years, such as the war in Ukraine, the rise of gas prices, farmer protests, debates on the green agenda, migration issues, and economic difficulties, have paved the way for the strengthening of right-wing parties, as anticipated in polls conducted in Member States. Post-election developments have confirmed these expectations, particularly in key EU countries like France and Germany.



What’s Next?

One week after the elections, discussions are ongoing regarding the implications of these elections for EU politics and individual policy areas. Following the elections, pro-EU parties consolidated a commanding majority with over 64% of seats, primarily through a coalition of

⁸ G. Gavin, Hungary can kiss a top job in Brussels goodbye, Politico, 30.06.2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-oliver-varhelyi-hungary-european-commission-ukraine-aid-sanctions-enlargement/>

centrist parties. This outcome positions them strongly for negotiating EU legislation in the next five years. With upcoming re-elections for both the Presidents of the European Council and the **European Commission, along with Hungary's** takeover of the final stint of the Trilateral Presidency for the next six months, 2024 becomes a significant period for the EU.

Despite the EPP winning the majority of seats, Ursula von der Leyen's bid for re-election as European Commission president still faces uncertainties. It is crucial to note the pivotal role of the European Parliament in the 2014 appointment of Jean-Claude Juncker through the *Spitzenkandidat* process, despite initial resistance from the European Council. This process allowed multiple candidates nominated by European political parties to compete, highlighting the Parliament's strengthened influence.

However, the *Spitzenkandidat* process faced significant challenges in 2019. Despite the EPP securing the most seats, the Council rejected Manfred Weber, the EPP's *Spitzenkandidat*, and instead opted for Ursula von der Leyen, who had not received formal endorsement from any political party prior to the election. This decision underscored the Council's continued authority and exposed divisions among member states and political parties regarding the legitimacy and effectiveness of the *Spitzenkandidat* process. Consequently, Member States have once again gained the upper hand in having a say in the election of the new Commission president.

Since winning the 2019 elections, Ursula von der Leyen has led the European Commission, supported by MEPs primarily from her center-right European People's Party (EPP), along with backing from Greens, Liberals, and Socialists. Her initial election saw her secure 383 votes, narrowly surpassing Juncker. However, both the Greens and Liberals each lost 20 MEPs each in the recent elections, potentially diminishing her support base. Additionally, Charles **Michel's** efforts to undermine her potential second term are likely to become more visible in the coming days, with alternative candidates like Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis being proposed.⁹ Nevertheless, the EPP's strong performance, expected to hold over a quarter of the parliament, could bolster Von der Leyen's prospects. However, her success hinges on securing an absolute majority in the European Parliament, where she faces dissent within her coalition and must navigate ideological divides, particularly with the Greens and the right-wing populist groups. Despite challenges, such as reduced support from centrist groups in the European Parliament and potential opposition from national leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Von

⁹ B. Moens, J. Barigazzi, Charles Michel's new plan to destroy von der Leyen: Give the Greek PM her job, Politico, 13.06.2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/charles-michel-new-plan-destroy-ursula-von-der-leyen-commission-president-kyriakos-mitsotakis/>

der Leyen was likely to be nominated by the European Council due to her position as the official candidate of the EPP for the European Commission presidency.¹⁰

However, on June 17, **EU leaders met in Brussels but failed to agree on Ursula von der Leyen's** reappointment for a second term as European Commission president. Despite assurances from **France's President Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz that a deal was close**, disagreements persisted among the leaders. The EPP, which won the European Parliament election, wanted to reappoint Von der Leyen as Commission president and Roberta Metsola as European Parliament president, both members of the EPP. They also proposed splitting the European Council presidency into two 2.5-year terms, with the EPP taking one term. This demand created friction with the S&D, who aimed to secure the Council presidency **for Portugal's António Costa.**¹¹

Macron and Scholz had both expressed optimism before the meeting, suggesting that an agreement on the top EU jobs could be reached swiftly. However, the lack of consensus means that EU leaders will have to reconvene on June 27-28 to continue their deliberations, aiming to finalize the leadership appointments before the European Parliament votes on the next Commission president in mid-July.

On the other hand, the race for the next EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is heating up, with several prominent figures vying for the role as Josep Borrell prepares to step down. Key contenders include Kaja Kallas from Estonia, who is supported by French President Emmanuel Macron due to her alignment with his views on European defense; Sophie Wilmès from Belgium and Xavier Bettel from Luxembourg, who face skepticism regarding their diplomatic skills and previous EU leadership from some quarters; Radek Sikorski of Poland, viewed as a strong communicator but encountering political hurdles within the EPP; and Micheál Martin, the former Irish *Taoiseach* (prime minister), also under **consideration, although Ireland's neutrality stance and domestic political dynamics may affect** his candidacy. Who will ultimately shape the EU's foreign policy amid geopolitical tensions remains to be seen.

The outcome of the elections carries significant implications for the European Green Deal efforts as well, including the "Farm to Fork" strategy.¹² **The Greens' losses, especially in major**

¹⁰ Charles Grant, Zselyke Csaky, Christina Kessler, Zach Meyers and Luigi Scazzieri, *CER Insight: What Will the EU Election Results Mean for Europe?*, 11.06.2024, <https://www.cer.eu/insights/what-will-eu-election-results-mean-europe>

¹¹ B. Moens, J. Barigazzi, S. Lau, EU leaders fail to agree on von der Leyen's second term, 17.06.2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/leaders-fail-to-agree-on-von-der-leyens-second-term/>

¹² L. Kurnaz, AB Parlamentosu seçimlerinin "Tarladan Çatala" uygulamasına etkileri, T24, 14.06.2024, https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/levent-kurnaz/ab-parlamentosu-secimlerinin-tarladan-catala-uygulamasina-etkileri,45232#google_vignette

economies like France and Germany, could complicate the strategy's implementation by reducing support for sustainable agricultural policies. The surge of far-right parties and their substantial gains in these elections suggests a potential shift away from prioritizing climate change and sustainability issues. Nevertheless, the continued influence of center-right parties such as the EPP provides some assurance that the Green Deal will not be entirely abandoned.

The electoral shift in the Parliament poses significant challenges to the EU's enlargement agenda, previously advocated by major political groups like the EPP and S&D. These groups viewed enlargement as geopolitically imperative, particularly in response to threats like Russian aggression. To sustain EU accession efforts in this altered political landscape, it is suggested that the next Commission President needs to explicitly prioritize enlargement alongside critical objectives such as defense and the green transition, emphasizing collaboration with the newly appointed commissioners for enlargement and defense.¹³

Secondly, the selection of a balanced and capable Commissioner for enlargement is essential. Given divergent member states' perspectives on accession, the appointed commissioner must adeptly navigate internal political dynamics within the European Council while upholding stringent rule-of-law conditions. Nevertheless, regardless of the leadership in these institutions, EU-Turkey relations are not expected to change. Interactions with third countries are likely to continue in a transactional manner. In Turkey, although the recent outcomes were seen as a pivotal moment concerning economic challenges, polarization, migration, and Islamophobia, the overall political direction of the EU has shown minimal alteration, with these effects being more pronounced at the national level.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need to secure robust budgetary support for enlargement. With the EU's long-term budget set to conclude in 2027, there is a pressing call to reform and enhance the Multiannual Financial Framework. The Parliament's role in approving funding allocations becomes pivotal, particularly given member states' reluctance to centralize funds or endorse tax hikes. Alternative funding mechanisms such as revenues from the travel authorization system, carbon border adjustments, and emissions trading are proposed as politically feasible alternatives. The rise of right-wing influences in the European Parliament could potentially hinder or redirect EU enlargement efforts. However, strategic leadership and robust policy frameworks remain critically important to sustain the EU's enlargement agenda amidst evolving political dynamics. Although the European Parliament may not be able to hasten enlargement, it can certainly put a brake on it.

¹³ E. Morina, Growing pains: The future of EU enlargement after the European Parliament election, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 13.06.2024, <https://ecfr.eu/article/growing-pains-the-future-of-eu-enlargement-after-the-european-parliament-election/>

Key Trends From the European Parliament Elections 2024

Despite the war in Europe, economic challenges, global trade tensions, and farmer protests, the 2024 election saw the centre retain control in the European Parliament.

Raisina Debates Expert Speak

Shairee Malhotra

June 17, 2024

From 6-9 June, European citizens from the EU's 27 member states voted to elect 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The European Parliament's role involves approving, reviewing, and amending legislation, including approving the EU budget. The 2024 election came at a critical moment with over two years into the return of war in Europe, a myriad of economic woes plaguing the continent, global trade tensions, and farmer protests. This was also the first EU election to take place after Brexit, and the first since these began in 1979 that the United Kingdom (UK) was not part of. The elections resulted in a [turnout of 51 percent](#), similar to the 50.7 percent recorded during the 2019 elections.

The centre holds

Despite gains for the far-right, the centre still holds in the European Parliament. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) emerged as the [outright winner](#), with 189 seats, more than the 176 it secured in the 2019 elections. The centre-left group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), even while reducing its seats from 144 to 135, will continue to be the [second largest group](#) in the European Parliament.

The far-right surges

Capitalising on voter concerns such as high costs of living, farmer protests, and a backlash against immigration, in France and Germany, the successful performance of the far-right served as de facto referendums on national politics. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) [came second](#) ahead of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats despite facing several [scandals](#). Marine Le Pen's National Rally, which is part of the Identify & Democracy (ID) group and is in direct opposition to President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party, won double the votes and secured [31 of France's 81 seats](#). The debacle led to Macron calling a [snap election](#) in France. In Austria, the far-right Freedom Party [fared on the top](#), and in Hungary, President Viktor Orban's Fidesz, currently not part of any group, even while facing [fierce competition](#) from his new rival Peter Magyar and his Tisza party, gained 44.8 percent of the vote share. In Spain, the far-right Vox [came in third](#) behind the Popular Party, part of the EPP group, and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's Socialists.

Mirroring national trends, the overall far-right, which includes the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, ID, and those not adhering to any specific group, gained 146 seats. This would render the far-right the second largest group in the European Parliament, just behind the EPP, if it were to come together and form a single group. However, internal divisions on key questions such as Russia and ongoing EU support for Ukraine make it unlikely to have a unified voice. For instance, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni from the ECR group has emerged as a staunch supporter of Ukraine despite her far-right credentials, clashing with France's Le Pen and her historic links to Moscow. Yet the far-right's large numbers could prove disruptive to a progressive EU agenda and impact elements such as the future of the European Green Deal—the EU's ambitious legislation to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050.

The Greens suffer major losses

With climate change being [relegated](#) in the EU's priorities, the Greens/European Free Alliance were the major losers. Despite [some gains](#) in countries such as Denmark, the Greens vote share [substantially declined](#) from 71 to [53 seats](#). This will have implications on the EU's green agenda [already under strain](#) by farmer protests and the centre-right's adoption of more rightward positions.

The liberals lose but still come in third

In addition to the Greens, the liberal Renew Europe (Macron's group) were the other losers, where seats were [reduced](#) from 102 to 79. Yet despite sustaining heavy losses in France, Germany, and Spain, the group made some gains. In Slovakia, the opposition [Progressive Slovakia](#) party won despite a recent [assassination attempt](#) on the country's populist left-wing Prime Minister Robert Fico. Overall, at 79 seats, Renew Europe still makes up the third largest group in the European Parliament.

What's next?

The [first task](#) for the new EU assembly and its MEPs would be to approve the next president of the European Commission, which is the EU's executive body. The incumbent von der Leyen from the EPP remains the top choice and is likely to secure a second term in office. Despite earlier rumours of French support for former Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi at the helm of EU affairs, Macron's crushing defeat in the European election and his focus on the forthcoming domestic snap election means he is unlikely to play [his usual disruptive role](#), paving the way for von der Leyen's second term. However, she still needs the support of at least [361 MEPs](#), which on the surface appears easy to gain given that the centre currently holds over 400 seats. However, some of these MEPs (at least 10 percent) are [likely to defect](#) from their groups, due to which von der Leyen may need the support of other groups to secure the numbers, including potentially the far-right.

Yes, There Are More Far-Right MEPs – But the Mainstream Parties Still Hold the Key to the EU’s Agenda

CEPS Commentary

Sophie Russack

June 24, 2024

On the run up to the European Parliament (EP) elections, many observers were fearful that we were about to experience a far-right surge. Now that the dust has settled and all results are in, this narrative has stubbornly persisted.

Yet it’s a misleading narrative. Instead, we’ve seen a steady rise over the past 25 years, with far-right MEPs making up 22 % of MEPs in the previous term (2019-2024), increasing to around 24 % in the new term (2024-2029) – a measly 2 %, hardly a rise that should instil a sense of panic. In fact, the turnover between the 2014 and 2019 terms saw an even higher increase of 4 %. This of course isn’t meant to downplay the significance of 24 % of MEPs sitting on the far right but rather to put things into the long-term perspective.

On top of this, the far right didn’t perform as well as had been expected in some Member States. In Finland, the True Finns saw their results drop by half. Donald Tusk’s Civil Platform won more seats in Poland than its arch rival PiS. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni did very well but this was at the expense of the Lega Nord. The far-right also underperformed in other countries, including Belgium, Sweden and the Czech Republic.

All eyes are now on France

Right now, the debate over the far right is completely tainted by the results in France and President Macron’s [decision to dissolve the National Assembly](#) and call snap legislative elections.

This focus is understandable. Marine Le Pen’s National Rally and Eric Zemmour’s Reconquest Party together secured almost 37 % of French EP votes. The fact that France is the second-largest Member State and holds the second-highest number of EP seats means that the French far right will have a significant presence in the chamber. Thus, the EP election results in France (and Germany too) matter a lot for the EP’s overall composition and political balance.

And, of course, we can’t forget that national elections determine the setup of the Council, European Council and – by extension – the Commission, and are therefore highly relevant for the EU level.

The far right cannot shape or block EU policies alone

Even if the far right in the EP is now bigger, will those 24 % of legislators sitting to the right of the European People's Party (EPP) be able to have a real impact on EU decisions?

A majority of 50 % is required to make or block a decision – there is no such concept of a blocking minority in the EP. Even the current record high figure is miles away from reaching this threshold. In short, the far-right MEPs will not be able to shape or block policies.

Instead, their potential influence on EU policymaking might unfold through indirectly influencing the mainstream. Generally, far-right parties only have as much power as mainstream parties give them.

The far right's immediate 'neighbour' in the chamber, the EPP, could play an important role as it may move itself closer to the far right in their own rhetoric and political priorities. The EPP might also be tempted to look towards its right flank for willing partners on conservative agenda points.

At the very least, the EPP could use its strong position as the largest grouping to pressure the left by threatening to cooperate with the far right on individual issues throughout the term. After all, you can't stop the far right from voting in line with the EPP if and when it decides to do so – the EPP can thus easily argue that such voting alignment couldn't be considered as active 'cooperation'. But the EPP needs to remember that the far right are far from being reliable partners. They're known to be notoriously fickle, especially over voting discipline within their own ranks.

However, the parties on the left of the political spectrum also hold sway – will they remain united in their pledge not to vote for the Commission President if they cooperate with the ECR? Currently, it seems unlikely that the ECR will participate in any formal agreement between the next Commission President as doing so would jeopardise numerous seats on the left.

This left-wing unity could be compromised if individual party interests prevail during negotiations. Still, more right-wing MEPs do not necessarily translate into a more right-wing agenda – but a lot depends on how the mainstream acts (and reacts).

The Greens' responsibility

Particular responsibility now lies with the Greens – so the question is, are they willing and able to play ball? And will the EPP let them?

As the EPP emerged from the EP elections in a strong position, Ursula von der Leyen (still the most likely candidate to be appointed by the European Council) now seems less dependent on Meloni. Nonetheless, if she can't count on Meloni's 24 EP seats, she'll need help from the other side of the spectrum, both throughout the term to pass legislation and to secure her reappointment through an absolute majority. Considering there are always dissidents, the votes of the EPP, S&D and Renew might be insufficient, especially for her reappointment.

In 2019, the Greens did negotiate agenda points with von der Leyen – but pulled out the night before the elections. This time, the Greens would need to up their game and be willing to compromise. [Bas Eickhout](#) seems to have understood this when he announced that the Greens ‘are ready to take on the responsibility’ to ‘play a constructive and responsible role’ in building stable majorities.

As there is a [high degree of discipline](#) within the Greens faction (the highest of all groups), they could indeed be a reliable partner, providing a counterbalance to the far right’s influence and ensuring a more stable and progressive legislative agenda.

So yes, the far-right contingent is indeed a little larger in the new mandate than it was during the previous one. But how much sway these 24 % of MEPs will have will depend on how effectively mainstream parties hold the line – the ball is very much in their court.

The European Union Inches to the Right

Rémi Daniel | No. 1876 | July 10, 2024

Between June 6 and June 9, elections were held across Europe to determine who would be the 720 members of the European Parliament for the next five years and the balance of political power on the continent. The discourse throughout the election campaign, in which the influence of the October 7 massacre and the subsequent war in the Gaza Strip was evident, focused primarily on political issues (security, immigration, and identity) and on economic issues—at the expense of the climate crisis. While the right increased its strength, the shift in that direction was less than predicted and the center managed to retain its strength. Having said that, the victories of the extreme right on a national level weakened a number of European leaders, especially French President Emmanuel Macron. The European Parliament has only limited powers when it comes to shaping the European Union’s foreign policy, but the balance of power inside parliament—now more convenient for Israel because of the election results—will facilitate Jerusalem’s contacts with the Europeans, even though almost all the parties in parliament, including the extreme right, support the two-state solution.

The European Parliament, which is the only institution in the European Union whose members are elected directly by citizens of member countries, is considered the European Union’s “lower house.” It approves the composition of the European Commission, based on a proposal submitted by the European Council (committee of heads of state or government), and it has the power to censure it. Parliamentary approval is required for any EU law or budget, and it has supervisory and control powers over the other EU institutions. Its influence on EU foreign policy is limited compared to its powers in other areas since most foreign-policy decisions are taken by the national governments. Having said that, its power to approve the composition of the European Commission, agreements with other countries, and budgetary allocations grants it a degree of influence over foreign policy. Through the resolutions it passes and its determined efforts to engage in “parliamentary diplomacy,” the European Parliament has also become a key institution in the European Union’s soft power on the international stage.

In elections for the European Parliament, which took place this year between June 6 and June 9, voters—who usually participate at lower rates in these elections than in the national ones—cast their votes for national lists, which are made up of parties from within their own countries. The elected officials then join multinational political groups, usually based on arrangements that were finalized in advance. This electoral system is the reason national issues affecting each of the countries dominate the

campaigns, rather than issues relating to the European Union and its institutions. Several leaders, including the Italian prime minister, the French president, and the German chancellor, turned these elections into tests of their own domestic support, meaning that the results have ramifications both at the national and European levels.

On the European level, these elections illustrated the drastic changes that the continent has undergone in the past five years. At the heart of the election campaign were issues such as European concerns over the return of war to the continent; arguments over the European identity given the impact of immigration, which have only become more acute as a result of the demonstrations that have taken place in various cities since October 7; and the worsening economic situation of many social groups due to the war in Ukraine. In contrast, the climate crisis remained largely on the sidelines, which was not the case ahead of the 2019 election. Evidence of this can be seen in the failure of the Green Parties, which lost around 20% of their seats in the European Parliament.

The strengthening of the European People's Party (EPP), from the center-right, and its remaining the largest party in the European Parliament continue a trend that we have seen since 2019—the growth of all kinds of right-wing parties in most member states. Despite losses by the social-democratic and liberal parties, the “center” maintained its strength and will continue to influence the policies of the European Parliament over the next five years.

Many experts had predicted a huge victory for the far right in the European Parliament election. While far right parties did indeed increase their representation in parliament, these successes were not replicated across Europe and were instead concentrated in France and Germany. The situation in other countries is more complex, so it would be untrue to say that a far-right wave swept across the entire continent.

In addition, the far right in Europe is undergoing a radical reorganization. Until now, it was divided into two groups: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Identity and Democracy (ID) group. The ECR, led by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, has adopted a relatively moderate stance and supports both NATO and Ukraine. The ID, under the leadership of France's Marine Le Pen, has been more extreme and included parties with controversial ties to Russia. After the elections, the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, created a new political group centered around his party, taking a radical and rather pro-Russian line. This group attracted former ID members, including Le Pen's party, which meant the end of ID and a new era for the far right in the European Parliament. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, previously a member of the ID group but expelled over comments about the SS made by one of its leaders, came in second among German voters and has also been trying to form a third far-right group with unaffiliated members of the European

Parliament. Instead of the union that far-right leaders aspired to before the elections, their parties will now be divided into three groups, weakening their position in Brussels.

In many countries, voters used the election to the European Parliament to express their dissatisfaction with their government. The two leaders who suffered the largest setbacks were Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose Social Democratic Party came in third, and Emmanuel Macron, president of France, where the far right won more than twice as many votes as his party. In response, Macron decided to dissolve the National Assembly and call for a snap election, on June 30 and July 7. The shockwaves in both countries, which are seen as key members of the European Union, could weaken the entire continent. Although the hypothesis of a far-right government in Paris, which raised fears in other European capitals, became irrelevant after the results of the French elections, political uncertainty and instability in France could have far-reaching ramifications for its neighbors and partners. In that sense, the indirect consequences of the elections are perhaps even more significant than the composition of the European Parliament itself.

The first issue that the European Parliament and the European Commission will have to address is the appointment of key positions within the European Union: president and deputy presidents of the European Parliament; chairs of the various parliamentary committees; the president of the European Commission; the president of the European Council; the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy; and commissioners, who are appointed by member countries. After initial discussions that were more complicated than expected, the European Council meeting held on June 27–28 led the European leaders to approve a second term for the EPP candidate, the outgoing President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen. The council also approved the candidacy of the prime minister of Estonia, the liberal Kaja Kallas (known for her hawkish stance on Russia), for the position of high representative. The Portuguese socialist António Costa was elected president of the European Council, a position that does not require additional approval by the Parliament.

These appointments reflect the desire of the members of the centrist coalition, EPP, Social Democrats and Liberals, to continue working together. This coalition holds a majority in the European Parliament, but due to poor party discipline, which made von der Leyen's initial election difficult in 2019, it is uncertain if she can rely solely on these three groups to be re-elected. One way to broaden the support base for von der Leyen which is being seriously considered by the EPP, is to cooperate with the ECR. However, this plan faces significant challenges. It has drawn criticism from the Social Democrats and the Liberals, who oppose cooperation with the far-right. Additionally, Meloni, who

aims to translate her success both in Italy and at the European level into influence over European appointments, has hardened her stance in recent weeks. The Italian prime minister abstained from voting on von der Leyen's appointment and voted against the other two appointments in the European Council. She expressed her disappointment that these appointments were decided without her agreement and her intention to ensure that her country and the ECR, which has become the third-largest faction in the European Parliament, receive appropriate representation. Therefore, the approval of the European Council appointments by the Parliament is not assured yet.

The new reality in the European Parliament, in which there is a majority for the center on the one hand but a majority for the right on the other, will lead to certain changes—but not to an overhaul of EU policy. The changes will affect the EU environmental policies. The “Green Deal” that was put forward to adapt the European economy to climate change was received angrily by the public. The drop in representation for parties with an ecological agenda in parliament and the new balance of power endanger its continued implementation. It is safe to assume that, when it comes to issues such as immigration, minorities, and the place of Islam in Europe, the composition of the parliament, and the increased strength of the far right across Europe, which puts pressure on various national leaders, will lead to a more aggressive tone from the European Commission and member states and to a more hardline position. Given the limited powers of the European Parliament when it comes to foreign policy and the post-election reality, we should not expect any drastic changes to EU foreign policy.

From an Israeli perspective, it is possible to view the election as a gage of public opinion in Europe, although we must take into account the low voter turnout and the large number of factors that influence the decisions of European voters. The war in Gaza was an important part of the discourse during the election campaign, particularly on the left side of the political map, which tried to drum up support—especially from Muslim voters. The strengthening of the right, including the far right, confirms that anti-Israel forces remain a minority on the continent's political map, even if there has been a move toward more extreme pro-Palestinian positions among some parts of the European public.

In the past, the European Parliament was somewhat a problematic body for Israel, because of its sensitivity to Palestinian rights. Among other moves, in the 2000s, it blocked the planned upgrade of the association agreement between the European Union and Israel. The configuration of the parliament after the election is more beneficial for Israel, as is the end of Josep Borrell's tenure as high representative for foreign affairs, given the Spanish politician's highly critical comments about Israel.

Having said that, Israel would be wrong to overestimate the room for maneuver that has been created as a result of the new reality in Brussels. Almost all the parties represented in parliament, including the most pro-Israel, support the two-state solution and oppose Israeli settlements in Judea and Samaria, which could lead to clashes with the Israeli government. At the same time, the new composition of the European Parliament opens up fresh opportunities. Because of its ability to exert influence on public discourse, global and regional powers have targeted it as part of their lobbying activities. Jerusalem must invest in its relations with Brussels during this complex period, after more than a decade of diplomatic stagnation between Israel and the European Union and must leverage the large number of pro-Israel politicians in its ranks. For the next five years, the European Parliament will be an easier institution for Israel to work with and the Israeli government must act to utilize this opportunity to improve relations with a bloc of countries that is vital for the State of Israel—both politically and economically.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg

Four Far-Reaching Consequences of France's Shock Election Result

The far right RN may have failed to take power, but France's political institutions, its place in the world, its financial position and its fragmented society will all be affected by a hung parliament.

Chatham House Expert Comment

Sebastien Maillard

July 8, 2024

The snap parliamentary elections that concluded on 7 July were called by President Emmanuel Macron to regain the upper hand after his party's weak performance in June's European Parliamentary elections.

Yet the outcome has achieved the contrary, creating political mayhem that has undermined the president's power and shaken the foundations of the Fifth Republic as never before.

A feared victory for Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) party did not materialize, with the left wing 'New Popular Front' alliance holding the most seats. But no party has achieved a majority.

The dust has far from settled but four valuable conclusions can already be drawn.

French institutions

France's politics will be less presidential, putting the Fifth Republic under serious stress: it has been based on a powerful head of state since its foundation by De Gaulle.

As if he was anticipating this, President Macron made as many ambassadors, prefects and senior civil servant appointments as possible ahead of the election's second round on 7 July, apparently expecting he would have to share power from then on. The Fifth Republic will look more like the Fourth, which relied on the parliament and was famous for its unstable and fragile governing coalitions.

The future government will be derived, however long it may take to form, from the newly elected National Assembly and not be shaped mainly by the Elysée, as its predecessors have been. The choice of a new prime minister able to command a stable majority will be imposed on the president out of the ranks of his Renaissance party, which performed better than expected.

Until now, Macron has always picked any head of government he wanted. The 'Popular Front' alliance of left-wing parties, which gained the most seats in the second round, now considers itself to be in a position to govern, although it is far from securing an absolute majority and must address internal divisions and power struggles.

With much pressure from the left, a new kind of cohabitation is in the making. In past cohabitations – in 1986 and 1993 under François Mitterrand and in 1997 under Jacques Chirac – the power struggle was between the Elysée and Matignon, the seat of the prime minister.

This time, the political centre of gravity will lie at the National Assembly. It cannot be dissolved again before July 2025 and will control the fate of any cabinet until then at least.

Thus, the president's authority has waned. With two severe electoral blows in one month, his party divided, hostile public opinion and the constitutional constraint of not being able to stand for another term, President Macron's political capital is shattered for the short- to medium-term – unless he succeeds in splitting the left and manages to keep his party in a minor but key role in a future coalition.

France in the world

President Macron, who can stay in office until May 2027, will use what is left of this role on the global stage to try to maintain France's influence and build back his reputation.

As head of state, he will still represent the country in international forums, starting with the NATO summit in Washington DC this week, followed by the European Political Community summit at Blenheim Palace on 18 July.

Even though foreign affairs and defence remain his *domaine réservé*, the president will be dependent on the budgetary resources allocated by the government.

Appointments will require the formal approval of the prime minister, as in the past, but must now also be negotiated with them – even if there were to be a large multi-party coalition more aligned with the president on international and European affairs than an RN cabinet would have been.

Lasting political confusion in France would hurt its leadership abroad and the prospect already worries the European Union, starting with Germany. The ability of Paris to generate new policy ideas that are taken seriously will be limited.

The period of political turmoil ahead will also test the resilience of France's long-standing diplomacy and its capacity to respond to an international crisis.

France's financial constraints

Financial markets signalled relief after the election's first round, confident that an RN-led government was out of reach. But any future cabinet will have to repair the public accounts, possibly thwarting the government's broader ambitions.

The budget deficit of 5.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 and the public debt over 110 per cent of GDP require strict fiscal discipline, expected both in Brussels and by France's partners, not least Germany.

The next government will have no choice other than to reassure markets that they can still comfortably lend to France.

Its challenge will be to stay fiscally on track while facing a ruthless opposition unwilling to compromise ahead of the 2027 presidential race. Any deep structural reform before then thus appears unlikely.

French society

The three blocs that the elections have put in evidence, from Jean-Luc Mélenchon on the far left to Le Pen on the far right, are the political manifestation of a much polarized and fragmented society that even President Macron depicted as on the brink of a 'civil war'.

With over 9 million voters supporting the RN, the first round showed the extent to which Le Pen's party has succeeded in becoming a powerful political force, far beyond its traditional strongholds and as part of a larger European trend. This is unprecedented and may stir frustration among RN-voters that 'Parisian elites' have colluded to stop their leader from rightfully taking power.

The same antagonism could be fuelled by the far left after a snap election that has put French society into a state of shock. The vote has exposed the country's social tensions, as did the gilets jaunes protests in 2018.

The greatest challenge for the next government, as well as for local authorities and civil society more broadly, will be to help the country recover by building ties among divided communities and renewing the nation's sense of unity.

What Do France's Surprise Election Results Mean for the Far Right?

The surprising shift to the left in snap elections has broken the far-right populist fever in France, but now a crisis of governability looms in Paris that has further weakened President Emmanuel Macron's grip on power.

CFR Expert Brief

Matthias Matthijs

July 10, 2024

What happened to France's surging far-right movement in these elections?

The second round of France's snap legislative elections on July 7 delivered a surprising outcome due to the strategically smart combining of rival political forces on the left and center. The far-right National Rally (NR) of Marine Le Pen had topped the first round of elections on June 30 with 33 percent of the vote. Further, of the seventy-six seats for the National Assembly directly elected in the first round—by getting more than half of the vote—forty went to the NR, an absolute record for the party.

Faced with this surge, the left-wing New Popular Front (NPF) and President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Ensemble ("Together") Alliance party chose not to compete with one another in three-way races involving their parties and an NR candidate. The stigma against the National Rally remains for a reason, despite Le Pen's efforts to 'de-diabolize' the party since she took over the leadership from her father in 2011. The party continues to harbor and attract members with openly xenophobic, homophobic, and often antidemocratic views.

This strategy employed by the left-wing and centrist parties, known as the "Republican Front" against the far right, has been used successfully before. It worked in 2002 for Gaullist President Jacques Chirac, when Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine's father and then leader of the National Front, had made it into the second round of the presidential elections, and well over 80 percent of the French electorate voted for Chirac.

This time around, while National Rally managed to further increase its vote share to 37 percent of the vote in the second round, it ended up with just below 25 percent of all the seats in the 577-seat Assembly (143), while the New Popular Front emerged as the largest group getting 31 percent of seats with just 26 percent of the vote (180) and Ensemble received 28 percent with just 25 percent of the vote (159).

Is the French far right no longer a political factor then?

Quite the opposite. Despite its disappointment, the far right made its strongest ever electoral showing this time around. Back in 2017, when Macron was first elected President, the far-right National Rally got just 6 out of 577 deputies elected to parliament. In 2022, they secured eighty-nine. This year, together with their right-wing allies, they landed a record number of 143 deputies. The trend is clearly upwards, even though this time around they fell well short of their own very high expectations—and those of the polls—that they could get as many as 270 seats in the National Assembly (close to an absolute majority of 289). That is why Le Pen was defiant after the first results were announced, [pointing out](#) that “our victory has only been delayed”—clearly with her eyes on the big prize during the 2027 presidential elections when Macron cannot run again—and that her party was the victim of a “dishonest alliance.”

What does France’s left-wing New Popular Front want?

The New Popular Front—a reference to the progressive Popular Front that won the 1936 elections against the right, led by Léon Blum, the first socialist prime minister of France—was put together in just a few days after Macron called snap elections on June 9. It comprises the far-left France Unbowed, led by left-wing firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon, as well as the communists, the greens, and the Socialist Party of former President François Hollande, now led by Olivier Faure. NPF insists it should have the right to form a new minority government, led by one of its own, although it has yet to agree on a candidate, and there is no obligation for President Macron to appoint someone from the New Popular Front as prime minister.

The NPF ran on a very traditional left-wing tax-and-spending program, with higher taxes for the rich and a whole series of expensive spending plans. Its central policies included the repeal of Macron’s hard-fought pension reform (bringing the retirement age back from sixty-four years old to sixty), increasing the minimum wage from 1,400 to 1,600 euros a month, a freeze in the prices of essential goods such as food, energy, and gas, and a reduction in overall energy bills for working- and middle-class families. The New Popular Front also wants to abolish the tax privileges of billionaires, reinstate the wealth tax, and substantially increase taxes on capital income. On foreign policy, Mélenchon advocates a much tougher line on Israel’s military actions in the Gaza Strip and wants France to recognize a Palestinian state without delay.

Will there be a governing stalemate?

It definitely looks that way right now. Unlike in neighboring Germany, France has no experience with coalition governments. Traditionally, after getting directly elected, the new president asks the French electorate for a governing mandate and an absolute majority allows the president’s party to govern. In the past, there have been cohabitations with prime ministers from another party, but those have always commanded absolute majorities in the National Assembly, so former Presidents François

Mitterrand (from 1986 to 1988 and again from 1993 to 1995) and Jacques Chirac (from 1997 to 2002) grudgingly accepted them. Right now, with no stable majority emerging—especially as the New Popular Front has ruled out governing in a coalition with Macron’s allies, and both exclude governing with the far right—France finds itself in uncharted waters.

Macron has asked his outgoing prime minister, Gabriel Attal, to stay on at the head of a caretaker government for now and will decide in the days ahead what the most sensible way forward is. Attal himself did not have a majority and presided over a minority government. He either needed to find majorities on different issues or could push through laws by decree under article 49.3 of the French constitution, which allows the government to bypass parliament. The frequent usage of article 49.3 is one of the reasons Macron’s government was so unpopular over the past two years, which led to the electoral beating he received during the European Union (EU) Parliament elections on June 9.

Macron could choose someone from the New Popular Front to try and form a minority government, though it is hard to see how his own allies in the Assembly would support their policies. He could also decide to appoint someone from his own party and see if he can work with the more moderate wing of the New Popular Front, even though they insist right now that is not an option. He could also decide to appoint a government of technocrats with no political affiliation to keep the government functioning until June 2025, the next time that general elections can be held.

What does this mean for Macron—and France—influencing vital issues in Europe?

This is clearly bad news for Macron, as it makes him a less effective president. In his first term, from 2017 to 2022, Macron was able to push through domestic reforms and provide leadership in the EU, whether it was in pushing for Next Generation EU (the Union’s joint economic recovery plan for the COVID-19 pandemic) or the initial response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In his second term, starting in May 2022, he had to govern with a minority cabinet, but his party had a plurality of seats in the National Assembly, and he could govern by decree or bypass parliament by using article 49.3.

Starting this summer, Macron will have to take into account the views of various other parties in the Assembly and make compromises. Though presidents in France hold wide sway over foreign policy including command of armed forces and national security bodies, Macron will no longer be able to dictate the agenda of his government on domestic issues. On backing Kyiv, there will be broad continuity, but it could be tougher to free up a lot more money to support Ukraine in its war against Russia. On any new EU initiatives, including on defense or energy policy, Macron could find himself hamstrung by a new government that is even less stable than the one he had before.

But the main fight will be on the budget for 2025, where his government could clash with the EU, which is pushing forward with an [“excessive deficit procedure.”](#) France is currently in breach of the EU’s stability and growth pact that manages Eurozone members’ fiscal policies and aims to keep government deficits below 3 percent. With the current French deficit well above 5 percent, a combination of tax increases and spending cuts will be required to bring that deficit down over the coming years. It is hard to see how a left-leaning government can square that circle without

disappointing its voters. The fact that Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Germany has just managed to put together an austerity budget of his own will only increase the pressure on France to do the same thing. Difficult months lie ahead.

A Guarantee of Continuity

Modi's re-election assures India's allies that Delhi will play a leading role in shaping the new world order

ORF Commentary

Harsh Pant

June 24, 2024

As the leaders of G7 met in Italy last week, most of them were facing daunting domestic political challenges at home. US President Joe Biden is being challenged by Donald Trump and a tough political battle lies ahead. French President Emmanuel Macron had to call snap elections after voters in France dealt his party a humiliating blow in the European parliamentary elections. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz decided not to take any risk though he too performed poorly. Rishi Sunak and his Conservative Party are assured of a rout in next month's British general election if their current polling numbers are anything to go by. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been trailing in polls by double digits for nearly a year now although he seems to be in no hurry to give up his post despite intraparty rumblings.

Contrast this with Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was attending his fifth consecutive G7 summit this year after winning a historic third term in office. He has given a strong sense of continuity by carrying forward most of his Cabinet members and in particular in the realm of foreign policy and national security. This means New Delhi will continue to search for its rightful place in the comity of nations as a "leading power". With Amit Shah as the home minister responsible for internal security, S Jaishankar at the helm of the Ministry of External Affairs, Ajit Doval as National Security Advisor (NSA), the team that has negotiated the nation's way through a highly tumultuous decade will now be shepherding India again. As much as India has reposed its faith in the leadership of Modi, the prime minister has underlined his faith in the ability of his team to deliver.

At a time when the world is grappling with a range of challenges and global leadership is struggling to respond, this continuity in the context of India is great news for the world as well. It has become a cliché to suggest that the global order is in flux. Global powers are competing much more sharply than at any time in the recent past and new powers are seeking their place under the sun. The consolidation of antagonistic power blocs is taking the world back to the heyday of the Cold War, although of a different kind.

The geopolitical shift from the unipolar moment of the early 1990s dominated by the US to a distinctly multipolar world order is paving the way for emerging powers to assert their influence on global affairs even as the older framework of treaty-based alliances is being renegotiated in favour of ad hoc issue-based coalitions of likeminded partners. This is happening at a time when the geo-economic certainties of the past are being challenged as economic globalisation gives way to inward

orientation in precisely those nations which were at one time the biggest votaries of economic integration.

At the same time, the rise of digital economies, powered by advancements in technology, has transformed industries and labour markets globally, thereby increasing economic interdependence on the one hand but also raising concerns about issues like data privacy, cyber warfare, and economic inequality between and within nations. Demographic shifts, including ageing populations in some regions and youthful populations in others, are reshaping consumer markets and labour forces. Social movements advocating for human rights, environmental sustainability, and social justice are gaining momentum, influencing policies and corporate behaviour worldwide.

The onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic ended up accelerating these underlying trends, such as the digitalisation of economies and the re-evaluation of global supply chains, while also highlighting vulnerabilities in global governance and cooperation.

Today the world is grappling with fundamental transformations brought about by shifting power balance, technological overreach, and institutional decay. The Covid pandemic and the Ukraine conflict widened these faultlines, resulting in global inflationary pressures, food and energy crises, and widespread economic fallout. States are frantically scraping their coffers to provide for their citizens' basic needs, and we are standing farther from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At a time when they are most needed, global institutions have proven to be incapable of responding to the needs of our times. Multilateralism is failing and flailing, resulting in growing scepticism about the effectiveness of existing multilateral frameworks and calls for reform. The growing credibility crisis for multilateral institutions is paving the way for various plurilaterals, some of which India itself is part of, such as the Quad and the I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and the US). From India's perspective, this crisis of multilateralism is accentuated by the lack of broader representation of developing countries and emerging economies in global multilateral institutions. It has thus advocated for 'reformed multilateralism' to ensure that international organisations reflect the current power balances.

At a time of this widespread global turmoil, India stands out as a beacon of hope. It is the fastest growing major economy in the world today with a stable democratic political system that is attracting the world's attention. For long, India's seemingly chaotic domestic politics was seen as a drag on the India story. Today, it is the same institutional fabric that is producing qualitatively different outcomes. The stability engendered by Modi 3.0 will ensure that the spotlight continues to be on New Delhi with all the attendant consequences.

The consequences of China's belligerence, and its own internal vulnerabilities, have certainly created greater space for the democratic world to underscore its primacy; the Chinese model will never be able to match the ability of democracies, despite their weaknesses, to respond to the aspirations of the millions.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is a declining power that has managed to tilt the geopolitical balance in Eurasia. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has forced Europe to reckon with geopolitics once again. The course and the conduct of the war in Ukraine are likely to fundamentally alter

European threat perception and have given NATO a new lease of life. Globally, the Russia-China axis has been cemented and global faultlines are more vivid than they have ever been.

Geopolitics is back in the driving seat as trust becomes an essential factor in shaping economic decisions. As Washington makes policy moves to deny China access to critical technologies and restructure supply chains away from overdependence on China, it recognises the need for new partnerships with likeminded states.

But with Washington pushing for supply-chain restructuring in critical industries due to foreign policy and national security concerns, this is certainly ushering in a new phase in globalisation. Forces of untrammelled economic globalisation that were once viewed as the panacea for all global problems are now under retreat. Mutual dependencies are being weaponised, further undercutting the foundations of a globalised world. And if emerging technologies are going to determine the next phase of geopolitics, then the polarisation of supply chains is the new reality that policymakers and market forces will have to contend with.

China, as a consequence, finds itself in a bind and India's stiff resistance to its aggressive pursuit along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has put paid to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) narrative that its time has come. India's standing up to China has ignited a process of a broad pushback across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. And with a plethora of domestic challenges being faced by Beijing, there is once again a premium on internal consolidation. India, as a consequence, finds itself in a 'geopolitical sweet spot' that it should make the most of. In the past, New Delhi's inability to exploit the extant balance of power to its advantage cost it dearly. A prudent nation should be able to identify the opportunities in the existing structure of global politics and shape its external engagement accordingly in the pursuit of its interests. Pursuing unrealistic ideational constructs can often do more damage to a nation's standing. For India today, the most serious challenge is the rise of China and how it has managed to constrain India's options. New Delhi's first priority in the coming years will be to internally consolidate its capabilities so that it can stand up to Beijing's nefarious designs on a more sustained basis. This will have to be supplemented with building serious partnerships that are capable of adding value to India's growth story.

Modi has ensured that New Delhi's approach to partnerships is not a prisoner of the past. Where in the past close partnerships were seen as part of the problem, constraining India's ability to manoeuvre, today they are deemed as ensuring greater room for managing at times even contending relationships. Delhi today proudly proclaims that it is non-West, not anti-West, even as it is an enthusiastic member of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). It is courted by the Russians and the Ukrainians as well as by the Israelis and the Palestinians. If India today is being seen by the West as its bridge to the Global South, Modi and Jaishankar's deft diplomacy has made sure that India's engagements with multiple stakeholders continue unabated. Despite the China factor, India has managed to enhance its profile in a range of global platforms, be they multilateral or plurilateral. The most high-profile plurilateral—the Quad—gained its salience precisely because of India's serious engagement with it over the last few years.

The Modi government has succeeded in altering the very nature of India's partnerships by making them key to enhancing the country's strategic autonomy. Instead of close alignments being viewed as a constraint, there has been an emphasis on building robust partnerships with likeminded partners, increasing India's strategic space to manoeuvre. For India's partners, the continuation of the Modi government would mean a continuation of New Delhi's priorities when it comes to working closely with its partners in forging global governance outcomes and pursuing Indian interests.

Modi's diplomacy on the global stage has managed to give wings to India's aspirations of playing a larger international role. Consequently, Indian foreign policy has made the most of this inflexion point in world affairs. In the last decade, India's image of being a perpetual naysayer in global politics has changed to a nation that is more than willing to contribute to global governance.

Modi has fundamentally altered the way India engages with the world, and that trajectory will continue to unfold over the next five years under his leadership. More than any other major power today, Indians view their future in aspirational terms, and that is shaping their domestic as well as foreign engagements. Modi has been successful not only in tapping into that sentiment effectively but also, in a sense, shaping that aspiration into his own image. This is a critical moment in the global order and India's centrality to the emerging order is now well-established. With the Modi government continuing in office, it offers India's partners and adversaries a new opportunity to assess their ties with New Delhi.



India's Voters Give Narendra Modi a Third Term

Patryk Kugiel

The parliamentary elections in India, which ended on 1 June, were won by the coalition headed by the Indian People's Party (BJP). Although its leader Narendra Modi will be sworn in as prime minister on 9 June for the third time in a row, his mandate is weaker than after the 2019 elections, and India will face a less stable coalition government. This means greater difficulties than in the previous term in introducing serious reforms and possibly a less active role for India in international politics.

What were the election results?

The [Indian general elections](#) were held in seven phases between 19 April and 1 June, with the results announced on 4 June. Of the 969 million eligible to cast a ballot, 642 million voted, making the turnout 66.3%. The ruling party, the BJP, won the most seats—240—in the 543-seat parliament, while the coalition formed by it and allied parties, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), won a total of 293 seats. This is much worse than in 2019 when the BJP won 303 seats, and the entire NDA 353, and it was also below the goals set by the BJP for 400 seats for the NDA, and lower than the exit poll forecast on 1 June. The opposition I.N.D.I.A bloc obtained 233 seats, including 99 for the Indian National Congress (INC), significantly improving its standing from five years ago when it won 54 seats. Despite the weaker results, the BJP and its partners have enough seats in parliament (272 required) to form a government headed by Modi for a third time in a row. This makes Modi the first Indian politician to record such an achievement since 1962.

What caused the decline in support for the BJP?

The BJP campaigned on slogans of a “Modi guarantee” of the continuation of rapid economic growth, strengthening India's international position, and emphasising the country's Hindu identity. Despite this, the party lost support in the largest states of Uttar Pradesh (it won 33 seats compared to 62 in the 2019 elections), Maharashtra (from 23 to 9), and West Bengal (from 18 to 12), which resulted in its worse result on a national scale. This was due to growing anti-

incumbency sentiment after 10 years of BJP rule (the party had previously also won the 2014 elections) and disappointment with the lack of improvement in the individual life situation of many voters. This applies especially to young people, among whom unemployment reaches 20%, farmers, whose protests in recent months have been ignored by the government, and poorer people who have not benefited from the country's rapid economic growth. The use of religious rhetoric did not mobilise enough Hindus, but it increased the fears of the Muslim minority (constituting 15% of India's population), who overwhelmingly voted for I.N.D.I.A. The BJP was harmed not only by the policies of recent years but also by the rhetoric used during the campaign, which increased the religious and ideological polarisation of society. The opposition, which made defending the Indian constitution and democracy and improving the fate of the poorest and minorities one of its main campaign slogans, mobilised voters in key states, and the common bloc prevented individual parties from stealing votes from each other.

What does the election result mean for India's internal situation?

The BJP's weaker result than five years ago means a return to coalition governments in India. It strengthens the opposition to Prime Minister Modi within his own BJP formation and the socio-ideological base in the form of the nationalist organisation National Volunteer Corps (RSS). It also increases the role of coalition partners, including regional leaders such as Nitish Kumar, prime minister of the state government in Bihar (his Janata Dal party won

PISM SPOTLIGHT

12 seats), or Chandra Babu Naidu, prime minister of the state government in Andhra Pradesh (his Telugu Desam Party won 16 seats). This exposes the future government to the risk of smaller parties withdrawing support and imposing their agenda. Hence, the coalition government may be less stable and less willing to undertake difficult but necessary economic reforms (e.g., agricultural reforms, labour law), which may slow down the modernisation of the country. The lack of a majority necessary to reform the constitution also eliminates the risk of changing the political system and the secular and pluralistic character of India. The good result for the INC will increase the monitoring role of the opposition in parliament, which will block changes that could limit democratic freedoms and marginalise minorities. This averts the risk of India sliding towards authoritarian rule and a Hindu majoritarian state.

What is the international significance of the elections?

The elections confirmed the vitality and efficiency of democracy in India, sending a positive signal to the world, while the quality of democracy on a global scale is regularly deteriorating and authoritarian regimes are strengthening. Modi's return as prime minister, even with a weaker mandate and stripped of the aura of an invincible strongman, makes him one of the longest-serving leaders of the G20 member states and strengthens India's position in international affairs as vibrant democracy. At the same time, the warning sent by the voters may encourage the new government to focus more on internal economic challenges, which can reduce its activity in the international arena. One should expect a continuation of the main directions and goals in India's foreign policy, that is, maintaining strategic autonomy and good relations with all powers, striving to strengthen its major power status, and aiming to become the third-largest economy in the world before the next

elections in 2029. The new coalition government will strive to represent the interests of the Global South and cooperate with the West in reforming international institutions. The tough attitude towards China and friendly relations with Russia will continue.

What are the prospects for cooperation with the EU and the United States?

The election result should reduce criticism of the state of Indian democracy in Western media and limit the negative impact of tensions over democratic standards in relations with the EU and the U.S. India, which must quickly respond to the development aspirations of its citizens (including in terms of job creation, income growth, quality of infrastructure), will strive even harder for Western investments, technologies, and opening of markets. This may increase the readiness of the Indian authorities to improve the operating conditions of foreign companies, which will facilitate intensified talks on free trade and investment agreements, including with the EU or the United Kingdom. Despite maintaining a neutral position towards the [war in Ukraine](#), India's rapprochement with the U.S. and Europe will continue in matters of security and defence (e.g., replacing Russian weapons in the Indian military with those supplied by Western partners), connectivity (the project of the Europe-Middle East-India economic corridor, IMEC), and the energy transformation. The end of the electoral period in India, and soon also in the European Union, opens the way to the organisation of an EU-India summit after a break of several years (the [last one took place in 2021](#)), during which a new multi-annual cooperation plan may be adopted. It also means a chance for Poland to intensify cooperation with the government of Prime Minister Modi, who has not visited Poland during his frequent visits to Europe.

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Prabowo's Victory and Competing Visions of Democracy in Indonesia: Post-Election Reflections

Leonard C. Sebastian and Januar Aditya Pratama

SYNOPSIS

The February 2024 elections brought to the fore the competing visions of democracy that exist within Indonesia, underscoring the rural-urban socio-economic divide and the stark differences in how democracy is perceived across various segments of the population.

COMMENTARY

Two months after the 14 February elections, questions still linger about the state of democracy in Indonesia. Many were concerned about its future, citing Prabowo Subianto's Soeharto-era track record and the possibility of election fraud. Yet, pronouncements that Indonesian democracy is dead are premature; we argue that perceptions of democracy differ across the diverse population of the country.

The practice of democracy in Indonesia over the past 10 years reveals competing visions of the concept. This is evident in the election outcome, which reflects how liberal visions of democracy contended with another vision of democracy that offers a system of government and a leadership style that is probably recognised as more effective in [delivering policy outcomes](#) for the average Indonesian.

To discuss these differing visions, however, we must first talk about the man who thoroughly understood the landscape of “democracies” and influenced it: Indonesia’s seventh president, Joko Widodo (“Jokowi”).

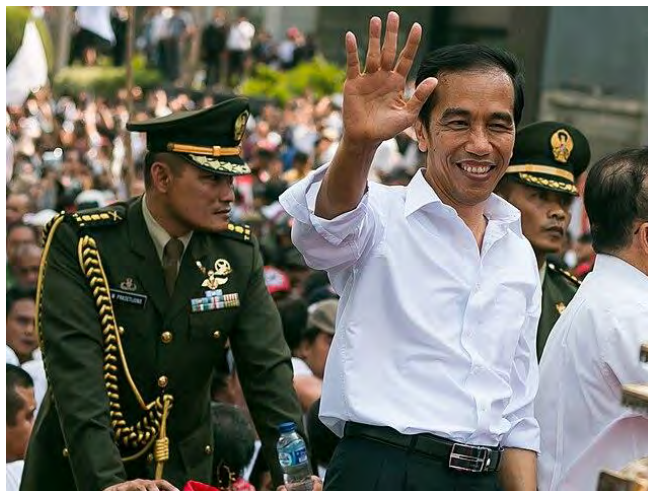
Joko Widodo: A Man of Conviction, Not Contradictions?

President Jokowi has unquestionably reshaped Indonesian politics. He rose from humble origins, yet his prominence now surpasses that of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), his political home for the past two decades.

International observers regarded the president as "[a new hope](#)" in 2014, hailing Jokowi's narrow victory over Prabowo as the [survival of Indonesian democracy](#). Ten years later, Jokowi has allied with his erstwhile opponent from the 2014 and 2019 elections, the purported military strongman Prabowo, with his son Gibran bolstering the latter's presidential ticket.

Jokowi's political prowess, evident in his ability to [co-opt](#) former political opponents, resulted in an all-powerful coalition in the House of Representatives. During his second term, the pro-government coalition held approximately 82% of the seats – the [highest](#) percentage in the post-Soeharto era. Consequently, many of the president's agendas have been virtually unopposed: the Omnibus Bill on Job Creation, the revision of the Village Law, and the State Civil Service Law, among others.

Here, Jokowi's insight into the majority Javanese society and his Javanese leadership mindset helped him achieve his policy outcomes. Many had questioned and doubted his ability to lead in the past. However, the president has proven them wrong.



Indonesia's seventh president, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, was inaugurated on 20 October 2014, and retained the position for two terms. His brand of Javanese leadership has no doubt influenced the landscape of Indonesian "democracies" in the country, which a Prabowo presidency would need to consider in future policy making. *Image from Wikimedia Commons.*

He is now the [Bapak](#) of Indonesia, fostering the qualities of a caretaker (*pengasuh*) who embraces even his former opponents. Jokowi knew he needed to avoid showing signs of [weakness](#) by working to unite different segments of society and create a leadership that all could accept. Aside from political parties, the president co-opted activist groups (*relawan*), establishing a clientelist system with diverse allies. Consequently, Indonesian politics has been virtually [opposition-less](#) for the past 10 years.

From the victories of Jokowi, we can now see two competing visions of democracy in Indonesia: one that is familial and Javanese in nature and the other that is liberal.

Competing Visions of Democracy

For a country as large as Indonesia, a socio-economic divide among its population is almost unavoidable. The [disparity](#) between rural and urban areas has far-reaching consequences, including how each group perceives democracy.

Antlov and Cederroth rightly argued in [Leadership on Java](#) that the keyword in the notion of democracy and human rights as conceived in the Pancasila – or specifically for the Javanese in this context – is not equality but kinship (*kekeluargaan*); the country should function like a family, complete with hierarchies and moral obligations. On the one hand, the figurehead must be able to provide; on the other hand, the members of the family must be able to reciprocate such a deed – *hutang budi*, as the people would understand it.

In this familial understanding of politics, it is preferable not to have a disruptive opposition, and, similar to a family, the polity of Indonesia must be united. Thus, the winning party must be able to “welcome back” the others, just as Jokowi had done to build his grand coalition. Accordingly, Prabowo seems to have welcomed the [Nasdem party and the National Awakening Party \(PKB\)](#) into his winning coalition, with the United Development Party (PPP) rumoured to be next in line for co-optation. The resulting parliamentary supermajority that he is likely to achieve would only allow for a “soft” opposition, comprising the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and possibly PDI-P, as things stand.

Hence, the elections are seen as a mere game to play between “family” members every five years; once the game ends, everyone is expected to get back together to uphold harmony. It is now evident that Jokowi’s aim is to transform the Indonesian polity into a *negara kekeluargaan yang mempraktikkan demokrasi* or a familial state that practices democracy. In this conception of democracy, the emphasis is not on liberal democratic practices; rather, democracy is a hybrid that also encompasses Javanese familial values.

The rural population understands this type of democracy well. Although the 2024 presidential election demonstrated that some perceive democratic practices as allowing for demonstrations or harsh criticism of the government, the people in the villages instead preferred “[performance politics](#)” – democracy as measured by its ability to produce tangible results. Related to this, a [survey](#) even revealed that the rural population is more satisfied with the Widodo administration than the urban population is.

For this reason, policies like the distribution of welfare assistance (*Bansos*) are [popular](#) among the rural population. The [free lunch](#) programme promised by Prabowo resonated with the rural masses, resulting in his candidacy’s relative popularity and electability among rural inhabitants, as reflected in Indikator’s [exit poll](#).

Thus, the question posed by this group of voters is not whether democracy will flourish but “*what does democracy bring to my life?*” That Jokowi has successfully satisfied this segment of the population is unquestioned, as reflected in a survey done by the Polling Institute, showing that 60.4% of Indonesians are [pleased](#) with the current state of democracy.

Some of the urban population no doubt interpret democracy in much the same way as those in the West, emphasising individual [equality](#) and freedom. As mentioned earlier, the Jokowi administration has successfully co-opted significant segments of this population, the activists, by offering them [positions](#) in ministries and state-owned enterprises.

As a result, many of these *relawan* chose to ignore the state's illiberal policies. Even back in 2019, there was hardly a whimper of opposition when Jokowi implemented controversial policies, such as applying [repressive measures](#) against political opponents and raising the [Bansos allocation](#) as the election approached. Some of the "progressives" have only recently become vocal about these issues, following the [split](#) between Jokowi and the PDI-P as the 2024 election approached.

A Possible Future Democratic Undercurrent

Jokowi recognised the existence of two Indonesias – rural and urban. Aside from the socio-economic differences between these two segments of the population, their perceptions of democracy also differ. The wily political operator that he is, Jokowi knew how to penetrate each voter segment, in the process ensuring the continuation of his policies under a Prabowo presidency.

Nonetheless, democracy is far from dead in Indonesia. The issue is not whether democracy survives but how the people perceive democracy in this vast archipelagic country.

There are many possibilities that are not readily apparent when we analyse a situation. Critical inquiry into the evolution of Indonesia's domestic politics is not a static notion; it is one that first needs to be grounded in empirical realities rather than idealised notions, yet remains open to novel ideas that could yield better national outcomes.

As things stand, Indonesia's democracy is still struggling to find its equilibrium; it remains a contested arena, with many, including Jokowi and Prabowo, searching for a better political format that serves the 2025–2045 National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) and likely to shape and bend democracy to accord with that policy objective.

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Iran's Election May Change the Direction of Its Relations With Russia

Candidates to be Iran's next president are quick to play down the special friendship that was sought by president Raisi.

Chatham House Expert Comment

Nikolay Kozhanov

June 28, 2024

Iran's presidential election on 28 June has underlined the uncertainty surrounding the future shape of relations between Tehran and Moscow. The two main supporters of rapprochement with Russia were the president Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who were both killed in a helicopter crash in May.

Their deaths came before the two countries had managed to institutionalize relations in the form of a new long-term partnership agreement. Whether the next president will be equally interested in developing Iran's relationship with Russia is a key question.

For now, the current vector of Iranian–Russian relations appears unchanged. Both the acting [president Mohammad Mokhber](#) and acting [foreign minister Ali Bagheri](#) talk about the long-term and strategic nature of relations between the two countries.

However, the main candidates in the presidential race are all signalling that their priorities are relieving sanctions and improving the economy – not a special relationship with Moscow.

The state of Russia–Iran relations

The 2021–22 decision on a new round of rapprochement with Russia was taken at the level of the Supreme Leader. Yet, even this endorsement is not enough to guarantee that relations with Russia continue on the course Raisi had planned.

It would not take a major revision to weaken bilateral contacts: it would be enough for Tehran simply to slow down the pace of cooperation in some areas (such as arms supplies or development of the North-South corridor) to make Russian interests feel less comfortable in Iran.

As of now, the Russian–Iranian agenda is quite wide. Both countries are coordinating positions and exchange information on a number of international issues, including Iran's nuclear programme, war in Syria, the situation in the Caspian sea region, Afghanistan's political and security processes, Persian Gulf security and more.

Traditionally, Iran was of interest to Russia as an important player in oil and gas markets and a country where Russia was building its first nuclear power plant in the Middle East. In matters of military-technical cooperation, Iran acquired the important role of arms supplier to Russia after the failure of Putin's blitzkrieg in Ukraine.

Post-2022 Iran became an important player in plans for a transport corridor to circumvent sanctions – another aspect of the revitalization of Russian-Iranian economic relations.

Iran has not only taught Russia how to circumvent sanctions but also served as a means of doing so. On one hand, it offers an alternative route to the Indian Ocean and Asia, to which Moscow is reorienting. On the other hand, a process of obvious and hidden 'parallel imports' has been launched through Iran.

Yet, even the Supreme Leader may change course on Russia if the interests of the regime require it. And there are, at least, two factors that can motivate him to make corrections in relations with Russia: sanctions and the country's deteriorating economy.

Iran's economic crisis

Two problems face whoever wins Iran's presidential race: to bring the economy out of crisis and to reduce the external pressure exerted on the country through sanctions. Irrespective of their political views, all the presidential candidates promise both to the Iranian people. The difference between them lies in the details.

The most radical candidate Said [Jalili says](#) that it is necessary not only to lift the sanctions on Iran but to force the countries that imposed them to repent. The more cautious Mohammad Bagher [Ghalibaf points](#) out the need to deal with the country's issues steadily and carefully. Meanwhile, the moderate Masud Pezeshkiyan has openly criticized Iran's 'turn to the East' strategy and insists on opening the country to the West, as well as reducing tensions with the US.

As [Hamid-Reza Azizi](#) has pointed out, Tehran's 'turn to the East' policy has provided only limited economic opportunities that are not enough to offset the negative impact of sanctions. Several years after the policy was first implemented, this shortcoming has become obvious to many.

Added to this, the threat of a large-scale war in the Middle East associated with the conflict in Gaza, and the application of even greater sanctions against Tehran [are not in the interests](#) of Iran's elite.

Many of them would prefer a state of neither peace nor war, achieved through a certain level of detente with the West. The next decade might be the time that power in Iran transitions from the current Supreme Leader to his successor. And it would be important for the Iranian elite to ensure a more stable socio-economic environment inside the country to make the succession process as smooth as possible.

Candidates downplay ties to Russia

Any lifting of sanctions and restoration of ties with the West will require Tehran to revise its relations with Russia, although not necessarily immediately. Moscow is clearly aware of this. Immediately after Raisi's death, the Kremlin tried to put the discussion of the bilateral long-term agreement on pause, willing to see the outcome of the presidential race in Iran.

The Kremlin's caution is understandable. Firstly, not all candidates are interested in cooperation with Moscow. Pezeshkiyan, in the traditional vein of Iran's moderates, opposes [Tehran's unilateral reliance on cooperation with Russia and China](#). He has slyly noted that the full potential of these ties would only be revealed after sanctions are lifted and a multi-vector policy established – which implies contacts with the West.

Many supporters of the conservative camp may adhere to similar ideas. They would cite the fact that the 'turn to the East' did not produce any tangible results in terms of improving the economic situation in Iran. On the contrary, helping Moscow in its war in Ukraine has only increased the country's sanctions burden.

The favourites in the presidential race, Ghalibaf and Jalili, give Russia little hope of sincere friendship. Their speeches avoid singling out Russia as a special vector in Iranian foreign relations, instead talking about Moscow only in the context of the 'turn to the East', discussed as part of a group including China and India.

Moreover, a recent [statement](#) by Jalili reminded supporters of a sincere Iranian-Russian friendship that such ties are built exclusively under the influence of external factors and out of necessity.

Notwithstanding the candidates' positions, any revision in Iranian-Russian relations is likely to occur slowly, taking into account the foreign policy environment, which is currently not conducive to Tehran's rapprochement with its opponents.

What is more, as previous experience shows, new governments in Tehran very quickly become disillusioned with the prospects for improved relations with the West and inevitably end up focusing on ties with Russia.

The bottom line is that while there is no chance for the immediate and deep revision of Russian-Iranian ties, the erosion of the current format is quite possible in the medium term, should the new president succeed in launching the sanctions-lifting process.

Masoud Pesheshkian President of Iran

The presidential election in Iran on July 5 was won by reformist Masoud Pezeshkian, who defeated conservative Saed Jalili in the second round. Pezeshkian's surprising victory is an expression of Iranians' dissatisfaction with the situation in the country and foreign policy, and the low turnout is a signal of disapproval of the system. The president-elect has announced improved relations with the West and pro-social internal reforms. However, his hands will be tied due to the opinion of the Supreme Leader and the growing strength of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

PISM Spotlight No. 46

Patricia Sasnal

July 8, 2024

Why did Pezeszkian win?

Although elections in Iran are not free (candidates are accepted by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei), the victory of reformist Masoud Pesheshkian was not arranged by the regime. It reflects two tendencies. First, the policies of the previous president Ebrahim Raisi (who died in a plane crash on May 19th) are negatively assessed – conservative within Iran and confrontational towards the West. In the second round, around 6 million Iranians, 10% more than in the first, mobilized to vote and prevent the successor of Raisi's policies, Saed Jalili, from becoming president. Second, the turnout, which was around 20% lower than in the previous elections, may show disapproval of the entire system of the Islamic republic: 30 million Iranians did not vote at all. The public mood was most affected by the brutally suppressed demonstrations following the 2019 gasoline price hike and the crackdown on women's activism following the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022. Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon and former health minister with a mild political temperament, has promised to reduce inflation and take care of the poorest Iranians, ease website blockades, and eliminate the moral police, which could de facto even mean abolishing the requirement for women to cover their heads.

How will Pesheshkian's election change Iran's foreign policy?

Pezeshkian was diametrically opposed to his rivals in terms of foreign policy plans, proclaiming that "you can't develop in a cage." His goal will be to lift sanctions on Iran, especially the American ones, and improve relations with the West. However, the president's directional decisions must be accepted by Khamenei. It is known that he does not want an open conflict with Israel or the US. In the meantime, he can give Pezeshkian a chance to see whether a policy of improving relations will lead to the lifting of sanctions. However, if this does not work, Iran will return to the path of confrontation with the US and Europe. Until the election of the American president, both countries will avoid escalation in the Middle East.

Pesheshkian will not have authority over the IRGC. According to some reports, the organization controls more than half of Iran's economy, its nuclear and missile programs, and its support system for pro-Iranian armed groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Yemen. The controversial power of the IRGC is a subject of public debate in Iran, and it is possible that Khamenei himself wants to curtail it, and Pesheshkian would be a tool for this purpose. However, the Guard Corps may deliberately hinder the reformist in introducing changes in order to discredit him, which risks incoherence in foreign policy.

What does this mean for the European Union, including Poland, and Ukraine?

The so-called Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) expires next year, and its European states parties, Germany, France and the UK, but also the US, can expect proposals to renegotiate it. A close advisor to the president-elect is Mohammad Javad Zarif, former foreign minister and popular JCPOA negotiator on English-language social media. However, much depends on the outcome of the US elections. Iran's nuclear program, declared to be peaceful, is at an advanced stage of uranium enrichment, although according to US and Israeli intelligence data, it has not yet entered the phase of building a device.

For the EU, Pesheshkian's priority to lift sanctions is a good sign. It means that Iran may be ready to sacrifice other elements of foreign policy, such as closer relations with Russia in recent years, which, however, are not as strategically significant as those with China. Putin congratulated Pesheshkian on winning rather in a tone of threat. Iranian society is anti-Russian. Iran declares neutrality in Russia's war with Ukraine and emphasizes Ukraine's right to territorial integrity, although it supplies Russia with weapons. The EU should use these declarations and condition the improvement of relations with Iran on the suspension of deliveries of Iranian drones and other weapons to Russia. Poland, which has better relations with Iran than Western European countries and very good relations with Ukraine, can play an important role here.

What Could Change Under Iran’s New ‘Reformist’ President?

President-Elect Masoud Pezeshkian campaigned as a moderate regarding issues such as the hijab law and nuclear negotiations, but the regime is unlikely to allow any sweeping changes.

CFR Expert Brief

Ray Takeyh

July 8, 2024

What does it mean that Masoud Pezeshkian is Iran’s first “reformist” president in twenty years? How does he differ from his hard-line predecessor Ebrahim Raisi?

The concept of reform has changed in recent decades. In the late 1990s, reformists such as President Mohammad Khatami sought to refashion the Islamic Republic, emphasizing the importance of parliament and other elected institutions, free press, civil society, and the rule of law. They were internationalists with hopes of reconciling with the West. But these are not the aspirations of those who call themselves reformists today. They merely want [loosened cultural restrictions](#) on women’s dress and better management of the economy.

The late President Ebrahim Raisi had a close relationship with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and had been implicated in some of the regime’s [most notorious crimes](#), namely by serving as one of the judges on the commission that sentenced thousands of dissidents to death in 1988. Before being elected president in 2021, Raisi spent his life in the judiciary and the enforcement aspects of the regime. Pezeshkian does not have such a sinister background, nor a close connection to Khamenei. He is a mild-mannered, middling parliamentarian whom regime officials allowed to run for office as a means of reengaging the public in the political process and improving the government’s public image. The latter had been tarnished by the [brutal crackdown](#) on the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement of 2022, which had spurred widespread anti-government protests after a young Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, died while in custody for violating laws on wearing the hijab.

Pezeshkian’s election has spurred speculation that Iran will pursue new negotiations over its nuclear program and an easing of tensions with the United States. What needs to happen for nuclear negotiations to resume, and how far has Iran developed its nuclear weapons capacity?

The [Iran nuclear deal](#) was hotly debated during the campaign, but it was merely a stand-in for a larger foreign policy discussion—a means for Pezeshkian to criticize his rival Saeed Jalili’s confrontational foreign policy and Jalili’s claims that Western sanctions are irrelevant and inconsequential. Pezeshkian spoke positively of the nuclear deal multiple times while campaigning.

Since the United States left the deal in 2018, Iran has resumed its nuclear activities, with UN inspectors reporting that it has enriched uranium to nearly weapons-grade levels. The position of the Iranian regime has been that, because the United States left the agreement and imposed sanctions on Iran, Washington has to come back in compliance before talks resume. This was the position of the Hassan Rouhani and Raisi governments. It could well end up being the position of the Pezeshkian government.

His election occurs at a time of sharply escalating tensions between Iran’s proxy Hezbollah and Israel. What do Pezeshkian and other reformists say about Israel and regional policies in general?

Opposition to Israel remains the point of consensus within Iran, and Pezeshkian made no moves on the campaign trail to indicate any change in that posture. At any rate, the “[axis of resistance](#)” is the core of the Islamic Republic’s foreign policy, and Hezbollah is its most potent affiliate. The confrontation between Iran and Israel escalated dramatically in April, with both sides launching direct attacks against each other’s territories for the first time in their four decades of enmity. Even if Pezeshkian wants to dial down the confrontation, Iran’s hostility toward Israel will not diminish much.

This election seems to indicate a split among Iran’s conservative factions. Will that have a bearing on preparations for a successor to the eighty-five-year-old supreme leader?

The conservatives could not agree on a unity candidate during the first round of the election, thus splitting their vote among three candidates. The two leading conservative candidates—Jalili and General Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf—refused to drop out in each other’s favor. Thus, Pezeshkian
There is little known about the [succession process](#) that seems to be underway. It could be managed entirely by Khamenei in collaboration with selective clerics in the Assembly of Experts, with little input from the president. It was rumored that Raisi had been involved in the process and may have been a candidate himself. managed to get to the second round and eventually win the election.

What Putin's Farcical 'Re-Election' Means for the EU

CEPS Commentary

Michael Emerson

March 26, 2024

Vladimir Putin now adds another six years to his reign in the Kremlin after 'winning' a fraudulent election on 17 March with 88 % of the vote. Now he may feel inclined to become even more aggressive towards Ukraine and the rest of Europe. The risks for the EU and its civilisation are now truly existential. If we rule out appeasement, a counter-offensive must now be developed.

Putin began his reign as president in 2000 with the ruthless suppression of Chechen separatists and the total destruction of the Chechen capital Grozny, causing around 60 000 casualties – methods he later employed on a much larger scale in Syria. His support to Syria has now overlapped with both his first aggressive acts against Ukraine in 2014, and his full-scale invasion of the country that continues to rage on.

Putin's regime has also famously engaged in political assassinations: Anna Politkovskaya, shot dead in 2006, Boris Nemtsov in 2015, and now Alexei Navalny on 16 February this year. And don't forget Yevgeny Prigozhin, former commander of the Wagner militia, who met a sticky end in an unexplained plane crash after his attempted coup in June 2023.

Creating chaos, wreaking havoc, and believing in nothing

Putin's overriding obsession is to restore Russia as a great power, based on his historic mission to lead a Russian world that includes Ukraine and Belarus as one people. Externally he sees Russia as a crusader (alongside China) to overthrow the West's global hegemony.

This year, Putin could seek some new version of the post-2014 Minsk agreements that had implicitly endorsed the then-territorial status quo, which left the door open for the 2022 invasion. Putin aims to [take Odesa next](#) and the whole of the Ukrainian coast down to Moldova, allowing him to re-establish Transnistria as an effective Russian military base and overthrow Chisinau's current pro-European leadership, thus ending Moldova's EU membership bid.

In Europe, Putin will continue trying to undermine the EU, with disinformation and the cultivation of allies such as Victor Orban and various far-right parties. If Trump is re-elected, Putin will absolutely relish the prospect of him taking a wrecking ball to NATO (although Trump seems to be already [back-peddling](#) on this). In the wider world he will keep working to build anti-Western alliances (with China) and will seek to deepen cooperation with India and the other BRIC states. At the lowest level, his semi-private militias will support any local African autocrat keen on booting out the West.

So with Putin in place for at least another six years, the EU has a choice between appeasement or developing a tangible counter-strategy. Rejecting appeasement outright, a counter-strategy should have three pillars.

It's time to play hardball

First, no more Minsk agreements. France and Germany have seen their illusions shattered. The EU has for Ukraine impressively moved on with agreeing to open accession negotiations and its civilian EUR 50 billion aid package. It has innovated on procuring weapons and ammunition for Ukraine, but will have to do much more if the US Congress does not agree to President Biden's USD 60 billion package. In short, the EU must do what it takes to help Ukraine triumph.

Second, Russia's pretensions at being a leader of the Global South have to be undermined by exposing its hypocrisy and lack of any normative legitimacy. In an under-reported session of the UN Security Council on 12 March, the EU's High Representative Josep Borrell gave a good account of what the EU was doing on the world stage.

Especially interesting was the [contrasting speeches](#) that followed from the Russian and Chinese ambassadors. The Russian indulged in a long and violent diatribe against the EU, accusing it of acting in an aggressive and expansionist manner in the worst of colonial traditions. The Chinese ambassador for his part welcomed the EU for its multilateralism and efforts in favour of peace. The Russian speech was ridiculous and exemplifies how Putin's global standing can – and should – be degraded. Consequently, the EU should intensify its cooperation with the major democracies of the Global South – Brazil, India and [Indonesia](#).

Third, at home the EU has to consolidate its own civilizational appeal among its citizens in a straightforward democratic manner – the upcoming European elections will be a major test for this. The ideas of the Russia-leaning extremist parties must be out-competed by those representing core European values. Finally, the EU's enlargement policies need to [be improved](#), made credible and translated into real advances for all parties involved.

Many heads will have to come together to realise such a three-pronged strategy. But with Putin's election 'victory', there's now no other choice. Appeasement is off the table – Europe needs to unite and get serious about the truly existential threat that Putin's brutal regime poses.

Coalition Government and Future of South Africa's Foreign Policy

With some political manoeuvrability and the strong leadership of President Ramaphosa, the ANC is expected to continue to remain in power.

Raisina Debates Expert Speak

Samir Bhattacharya

June 18, 2024

Background

On 29th May, South Africa held its seventh national election. The results hardly came as a [surprise](#) when the incumbent African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary majority. Since it transitioned to democratic government in 1994, the ANC has always held the absolute majority in the South African Parliament. Indeed, since 1999, the ANC's vote share has consistently declined (refer Figure 2). However, this time, it fell drastically to [40.2 percent from 57.5 percent](#) in the last election of 2019, and for the first time in the history of South Africa, the country will witness a coalition government at the national level.

Later, the ANC called for a '[National Unity](#)' coalition, where any party and every party can join and participate in the governance along with the ANC. As it stands now, three parties agreed to join the ANC-led Unity government, which includes the Democratic Alliance (DA), along with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and Patriotic Alliance (PA), and have agreed to join the coalition. Interestingly, the centrist DA, the second-largest party, has been the principal opposition. Also, in contrast to the left-leaning ANC, PA is a far-right party. Given this extreme contrast, some [prefer to call it a coalition government instead of a unity government](#). The new government will continue to be led by the incumbent President Cyril Ramaphosa.

After marathon calls and negotiations between the ANC and other parties, it was decided that ANC leader Angela Thokozile "Thoko" Didiza would get the Speaker of the Parliament position and DA leader Dr Annelie Lotriet would be the Deputy Speaker. The rest of the cabinet positions are expected to be allocated according to the number of seats a party gained.

Messy political riddle of coalition

South Africa's election has undoubtedly delivered a shocking reality check to President Ramaphosa by denying his party an outright majority in the Parliament. Moreover, although his party got way more votes than its nearest rival party, this setback will severely restrict his policy choices. As Ramaphosa

will remain dependent on other parties to keep the government functional, it will most certainly impact the stability or the direction of Ramaphosa 2.0.

The nature of South Africa's fractured democracy was exposed when more than 250 parties, the highest in the history of elections in South Africa, registered for the election. As around [50 political parties](#) contested the election, some also viewed it as [political pluralism](#). Ironically, only a few nurtured national-level ambition or demonstrated any comprehensive national vision. Their poll manifestos were limited to domestic issues without any foreign policy implications. Most of these parties participated merely to inflict some damage on the ANC's vote bank.

Further, the parties in the coalition are yet to develop any common minimum agenda as their ideas of governance are highly diverse and often contradictory. For example, DA, although agreed to join the coalition, staunchly opposes ANC's Broad-based [Black Economic Empowerment \(BEE\)](#) programme. South Africa introduced the BEE program to improve the representation of black people in the economy, thereby redressing the historical injustice of the apartheid era, resulting in their social and economic exclusion. DA also opposes the [National Health Insurance \(NHI\) Bill](#) and the creation of a state fund towards providing free healthcare to every South African resident.

Implications for the continent and beyond

As there exist several ideological divergences, this would undoubtedly impact South Africa's foreign policy. Nowhere is this crack more palpable than regarding the question of great power politics. On one hand, DA wants to have a [pro-West, pro-business](#) foreign policy. On the other hand, former President Jacob Zuma-led uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) and firebrand radically left Malema-led Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) would be in the opposition alliance "[Progressive Caucus](#)". Contrary to DA, the opposition alliance has a [pro-Russia](#) approach. The newly formed MK party expects South Africa to keep its distance from the West and has a [pro-BRICS policy](#). As a result, the new government will have its task cut out concerning its foreign policy and, above all, the tricky balancing act against China, Russia and the West.

Furthermore, South Africa has important stakes in many other international issues and forums. This January, South Africa went to the [International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#), accusing Israel of genocide. However, the DA's proximity to Western positions, its [support for Israel](#) and its strategic ambiguity over the Palestinian cause could significantly alter South Africa's Palestine policy. On the other hand, as MK and EFF have joined hands, they would pressurise ANC to raise South Africa's [anti-Israel stand](#), thereby bolstering South Africa's voice for Palestine.

Irrespective of these complex contradictions, the priority of the new government would be the revival of its sluggish economy and the creation of employment. Hence, Ramaphosa 2.0 must shape a pragmatic foreign policy that encourages trust from the investor community while avoiding having to choose overtly one power over another as a dominant partner. South Africa's growth and stability are intrinsically linked to all the superpowers as well as the Global South, including its fellow BRICS

nations. Under these circumstances, South Africa must retain its nonalignment approach and strategic autonomy vis-à-vis its foreign policy.

Conclusion

South Africa is a major international player, as reflected in its membership in forums like G20, BRICS, and other international issues. It is also the [largest economy](#) of the African continent, recently surpassing Nigeria. The fact that multiple parties across the aisle will be forced to work together can work as a [blessing in disguise](#). It can create social cohesion among different segments of society as each party represents different sets of electorates. However, South Africa lacks any legislative or constitutional framework regulating how the proposed unity government should be set up. Considering the vast internal ideological divergence, at times, it would be difficult to get a clear policy position.

Undoubtedly, South Africa finds itself in uncharted water. Nevertheless, with some political manoeuvrability and the strong leadership of President Ramaphosa, the ANC is expected to sail the ship safely. South Africa still draws strength from its democratic framework, which continues to serve as a pillar of inclusion and stability. Therefore, instead of panicking, countries across the world must demonstrate flexibility in working with the new coalition government.

The functional details of the coalition are not clear yet and will slowly shape up in due time. Notwithstanding, a stable South Africa would be crucial not only for its people but also for the continent and beyond.

How Will SA's New Coalition Government Steer Foreign policy?

The challenge of decision making by consensus may see South Africa adopting more middle-of-the-road policies on pressing global challenges.

ISS Today

Priyal Singh

July 2, 2024

South Africa's political landscape has changed dramatically since the African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary majority on 29 May, compelling it to form a Government of National Unity (GNU). This new political reality could have far-reaching implications for the country's international relations over the next five years.

The recent appointment of Ronald Lamola as Minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) may signal that the broad contours of South Africa's foreign policy will remain unchanged. International relations will continue to be guided by the Constitution and underpinned by the ANC's ideological adherence to Pan-Africanism and progressive internationalism.

However, questions concerning the nature and trajectory of South African foreign policy under the coalition government may be far trickier to determine.

An ANC minister at the helm of DIRCO (coupled with two ANC deputies) cannot gloss over the deep and glaring foreign policy fissures between certain GNU parties – particularly the ANC and Democratic Alliance (DA).

Can DA officials square their positions on South Africa's responses to the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, for example, which have been largely framed under the ANC's overarching commitment to progressive [internationalism](#)? Can the GNU remain faithful to the ANC's framing of Pan-Africanism while the Patriotic Alliance (PA) persists with its [hardline](#) approach to illegal immigration

These predictable schisms are perhaps less important to the day-to-day functioning of DIRCO or the Presidency's international relations activities. But they are critical in determining the broad outline of South African foreign policy over the next five years.

If the GNU doesn't present a united front on pressing global developments, political opposition forces could easily attack and undermine the country's international relations. A lack of consensus could also lead to a less decisive, incoherent approach – especially if the institutional links between the executive and legislative arms of foreign policy making are subject to the GNU's principle of sufficient [consensus](#).

This could be avoided if GNU parties recognise these potential pitfalls beforehand, and agree to ringfence major foreign policy decisions as the sole preserve of a single party, based on the Cabinet minister's political affiliation.

This could be done in exchange for party-specific influence in other policy domains, which would minimise internal GNU squabbles and prioritise action and expediency over constant consensus-making. Such an arrangement could be bolstered by a clear agreement detailing Cabinet's prerogatives and executive powers in the realm of foreign policy. The likelihood of either scenario playing out, however, remains to be seen.

The GNU's internal governance arrangements could also lead to a reordering and rationalising of the working relationships between different nodes of the foreign policy-making establishment. This includes the Office of the Presidency, DIRCO, the ANC National Executive Committee's (NEC) international relations sub-committee, and the National Assembly's Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation.

Depending on how the GNU works to achieve sufficient consensus, the ANC's NEC sub-committee may need to consistently engage with the worldviews of the DA, Freedom Front Plus and PA, among others. Many of these parties hold diametrically opposing [positions](#) on how the country should respond to pressing international developments.

This trade-off between the internal coherence and sustainability of the GNU versus party-specific pressures may be the single greatest factor informing continuity and change. That means the seventh administration's international relations may depend less on who occupies key executive positions, and more on how governance and GNU party structures work together in formulating and implementing foreign policy.

This won't be easy, as the recent national election results have pushed these structures into uncharted territory. The ANC's 71-seat [loss](#) in Parliament will also undoubtedly reshape power dynamics among members of the International Relations and Cooperation Portfolio Committee, and its subsequent utility in law making, oversight and budget allocation.

The net effect of this new governance arrangement may well be that more middle-of-the-road foreign policy outcomes consistently win the day. That is not an inherently bad thing for the country's international relations.

In fact, an approach that opens up foreign policy to a more eclectic mix of actors who are compelled to achieve consensus, may help to temper the country's international relations. Over the longer term, this could entrench a culture of greater political pragmatism as South Africa navigates an increasingly volatile and uncertain global environment in pursuit of its national interest.

As the fortunes of the GNU parties become increasingly intertwined, this new composition of foreign policy actors should actively incentivise consensus building, rather than simply being compelled to do so.

The GNU's stability and effective functioning – at least until the next national elections – could provide this incentive, as all members risk losing support if they fail in their collective governance efforts. Hopefully the GNU parties arrive at this conclusion sooner rather than later.



Opposition Wins Parliamentary Elections in South Korea

Oskar Pietrewicz

In South Korea's parliamentary elections held on 10 April, the opposition Democratic Party won 175 seats in the 300-seat National Assembly. Its victory will make it much more difficult for President Yoon Suk-yeol, of the People's Power Party, to achieve his domestic policy goals by the end of his term in 2027. It may also affect South Korea's foreign policy in the long run, manifesting in less-explicit siding with the U.S. in its rivalry with China and moving away from the socially contested rapprochement with Japan.

What was at stake in the election?

The parliamentary elections in South Korea will not lead to the formation of a new government. The new parliamentary majority can pass or reject laws prepared by the executive branch, headed by the president, with the prime minister his deputy. The election was an assessment of Yoon's presidency since he took office in 2022. The opposition liberal Democratic Party (DP) hoped to maintain at least its [existing majority](#) (180 seats in the National Assembly), allowing it to reject presidential laws and push through its legislative initiatives. The ruling conservative People's Power Party (PPP), on the other hand, wanted, above all, to keep the opposition from winning 200 or more seats, which would allow it to reject presidential vetoes, amend the constitution, or even initiate impeachment proceedings against the head of state.

What were the election results?

The DP won the election, taking 175 parliamentary seats (58%) along with its satellite party. The opposition was further strengthened by 12 seats from another liberal grouping, the Korean Reconstruction Party, which formed for the election campaign. As a result, the liberal camp can count 187 seats altogether. The PPP, together with its sister party, won 108 seats. The remaining five seats went to three smaller groups. The turnout was 67%, the highest since the

1992 general election. The election result was mainly influenced by public dissatisfaction with the increasingly high cost of living, including rising property and food prices. Also working against the PPP was the president's unwillingness to compromise with the opposition and corruption scandals involving his associates, such as the case of the former defence minister.

What do the results mean for South Korean domestic politics?

Yoon is the first president in the democratic history of the Republic of Korea to rule without a parliamentary majority for his entire five-year term. The PPP's loss in these elections confirmed that the majority of the public is against the president, who, according to polls, only enjoys around 30% support. As in the last two years, the parliamentary majority will have the power to reject laws introduced by the government. Since the beginning of Yoon's term, parliament has passed only about one in three proposed laws. Given the liberals' inability to override the president's veto, however, legislative gridlock may persist on many issues, hampering the implementation of Yoon's most important projects, such as a programme to support the biggest companies (*chaebols*) and the development of nuclear power. The PPP's election loss is likely to lead to a reconstitution of the government, as the prime minister and the president's advisers and secretaries for domestic and economic affairs have resigned. The negative assessment of Yoon's policies

PISM SPOTLIGHT

may also lead the PPP to urge him to withdraw from the party so that he is not a liability to it ahead of the 2027 presidential election.

How could the election results influence Yoon's foreign policy?

Foreign policy is the executive's responsibility, and the president can act in this area without parliamentary approval. However, the parliamentary majority can indirectly influence foreign policy by even more sharply criticising the president's unpopular decisions. This includes [the rapprochement with Japan, strengthening of trilateral cooperation with the U.S. and Japan](#), and the Yoon administration's [firmness with North Korea](#). The opposition may also urge the government to soften its pro-U.S. stance, manifested by South Korea increasingly siding with the U.S. in its rivalry with China. There also may be growing pressure from parliament on the government to support high-tech exports, such as computer chips, to China, although the [U.S. has urged its allies to limit such activity](#). Opposition

politicians also accuse Yoon of supporting Ukraine excessively and unnecessarily. The parliamentary majority may also make it difficult to pass legislation to increase foreign engagement, such as development aid and ratification of international agreements.

It is possible, however, that the president, who has been uncooperative with the opposition for the past two years, will maintain or even strengthen his current [foreign policy directions](#), including the hard line towards North Korea and [intensified cooperation with NATO](#). The low public support may weaken Yoon's credibility in his partners' eyes, for example, in trilateral cooperation with the U.S. and Japan, and in their perception of the sustainability of South Korean engagement. The opposition's win also increases the chances that its candidate could win the 2027 presidential election. If this were to happen, South Korea might move away from the issues most contested by the DP and criticised in public opinion, such as the Yoon's conciliatory stance towards Japan on historical issues.

Turkish Voters Punish Erdoğan for the Economy and the Gaza War

Remi Daniel | No. 1845 | April 10, 2024

The results of the municipal elections that were held across Turkey on March 31 surprised many Turkish commentators because of the magnitude of the blow that voters delivered to the government. For the first time since it came to power, the party of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did not finish in first place. In contrast, the opposition recorded a historic achievement. Not only did the opposition prevent Erdoğan-backed candidates from retaking control of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, but it also recorded victories in many other cities, including places that were considered conservative strongholds. Turkish voters sent a clear message to Erdoğan and his party—frustration and anger over the prolonged economic crisis. Some of Erdoğan’s traditional supporters also wanted to punish him for what they see as his hypocrisy over the Palestinian issue. Turkey will not have an election for several years now, but it remains to be seen whether this period will be characterized by a change of policy from the Erdoğan government, including on the international stage.

The opposition’s victory in the Turkish municipal election and the extent of that win took the country’s political commentators by surprise. They had been expecting a close race, given the extensive efforts by the government to defeat a disunited opposition, which had already suffered a stinging defeat in the national elections of 2023. But the Republican People’s Party (CHP), founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and loyal to Atatürk’s values of secularism, nationalism, and a center-left economic approach, recorded a historic achievement on March 31. For the first time since 1977, the CHP is now the largest party in Turkey, garnering 38 percent of the vote. The CHP maintained control of the three largest cities in Turkey and even widened its winning margin there. The party also recorded victories in other big cities and made inroads in regions that until now were considered more conservative and, in some cases, strongholds of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

For Erdoğan’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the election results were a bitter defeat. With just 35 percent of the vote, the party failed to attract voters for the first time since it was established and ran for elections in 2002. The plans of the Turkish president—who had asked voters to “break records” in terms of electing his party and who made no secret of his burning desire to regain control of Istanbul—failed less than a year after his victory in the presidential election.

Moreover, the AKP also faced the challenge of an Islamist rival, the New Welfare Party. With its name, symbol, and leadership highly reminiscent of the party in which Erdoğan began his political career in the 1990s, the New Welfare Party has been trying for

several years to attract voters disappointed with the AKP's more moderate approach. After all, the AKP based its political success on deviating from Islamist orthodoxy to attract a broader base of voters, and according to extremist Islamists, it did not do enough to promote religion in Turkey. After forging an alliance with Erdoğan in last year's national elections, the New Welfare Party decided this year to run independently. This gamble turned out to be successful, as the party finished in third place, with 6 percent of the vote.

One of the main reasons why the Turkish people chose to punish the government is the dire state of the country's economy. Turkey is currently facing a severe economic crisis, with consistently high levels of inflation. For years, Erdoğan adhered to economic policies that went against conventional monetary theories; however, he changed course after last year's national elections and appointed a finance minister who brought Turkey back in line with economic orthodoxy. Despite the measures taken to control prices, they have not yet had any significant impact and have actually worsened the personal financial situation of many Turks. The generous measures that the government announced toward the end of the election campaign and the suggestion that some of them might only be fulfilled if the AKP won the election did not convince voters, especially pensioners, who form a significant portion of the Turkish population and have been heavily affected by the economic crisis. In contrast to the national elections in 2023, in which voters were more concerned about issues of national security and identity, Turkish voters used these municipal elections as a way to express their frustration with the government.

Moreover, the election campaign was marked by a lively discussion about the war in the Gaza Strip and Israel–Turkey relations. President Erdoğan tried to gain support from voters by highlighting his strong condemnation of the Israeli government and the generous aid that Turkey sends to the Palestinians; however, this tactic failed. On the contrary, AKP's rivals were highly critical of the government for not ending all commercial ties with Israel. The New Welfare Party was particularly vocal on this issue and even said that every vote for the AKP was like sending a bullet to the Israeli military to continue its “genocide” in Gaza. Hence, the defeat of Erdoğan's party, compared to the significant success of a rival Islamist party that takes a more radical stance on the Gaza conflict, can be attributed to some of the AKP's conservative, Islamist base wanting to punish the president for his inconsistent approach toward Israel. The influence of the Gaza war on the Turkish election campaign also contributed to the overall decline of parties identified with Turkish nationalism, which decreased from 20 percent of the vote last year to around 10 percent this year. This phenomenon of the decline of the nationalist parties illustrates, *inter alia*, the change in the Turkish political discourse, which, in 2023, focused on the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey, while this year centered on the war in Gaza—an issue about which the nationalist parties do not have any distinct message compared to the other parties.

Although the municipal elections have redrawn the map of Turkish politics, Erdoğan has no need to worry about his continued presidency in the short term. The next planned elections will be held in 2028, and Erdoğan has a solid parliamentary majority, so he will continue to rule the country with broad room to maneuver and enough time to overturn the most recent election results. In addition, despite the AKP's loss, the overall outcome reflects certain trends that could be positive for Erdoğan. Taken together, the New Welfare Party and the AKP won more than 40 percent of the vote, which corresponds to the level of support that Erdoğan enjoyed in the past. The New Welfare Party had been allied to Erdoğan; it is ideologically close to his party on many issues, and it even told Erdoğan that it would drop out of the election in exchange for the AKP adopting some of its political agenda. Therefore, it seems that he will be able to bury the hatchet with the New Welfare Party in the future and once again will be able to count on its voters.

Nonetheless, the new political map will make it harder for Erdoğan to promote his political agenda. Among other things, the president will have to rethink his plans for amending the Turkish constitution by means of a referendum since he is no longer assured of a majority of the votes. Moreover, the results of the municipal election strengthen the opposition. First of all, after some 20 years in which no strong figure emerged to challenge Erdoğan's dominance on the political stage, the mayors from the opposition—especially those reelected in Istanbul and Ankara—are a growing threat to the Turkish president. Second, after decades of trying to defeat Erdoğan by means of complex coalitions that ended up in failure, the outcome of this election—with the CHP recording a major achievement and the other opposition parties falling short—created a new order in the opposition camp. Now, there is one main party that is able to mobilize opponents of the regime around it. Even Kurdish citizens decided to vote tactically, by supporting pro-Kurdish parties in districts where they had a chance of winning and voting for the CHP elsewhere, such as in Istanbul. Finally, the CHP's successes in the municipal elections mean that it now controls local authorities that represent around 66 percent of the country's entire population and around 80 percent of its GDP and resources; these resources will be important tools in future campaigns. In light of this, Erdoğan will face a stronger and more effective opposition in the next national elections.

In any case, players on the Turkish political stage will have to prepare for an unequal fight—something that was illustrated again in last month's election, which highlighted the ambivalent nature of Turkish democracy. Masses of Turkish citizens participated in the election; the 78 percent voter turnout, which is relatively low when compared to previous elections in Turkey, is actually quite high relative to other countries. Moreover, the voting was as a whole proper and correct. One additional interesting fact is that more women than ever were elected, confirming the slow trend toward more female involvement in the Turkish political system, which was already evident in last year's

national election. At the same time, the opposition was forced to conduct its campaign under trying circumstances, against state institutions, and a media that were comprehensively mobilized behind government candidates. In addition, since the judicial system is no longer independent, candidates and even elected mayors from the opposition camp are under threat of political detention. For example, the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, is awaiting a retrial after he was sentenced in 2022 to two and a half years in prison for what the government claimed were comments that insulted the election committee. In a more sweeping case, the government systematically dismissed mayors from southeastern Turkey, where there is a Kurdish majority, and replaced them with regime loyalists. Government attempts to do something similar in the aftermath of last month's municipal elections are already causing tension in the region. Therefore, the most common expression used to describe elections in Turkey—"free but not fair"—fit the reality this time, too, and should also characterize the next election.

The picture that emerges from the Turkish municipal elections is complex, especially for anyone seeking to analyze it from an Israeli perspective. Contrary to Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz's tweet after the election, which claimed that the result reflected the price that Erdoğan paid for his anti-Israel policies, the exact opposite could also be argued: Turkey's position on the war in the Gaza Strip harmed Erdoğan in the election, since he did not go far enough in the measures he took against Israel, according to a large percentage of the electorate. Still, it is too soon to say whether the election will influence Ankara's policies, especially its foreign policy. In a speech after the preliminary election results were announced, Erdoğan described the outcome as a "turning point" for him and his party, which suggests that changes could be afoot. However, without elections on the horizon, Turkey is entering a period during which Erdoğan no longer is concerned about the pressure of public opinion. Turkey's foreign policy, and especially its approach toward Israel, is influenced by conflicting factors too. There are those in the Turkish political system who will pressure Erdoğan to take a more extreme position vis-à-vis Israel and they will have been bolstered by the gains made by the New Welfare Party. It is safe to assume, however, that Ankara will continue to be wary of translating aggressive rhetoric into reality-changing measures against Israel, since the Turkish government recognizes the importance of maintaining continued relations with Jerusalem, in order to preserve its regional standing and help stabilize its economy.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg

SWP Comment

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The UK and the EU: New Opportunities, Old Obstacles

Prospects for UK-EU Cooperation in Foreign and Security Policy after the UK Elections

Nicolai von Ondarza

Labour has won a landslide in the United Kingdom (UK) snap elections and will now lead the government. Following the mutual estrangement caused by Brexit, among other changes, this provides an opportunity to revitalise relations with the European Union (EU). Particularly in foreign, security and defence policy, cooperation has already increased in the wake of Russia's war of aggression, but mainly on an ad hoc basis. In the medium term, it is not a question of reversing Brexit, but rather of establishing an EU-UK Common Strategic Initiative – in other words, a new model for structured relations with a partner that is very important for the EU and Germany. Here, the EU should also show more flexibility than in the past.

The snap elections called by Rishi Sunak for 4 July 2024 have brought a massive change to the UK political landscape. After 14 years of Tory-led government, the Labour Party has gained a vast absolute majority of 412 seats – 63 per cent of the House of Commons. This gives the new UK Prime Minister, Kier Starmer, a major mandate and political room for manoeuvre to change UK politics.

At the same time, the election results are first and foremost a rejection of the Conservative Party. The party's vote share has halved, resulting in a loss of more than two-thirds of its seats, with losses to both to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. However, the biggest electoral threat to the Conservatives were Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, which gained 14 per cent of the

votes to the right of the Tories. Throughout the election campaign, Farage put additional pressure on the Tories to harden their stance on migration issues, climate policy and relations with the EU, for example by calling for the country to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights. With the biggest electoral loss in the last century, the Conservatives now face a huge internal fight about their future strategy, in particular on whether they should move further to the right to fight Reform UK, or challenge Labour at the centre.

From the EU's perspective, there should be opportunities for a limited revitalisation of bilateral relations with the new Labour government. One thing is clear for now, however: A reversal of Brexit is not on the table, even for the Labour Party, at least in



the medium term. This is because Labour categorically rules out a return to the single market or customs union, but also to freedom of movement and any form of dynamic alignment to EU rules. In addition to the goal of technical adjustments to the EU-UK trade agreement (e.g. in the veterinary sector), Labour emphasises above all its interest in increased cooperation with the EU in foreign and security policy.

The political wounds that the Brexit process has inflicted on the political establishment and the population run deep, and neither of the two major parties wants to revisit the fundamental decisions made between 2016 and 2020. This is not changed by the fact that, according to polls, around 60 per cent of people in the country now believe Brexit was a mistake and that there are even signs of a majority in favour of rejoining the EU.

Given this political constellation, new thinking on the EU-UK bilateral relationship should initially focus on foreign and security policy after the elections. On the one hand, the new Labour government is likely to have more political leeway in this area, which is still largely separate from the complex economic relationship. Moreover, the Labour Party has made it clear that it intends to step up cooperation in this area. On the other hand, the EU is also particularly interested in involving London in this sphere. Given Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – but also the prospect of Donald Trump's potential return to the White House – foreign, security and defence policy will be one of the EU's key priorities in the coming years. With its substantial defence industry and military and diplomatic resources, the UK is likely to be an important partner – albeit as a third country.

Quick start needed on foreign policy

Freshly elected, the new Prime Minister, Kier Starmer, will have to hit the ground running on foreign policy. In the two weeks

following the elections, there are two important dates for shaping European foreign and security policy: the NATO summit in Washington from 9 to 11 July, and the next summit of the European Political Community (EPC) on 18 July. The UK will host the latter and welcome leaders from up to 47 European countries. The agenda for the meeting was set by the previous government, while the new government will be responsible for organising it.

The fact that the new Prime Minister will be in office by 9 July is due to the UK's political system. The first-past-the-post electoral system usually produces a clear majority, including the large Labour majority of more than 63 per cent of seats in these elections, despite the party scoring only 34 per cent of the popular vote. In addition, the Prime Minister is appointed by the King on the basis of the results of the elections, with no parliamentary vote of approval required. The new UK government will thus be fully operational for both summits. It should therefore be possible to discuss the scope for cooperation with the new British government at the EPG summit in mid-July.

Foreign policy rapprochement with reservations

The UK's foreign and security relations with the EU hit their low point after Brexit. First of all, it should be emphasised that London continues to work with the EU member states in many ways – through NATO and very close bilateral relations, but also via formats such as the G7, the E3 (France, Germany and the UK) and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). Prime Minister Theresa May, who was in office from 2016 to 2019, originally aimed to establish a security partnership with the EU after Brexit. However, mutual relations reached a low point in 2020/21 after her successor, Boris Johnson, rejected any structured relationship with the EU on foreign, security and defence policy at the start of negotiations on the future relationship between Brussels and the UK. The UK government's 2021 strategy

document did not even mention the EU as a partner, focusing instead on “Global Britain” and maintaining bilateral relations.

However, two factors have led to a “thaw” between Brussels and London on foreign and security policy. First, after Sunak took office in 2022, both sides were able to settle their differences over Northern Ireland with the Windsor Agreement, thereby overcoming mutual distrust concerning the special arrangements for this part of the country. Second, Russia’s war of aggression highlighted the need for closer cooperation. In early March 2022, a few days after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the then UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss attended a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council (though it did not happen again). The EU and UK coordinated closely on sanctions trilaterally with the United States (US) and within the G7. The UK is also in the process of joining the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) military mobility project. It has helped to organise the EU’s training operation for the Ukrainian armed forces, having already conducted its own bilateral training for Kiev. It also participates in the Donor Coordination Platform for Ukraine, co-chaired by the EU Commission, including the secondment of a UK official to the relevant secretariat based at the Commission.

However, the majority of cooperation on Ukraine does not take place bilaterally between the EU and UK, but within a multi-lateral framework (notably NATO and the G7) or through bilateral and minilateral cooperation with individual EU states. This is because the Sunak government continued to reject a structured dialogue on foreign and security policy; it turned down the invitation to a regular dialogue format from the President of the European Council, Charles Michel.

The biggest difference in foreign and security policy between the new Labour government and the previous Tory government will therefore concern cooperation with the EU. Specifically, Labour wants a “UK-EU security pact” with Brussels. In its vision, this security pact should include

closer coordination not only on military security, but also on the relevant issues of economic, climate, health, cyber and energy policy. Such a security pact should be explicitly in line with – rather than in opposition to – NATO’s collective defence, as the Alliance remains for Labour the primary framework for British and European security. In addition, as with the Conservative governments since Brexit, the party is seeking to develop bilateral relations with close EU and NATO partners such as France, Poland, Ireland and, in particular, Germany. Remarkably, both Labour and the Conservatives included in their manifestos the goal of a UK-German defence pact along the lines of the Lancaster House Treaty between France and the UK.

Despite the mutual interest, however, it remains difficult to strike a balance between resources and participation rights, as best illustrated by the “Galileo problem”. Even during the negotiations on the Brexit withdrawal agreement, Theresa May sought a security partnership with the EU. However, the first major setback was London’s decision to not participate in the European satellite navigation system, Galileo, which was developed with significant input from British companies and could benefit in the long term from the involvement of the UK space industry. However, the EU insisted on participation on the same basis as all other third countries, which the UK felt was too restrictive in view of its financial and industrial contributions. There is a similar danger in the area of defence cooperation, for example, where there should be a high level of mutual interest in cooperation. From the EU’s point of view, however, this requires participation according to the standard rules for third countries, that is, without any decision rights, which is unacceptable to London, given the size of the British defence industry – regardless of who is in government. To date, the Labour Party has not indicated how it intends to solve this “Galileo problem”.

Constants and potential shifts

In terms of thematic cooperation between the EU and the UK, it should be noted that the Sunak government and Labour are closely aligned on many other key foreign and security policy issues, where policy change is therefore expected to be limited. This shows that Starmer has brought his party closer to the foreign and security policy mainstream in London after the years under Corbyn. But Rishi Sunak has also made some course corrections compared to his short-lived predecessor, Liz Truss.

The alignment is first and foremost about UK support for Ukraine and London's fundamental positioning in the European security order. As early as 2021, the British government identified Russia as the "most acute threat" to European security; London provided early and substantial military support to Ukraine. Alongside Germany, the UK is the largest European supporter of Ukraine in quantitative terms, but unlike Berlin it has taken a pioneering role in supplying new weapons systems and changing the West's positioning, for instance regarding strikes on Russian territory. The government's course has always been supported by the Labour Party, which recently called for even greater support for Kiev. Under Labour, London will likely also position itself as a key player with a claim to leadership in European security policy, maintaining close relations with the countries of northern, central and eastern Europe as well as France.

The "special relationship" with the US also remains of central importance to the UK. From London's perspective, US support for Ukraine has once again highlighted Washington's importance for European security — and thus Britain's goal of keeping the US as its closest ally. This remains true even in view of Trump's possible return to the White House. Not only the Sunak government, but also Labour's shadow and likely new foreign secretary, David Lammy, emphasised that the UK would work closely with Washington on foreign and security policy, regardless of who wins the US elec-

tion. The differences between the two parties are likely to be nuanced. For all their political differences, Starmer has deliberately refrained from publicly criticising Trump, and even after his conviction in the New York hush-money trial, Starmer said he would work with Trump if he were to be re-elected president. Sunak, on the other hand, is also not particularly close to Trump, but he sent his foreign secretary, David Cameron, to visit him in April 2024. A notable difference is, though, that unlike during Trump's term from 2017 to 2021, the far-right wing of the British Conservative Party is openly reaching out to the MAGA Republicans. Former Prime Ministers Johnson and Truss, among others, have called for Trump to be elected.

The UK's position in the Indo-Pacific and towards China is closely linked to the transatlantic relationship. The UK-China relationship has changed significantly over the past 15 years. Whereas Cameron, during his time as Prime Minister (2010–2016), still spoke of a "golden era" between China and the UK, Truss, for example, sought to adopt a particularly hawkish stance towards Beijing, alongside the US. Under Sunak, and now under Starmer, the UK government is moving closer to the European mainstream by viewing China's rise as an "epochal" (Sunak) or "systemic" (Lammy) challenge and emphasising "de-risking" rather than "de-coupling". Both the Conservatives and Labour emphasise the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party, but also the importance of China to the UK economy and its role as a partner in tackling global challenges such as pandemics, climate change and the regulation of artificial intelligence. With this in mind, Labour wants to complete the UK's accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership and secure a trade deal with India. It also aims to build upon the AUKUS partnership between the US, Australia and the UK.

Shifts in Middle East and climate foreign policy

The terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October and the subsequent Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip had a strong political resonance in the UK. Under Prime Minister Sunak and Foreign Secretary Cameron, London has positioned itself as a close ally of Israel, regularly coordinating with Germany. This coordination included a joint op-ed by Cameron and his German counterpart, Annalena Baerbock, in the *Sunday Times* and a partially joint trip by the duo to Israel. Starmer has long been a vocal supporter of this line as well, partly to reaffirm his policy of distancing himself from the anti-Semitic incidents that occurred in the Labour Party under his predecessor, Corbyn. However, many voices within the Labour Party, both at the grassroots level and among MPs, are calling for a change of course due to the high and rising number of victims of Israeli military operations. Starmer, in consequence, called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza earlier than Sunak, and he is likely to come under pressure from within the party to adjust Britain's Middle East policy once he takes power. In its election manifesto, Labour signalled its willingness to recognise a Palestinian state "as part of a renewed peace process".

One clear difference between the two parties is the extent to which climate action should be integrated into foreign and security policy. The UK has long been at the forefront of international climate policy, but the Conservative government recently scaled back efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to "net zero". This goal had taken a back seat in the Conservatives' plans, with their climate policy focusing instead on energy security, public acceptance of climate policy and competitiveness. Labour places more emphasis on "green growth" as part of its economic agenda, while a "clean energy alliance" is to become an important element of its foreign and security policy. Climate policy in its view should also be better integrated into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Limited fiscal room for manoeuvre

One challenge is the UK's tight fiscal leeway, including in the area of defence. Unlike Germany and many other NATO allies, the UK consistently meets the 2 per cent target. However, in contrast to many Central and Eastern European countries, it has not significantly increased its defence budget since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In addition, London's reserves have been depleted by years of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and later by aid to Ukraine. On top of this, the country's economic difficulties – not only, but also due to Brexit – will foreseeably limit what is fiscally possible.

Despite this backdrop, Sunak promised in the pre-election campaign to increase UK defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2030 (from 2.33 per cent by 2024, according to NATO). Labour has set the same percentage target but subject to "as soon as resources allow". It is worth noting that since 2014, in relations to GDP, the UK has had the lowest defence budget increases of all European NATO allies (except Croatia); even after 2022, increases here have been lower than elsewhere. With interest rates higher than in the eurozone, and both parties insisting on investing in the health and pension systems while avoiding tax rises, Labour is likely to have to keep a tight rein on its defence spending.

Outlook

After the twin elections in the summer of 2024, the EU and the UK will have the opportunity to deepen their foreign and security policy cooperation. Given an increasingly confrontational European security order with an imperialistic Russia, the global rivalries between the US and China, and Trump's possible return to the White House, Germany and the EU should have a strong interest in seizing this opportunity. Whether and to what extent this can be done depends on the mutual willing-

ness to prioritise geostrategic interests in negotiations instead of insisting on red lines.

On the one hand, the political room for manoeuvre of the new Labour government is important. In principle, Labour has a big absolute majority, which gives Starmer plenty of political space for bold political action. At the same time, the low share of the popular vote as well as the rise of Reform UK will keep public pressure up. In order to reign in calls for a much closer relationship with the EU, Starmer has thus, on the eve of the elections, ruled out any movement on the central principles of Brexit – no return to the single market or customs union, no formal mandatory adoption of EU law – during his lifetime. The Tories in opposition are also likely to protest loudly – with the support of the right-leaning media – against any rapprochement with the EU, especially as they are under pressure on this issue from the hard Brexiteers and Farage’s Reform UK party. On the other side, the Liberal Democrats and Greens might start to campaign for more movement towards the EU. Starmer’s positioning so far suggests that his new government will aim for – or will at best allow for – political rapprochement and better coordination vis-à-vis the EU, but hardly re-integration. Deepening cooperation in the largely separate field of foreign and security policy could, however, send a positive signal about this mutual interest and open up scope for closer cooperation in other areas in the medium term.

On the other hand, the EU should also show more flexibility. Throughout the Brexit negotiations, the mantra has been that the UK should not benefit from special arrangements in any area, but should be treated like any other third country. Applied to foreign, security and defence policy, this leads to the “Galileo problem” described above and, for example, the exclusion of the UK defence industry from the joint EU procurement of ammunitions. Efforts so far to involve London in European security issues in a structured way, for example through the EPC, have made little

difference to the EU-UK relationship; bilateral relations with the larger member states remain more important. At the heart of this is the formalist approach to foreign and security policy: Even without formal voting rights, London as an observer would likely carry more weight than at least 22 of the 27 EU members, given its importance in foreign and security policy as a non-member. This, in turn, means that neither the UK nor any other third country should even get a regular observer role in EU meetings. This formalist approach, however, no longer does justice to the interests of a geopolitical EU or to the UK’s status in this area.

An EU-UK Common Strategic Initiative

Instead, the EU should be open to the structured involvement of the UK in security matters in the context of a security pact, as envisaged by Labour, through a model specific to the UK, an EU-UK Common Strategic Initiative. The core feature of this new model should be a UK-specific balance between commitments, flexibility and mutual interests to be found in negotiations. The Common Strategic Initiative should be based on the principle of partnership, not (re-)integration. The level of cooperation should be between the EU institutions and the UK government, but with the close involvement of EU member states, which will continue to play the central role in foreign, security and defence policy. Finally, this initiative should be designed from the outset to complement, rather than compete with, existing cooperation, notably within NATO.

Such a project would require a new institutional framework beyond the existing ad hoc cooperation. It could consist of three elements. First, regular strategic consultations should be established at the political level – as the EU does with other strategic partners such as the US – in the form of third-country dialogues. The EU should be represented at the highest level by the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council, and at the foreign minister level by the High Representative.

These consultations should take place at least once a year; a good starting point would be the end of 2024, after the US elections. Second, at the working level, mixed working groups from EU institutions and representatives of EU member states and the UK on issues in which cooperation could be deepened would be an option. Third, London could be invited as a guest – possibly together with candidate countries and/or other partners – to selected parts of meetings of EU leaders and foreign ministers. However, participation should always be selective and limited in order to remain at the level of partnership.

Legally, such an initiative could be linked to the existing EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The TCA is explicitly designed as a framework agreement to which further individual agreements can be added in accordance with Article 2 of the TCA. These can also use and extend the common institutional framework, including the possibility of setting up specific working groups.

Most important for a Common Strategic Initiative, however, are concrete policy projects. Beyond regular foreign and security policy coordination, three areas are particularly suitable. The first would be better coordination on sanctions, underpinned by a mixed working group. Here, both sides could benefit from improving the coordination of sanctions – some of which are conducted through the G7 or the EU, US or UK – by exchanging information and harmonising the measures imposed, without relinquishing each other's decision-making autonomy. A second focus should be cooperation on defence industry and armaments. The EU has ambitions to make significant progress in this area in the current legislature, which would be important for UK industry. A third potential focus could be on climate change policy. Labour wants to put climate change at the heart of British foreign policy, and the EU and the UK have a common interest in linking their emissions trading and carbon offsetting

schemes (also planned in the UK) and promoting them globally. However, there are many other issues that could be addressed, such as support for Ukraine, cyber security and energy policy.

Germany could play a key role in the EU-UK Common Strategic Initiative. For one thing, Berlin in particular has a vested interest in involving London in European security and defence cooperation. The Anglo-German defence pact envisaged by Labour (and in the Conservative manifesto) should be embedded not only in NATO and the G7 from the outset, but also in an EU-UK security pact. In the negotiations on PESCO or the procurement of munitions, for example, France has insisted on creating the most restrictive conditions possible for third countries in the interests of European sovereignty, to the detriment of British participation. Germany, together with other partners, should work towards a pan-European interpretation of European sovereignty, with flexible, deeper and more comprehensive British involvement.



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SWP Comment 27
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Can Labour Improve Britain's Place in the World?

Keir Starmer and his foreign secretary will face difficult, early decisions on foreign policy. The test will be whether those rebuild the UK's influence, reputation and interests.

Chatham House Expert Comment

Bronwen Maddox & Olivia O'Sullivan

July 5, 2024

It is a mark of the significance of this general election that a result predicted for months still brings with it a sense of uncertainty about what will follow.

On paper, there is little difference between most elements of Labour and Conservative foreign policy. The greatest differences are on Europe and migration; on China, Ukraine, the rest, it is astonishingly similar. But there will be early decisions that will set the tone of the Labour government's approach to Britain's place in the world and begin to fill in the questions carefully left blank in the campaign.

More than that, though, whether Labour improves Britain's standing in the world will depend on whether it can fix the UK's problems at home, including its failure to achieve growth in productivity, its patchy education system, regional divergences and failing health system.

US and NATO

A first chance will come just five days after the election with the NATO summit in Washington, DC. Starmer will have a chance to repeat his support for Ukraine where he has echoed his Conservative predecessors. But he will be under pressure to clarify exactly when Labour intends to spend 2.5 per cent of GDP on defence (up from around [2.3 per cent](#) now), a point left open so far.

What is more, the US landscape has changed since he made that pledge. The evident fragility of President Joe Biden has injected new uncertainty into the presidential race. For the moment, it makes a Trump presidency more likely. The decision for Starmer is how much to try to persuade the US – as well as other wavering members of NATO – to remain a defender of Ukraine, on the grounds not just of sovereignty but European security.

Europe

There will be a second chance on 18 July when the prime minister will host around 50 European leaders for the European Political Community meeting. This is not just a chance to sound statesmanlike and to assert the UK's interest in

liberal values (including rule of law, a reputation strained by government manoeuvres since Brexit). It will be a first chance to sound out European leaders on the details of what a closer relationship might look like – as Starmer has said he wants.

Some cooperation on defence, agreements on trade of food and animal products, possible extensions of mobility to some professionals and creatives – this is easier, though not entirely straightforward – territory for both sides. But EU leaders will press the new government on why it recoiled before the election from European musings about the chance of freer movement for young people between the EU and Britain.

Starmer will also have to work out how to position his left of centre government in a Europe showing rising support for the right. He will also have to explain, given that he has vowed to jettison Rishi Sunak's Rwanda plan for dealing with illegal migration, what will replace it – all the more as alternative approaches will likely require cooperating with European countries facing similar problems.

Gaza

Starmer chose before the election to support Israel's right to defend itself in the wake of Hamas's 7 October attacks. That was a similar position to that of Sunak's government. But it came at greater cost to Starmer than to Sunak, given the heat of the opposition among Labour supporters to Israel's actions in Gaza.

He will be under pressure at home to toughen the stance against Israel, and will want to test the UK's influence with the US to increase pressure on the Israeli government. He may, however, be confronted with the fact that UK influence on such questions is slender, even though its own actions do carry symbolic weight. Britain's greatest use may be in convening discussions among the wide range of regional players where it does have influence.

China

No immediate decision looms on China, where Labour has set out a similar careful balance (trade, talk on global problems but defend the UK against threats) as did Sunak. Indeed Labour has proposed an [audit](#) of the UK's China links, possibly to begin in the first 100 days of government.

For all that an 'audit' sounds like a technical exercise, the big question will be how far the UK can skirt US pressure to align with its trade measures against the country. The chill between China and the US has deepened further during this year, over trade and over China's aggression in the South China Sea, as well as more recently, its support for Russia. Starmer may find that he is forced to take sides more than is convenient for his pursuit of economic growth.

Climate

The first difficult decision may come over whether to welcome imports

of cheap Chinese electric vehicles and solar panels. Rachel Reeves, now chancellor, speaking at Chatham House on the day the election was called, said that cheapness was not a case for buying the products in itself. But it can be if growth is your goal – and meeting climate change goals. Labour still needs to resolve this dilemma. And it will need to if it is to play the leadership role on climate it says it seeks.

While immediate international risks will draw the government's attention, 2023 was the [hottest year on record](#). Climate change will have significant consequences on migration, food prices and conflict, and a government which has promised to deliver security for voters at home will need to play its role in addressing it.

Improvement within the UK

Starmer has campaigned for weeks in front of a thicket of red signs saying 'Change'. Influence in the world is underpinned by a country's performance at home, both the admirability and stability of its political arrangements, and its economic growth.

At the end of fourteen years, the Conservatives [failed to deliver](#) on both these fronts. They paid for it in diminished influence for the UK abroad, and they have paid for it electorally now, with what looks set to be the worst result in the party's history.

If this is to be the new era that Labour promises, it will have to show that it has answers to the UK's enduring problems: lack of productivity growth, education and health systems under strain, lack of investment in infrastructure from electricity and power to 5G, and regional and social inequalities.

Labour's win is not only a new phase in British politics – a different political reality after over a decade of Conservative dominance – but it brings with it a recognition that new ideas are needed in a world much changed since 2010. Many of the UK's challenges are often attributed to Brexit, and while that has not helped, there are deeper problems that plagued the country in the Conservative era (and other similar democracies too).

Better answers are needed to the continued economic malaise following the 2008 crash, the capacity of the state to manage growing global risks like climate and COVID, to say nothing of the return to war in Europe and the Middle East. There is a sense from this huge victory that it is time for someone else to try to find them.

How Foreign Policy Might Impact the Outcome of the US Election

Divisions over key foreign policy issues, from the war in Ukraine to Gaza, could play a pivotal role in determining the outcome of the 2024 presidential election.

Chatham House Expert Comment

Michael Cox

March 6, 2024

In 1992, Bill Clinton's political strategist James Carville quipped that the outcome of US elections was determined by 'the economy, stupid'. Joe Biden must certainly hope that this remains true because, if so, he would almost certainly be a shoo-in for re-election in 2024.

The facts speak for themselves. Unemployment is at an all-time low, the US economy is growing by about 3 per cent per quarter, wages are going up, and the stock market is going through the roof. Meanwhile, interest rates, which have been at an all-time high for over two years, are finally predicted to come down. And to cap it off, of the top ten corporations in the world right now, eight just happen to be based in the US. As one pundit has put it, if the US was in an economic war with the rest of the world, it would be ['winning'](#).

But despite all this, Biden is still behind Trump in the polls. Of course, much can and will happen by November, and polls taken now may not be a great guide to how Americans will actually vote when presented with a simple but stark choice between Biden and Trump.

But if polls are any kind of guide, the Biden team clearly has a lot of work to do. A [November 2023 poll](#) put Trump ahead in five of the six battleground states (Nevada, Georgia, Michigan, Arizona, Pennsylvania, though not Wisconsin), while a [February poll](#) conducted by NBC News showed that Biden's approval rating had dropped to 37 per cent.

Nor is the tide turning in Biden's favour. If anything, quite the opposite seems to be happening. As Democratic pollster Jeff Horwitt of Hart Research recently pointed out, 'on every measure compared to 2020' support for Biden [has declined](#).

But why is this?

There are several common explanations. Among the most popular are Biden's age and alleged memory loss (something he vehemently denies); his administration's failure to stem the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States (the number arriving has roughly doubled since 2020); and last but by no means least, the fact that even if the Dow Jones is on the up, many ordinary Americans are hurting. A recent [CBS poll](#) found that 65 per cent of Americans remember the economy under Trump

as being good, but with only 38 per cent giving the same positive assessment of the current economy under Biden.

However, this is by no means the whole story. Foreign policy might be playing a role here too. While Biden's foreign policy may get good marks from both his supporters at home and US allies abroad, especially those worried about Trump returning to the White House, it may not necessarily be working to his advantage.

Take the war in Ukraine. It is true that the majority of Americans stand with Ukraine against Russia. However, Trump's brand of isolationism has struck a chord with part of the American electorate who believe that there is little point backing Ukraine militarily if this extends a conflict to which there appears to be no end in sight. In 2021, Biden controversially decided to call a halt to what he termed a 'forever war' in Afghanistan. Could Trump do the same in Ukraine?

While the stakes in Ukraine may be higher, there are many (or at least enough) Americans who seem prepared to vote for someone like Trump who has promised to end this other 'forever war' by negotiating some kind of peace deal with Putin. Among a reasonably [large swathe of Americans](#), pressure is growing to call it a day.

China is proving to be another foreign policy headache for Biden. Both Biden and Trump agree that China is the only power in the international system which has both the intent and the capabilities to challenge the US-led world order. But the Biden administration has also pointed out that there are several reasons – not least strong economic ones – why the US should remain engaged with China.

This approach might make perfect sense to American companies who operate in China and to political realists who see little wrong in working out a way to coexist with another great power. However, in the hurly-burly of American politics where 81 per cent of Republicans, 59 per cent of Independents, and 56 per cent of Democrats [view China as a critical threat](#), it leaves Biden open to attack by the Republican Party for either going soft on China, or worse, appeasing it.

Finally, there is the crisis in Gaza. The Biden administration may indeed be working overtime to put a brake on the military policies being pursued by the Netanyahu government and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Biden may even have warned Israel of diminishing international support for its policies. But the perception among those demanding a ceasefire is that this is all window dressing which is making no difference at all in Gaza itself where the humanitarian crisis is going from bad to worse.

Of course, if all Americans were on the side of Israel this might not make much of a difference. But Biden's dilemma is that a good number of Americans, particularly in his own party, among the young and among groups of Arab-Americans, do not back military aid for Israel and wish to see a [cessation of the war](#) now.

And this may have long-term political consequences, as the recent Democratic primary in Michigan showed when 100,000 voters cast 'uncommitted' ballots in a major protest against what they view as Biden's support for Israel's military campaign. Of course, this does not necessarily translate into support for Trump, who also lacks support outside his own base. However, given that the 2020

election was decided by less than 50,000 votes in three swing states – including significantly Michigan – the White House must be concerned.

What happens in November will have huge consequences for the rest of the world. But by the same measure, what is happening in the rest of the world could play a key role in determining who enters the White House. The world can only wait and watch.

The Global Implications of Trump's Conviction

Last week former U.S. President Donald Trump was convicted on thirty-four counts of falsifying business records, an unprecedented development that has injected uncertainty into the 2024 presidential race. Three Council of Councils (CoC) experts reflect on the regional impact of the Trump conviction in this CoC global perspective series.

CoC Global Perspectives

Lowy Institute, Chatham House, and IAI

June 4, 2024

A Blow to Global U.S. Standing

By: Michael Fullilove, Lowy Institute

As an historian of the United States, I believe this is a significant moment. Trump is the first former president to be charged and convicted with felony crimes. “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody,” Trump [bragged](#) in 2016, “and I wouldn’t lose any voters, okay? It’s, like, incredible.” In this case, Trump hasn’t shot anyone. But his boast of impunity will be tested in November.

In the rest of the world, the conviction will be another blow to the regard in which the United States is held.

To be sure, Trump’s conviction demonstrates that no American—no matter how rich or influential—stands above the law. However, the fact that so many Americans believe his trial was a witch hunt and a sham shows the degree to which Trump’s cynicism has corroded American public life. His return to the White House would further tarnish the international image of the great republic.

Just as important as the power of the United States, I have always believed, is the idea of the United States: a democratic superpower; a flawed country that is always reaching for perfection; a nation of awesome might but also dignity and restraint; a republic with republican values. What would happen to those republican values in the wake of a Trump victory?

U.S. allies are deeply concerned about the policy implications that would flow from Trump’s return to the White House. Previous presidents have defined the United States’ self-interest broadly. But how can the rest of the world find our place in his “America First” worldview?

Most Australians support the U.S. alliance, and Australia is the United States’ most reliable ally: the only country to fight beside the United States in every major conflict of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, Trump’s values run counter to Australians’ values. Trump is an alliance skeptic; Australians are alliance believers. Trump is hostile to free trade; Australia is a trading nation. Trump swoons over autocrats and strongmen; Australia is an old democracy and a free society.

Australians lost some confidence in the United States during the Trump presidency. In 2020, Lowy Institute polling found that [nearly half of Australians](#) did not trust the United States to act responsibly in the world. The [2024 Lowy Institute Poll](#), released this week, reveals that if Australians had a vote in November, [nearly seven in ten](#) would vote for Joe Biden.

Canberra will deal with whomever Americans elect as their president, of course. But most Australians will be hoping that Trump's conviction damages his chances.

Increasing Anxiety About the Special Relationship

By: Leslie Vinjamuri, Chatham House

The news that former U.S. President Donald Trump had been found guilty on all thirty-four criminal counts added to a rapidly growing anxiety in the United Kingdom that the future of its closest security relationship is uncertain and, if Trump is reelected, unpredictable.

This comes at a bad time for the United Kingdom, which is embroiled in its own election, scheduled to take place on July 4. Since Brexit, successive UK leaders have struggled to define Britain's role in the world, and especially its relationship with the United States. As part of his Global Britain agenda, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson tried to distance the United Kingdom from the United States. As the reality of Britain's self-inflicted isolation unfolded, Johnson and his successors changed course and sought to strengthen those bonds. This includes with MAGA Republicans, the staunchly pro-Trump Republican flank. Britain's pragmatism was on full display in April when Foreign Secretary David Cameron took a surprise visit to Mar-a-Lago in an attempt to persuade Trump to give his backing to congressional action in support of Ukraine.

But what now? In the short term, it is complicated. The UK is in a tight spot at home and abroad. Stalled economic growth, a country in dire need of foreign investment, a war in Ukraine that has deepened Europe's dependence on the United States, and a difficult relationship with the European Union, all lead to the obvious conclusion: a strong relationship with the United States is essential and the United Kingdom cannot afford to be partisan when it comes to the U.S. leadership.

But the relationship with Trump has long been fraught. And during the UK electoral season, courting an unpopular former president who is now a convicted felon is even more complicated. The British public are notoriously ambivalent about American power and Britain's dependence on it. [Trump's willingness to interfere](#) in UK politics did not make him popular when he was president, and it will not make current or future British leaders who associate with him any more popular for doing so. This dilemma will not disappear, and the upcoming NATO summit in Washington, marking its seventy-fifth anniversary, will be an early challenge for the next UK leader, whoever that could be, to manage a United States deep in campaign season.

For Europe, including the United Kingdom, Trump's new status as a felon only deepens the existential crisis that most of the continent is feeling as the U.S. elections approach. The United States' role as a beacon of democracy and human rights, a partner, and a provider of security, feels

increasingly fragile. Europe will be seeking to gauge how permanent change in the United States is likely to be. An election in which not only swing state voters, but also wealthy American donors, choose to ignore the judgment of its own courts on the moral standing of their party leader will send a strong signal to America's closest partners in Europe if Trump is elected.

Developing a pragmatic strategy for engaging with its friend across the pond will be essential. In doing so, Europe should preserve space for its own liberal values. But in an era of heightened geopolitical rivalry, where the alternatives to American power are worse and by orders of magnitude, Europe cannot escape its dependence on the United States.\

In Europe, Bracing for a Debased Discourse on Democracy

By: Riccardo Alcaro, IAI

Donald Trump's guilty verdict has caused a big splash in Europe. It is too early to say whether it will also have an impact, though. For now, one can only make an educated guess about indirect implications.

First, it could fuel a European perception of U.S. politics in which polarization has now definitely transcended political divisions and affects the constitutional balance of the republic. This perception could feed concerns that the Joe Biden administration may not have the political wherewithal to resolutely pursue the foreign policy objectives most critical to Europeans, namely the defense of Ukraine and a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza—at least until November.

Second, it could legitimize the proposition that democracy across the transatlantic political space is about electoral politics and not the rule of law. Rather than a system balancing separate powers and guaranteed by law, this proposition constructs democracy as the regime in which the will of the people (which is, moreover, always partial and often a minority) replaces the rule of law. Popular following is as important as lawyers—in fact, more important than lawyers—as electoral success is akin to a court of appeals that acquits the powerful even if they were convicted. Trump's professed martyrdom as the victim of a politicized justice could easily become a term of reference for parties in Europe that share this debased discourse on democracy, which has already advanced further in places such as Hungary and, until recently, Poland. From this point of view, the response of the Republican Party and Trump to the verdict, rather than the verdict itself, could usher in a season in Europe in which democracy will increasingly become an empty vestige of a political discourse imbued with nationalism, nativist intolerance, and authoritarianism.

Third, the reverse could occur to those in Europe opposed to the nationalist and nativist parties, who see in Trump an America they do not understand and from which they feel

irremediably distant in values. In the long run, this could loosen the bonds of mutual trust and reorient the preferences of some states—or at least some parties—in Europe toward a transactional relationship with the United States. This would make it harder to sell to the public that transatlantic cooperation, is necessary to maintain an international system in which democracy is safe.

US Allies Are Already Worried About Another Round of Trump

What should America's allies do if the leader of the free world doesn't care about the free world or want to lead it?

Lowy Institute Commentary

Michael Fullilove

July 8, 2024

Most of America's allies would like Joe Biden to win the U.S. presidential election in November. He has been a fine president. His foreign-policy team is first-class. But what if Donald Trump should win instead? In the aftermath of Biden's poor debate performance, the anxieties in allied capitals are spiralling.

Allied leaders know that Trump views their countries not as friends but as freeloaders. As president, he threw shade on the principle of collective defence and carelessly handled the intelligence that allies provided to Washington. He threatened to withdraw U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula and Europe.

So what should America's allies do if the leader of the free world doesn't care about the free world or want to lead it? In this ghastly scenario, they should retain their independence and their equilibrium — and be pragmatic.

Trump's instincts run counter to the worldviews of most U.S. allies. If he isn't an isolationist, he is certainly iso-curious. America's allies, by contrast, favour internationalism. He is bitterly opposed to free trade, whereas most allies benefit from it. He enjoys the company of autocrats such as Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, whereas most allies are democracies. Finally, Trump is dubious about alliances themselves, even though both China and Russia would dearly love to have alliance networks as powerful and cost-effective as that of the United States.

The last time Donald Trump served as president, allied leaders fell into three categories: critics, sympathisers, and pragmatists. Angela Merkel was a prominent critic who never seemed comfortable with Trump and publicly contradicted him on refugees, tariffs, and other issues. During the 2018 G7 meeting in Canada, Merkel [posted](#) a striking photograph on Instagram that appeared to show her and other leaders confronting Trump, who sat in a defiant pose with his arms crossed.

But picking a fight with the world's most powerful person is not always smart. Allies rely on the United States, which has the capacity to project military power anywhere on Earth, to protect them from adversaries such as Russia and China and provide essential public goods. Being at daggers drawn with Washington is rarely in an ally's interest. Merkel's poor relations with Trump, for example,

contributed to his 2020 decision to withdraw 10,000 troops from Germany — a decision that President Joe Biden later reversed.

The second model for allies during the Trump administration was that of sympathiser. The former Australian prime minister Scott Morrison was a sympathiser: He identified himself politically with Trump, even joining the then-president in Ohio in 2019 to address a crowd of Trump supporters. Trump told the gathering that Morrison was “a great gentleman”; Morrison replied, “Together we are making jobs great again.”

In May this year, during the criminal trial at which Trump was convicted on 34 felony counts, Morrison visited him at Trump Tower. “It was nice to catch up again, especially given the pile on he is currently dealing with in the US,” Morrison later [posted](#) on X. “Good to see you DJT and thanks for the invitation to stay in touch.”

Sympathisers figure that they need to get close to Trump in order to influence him. True, Trump’s administration was animated by egomania and narcissism, and Trump relishes flattery. Praise can lead to goodies such as investment, political support, and decorations. But being intimate with Trump is unlikely to be popular back home — or good for the soul.

The pragmatists included former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Japan operates in a tough neighbourhood, facing security threats from China and North Korea and maintaining awkward relations with South Korea and Russia. Tokyo relies on Washington, and so Abe worked hard on his personal relationship with his fellow conservative Trump. In November 2016, Abe was the first world leader to call on the president-elect at Trump Tower. Over the next four years, he had dozens of conversations with Trump in meetings, on the phone, and on the golf course. In 2019, he arranged for Trump to be the first foreign leader to meet with Japan’s newly enthroned Emperor Naruhito.

Abe was courteous and attentive without sacrificing his dignity or submerging himself in Trump’s political identity. He stayed in close contact with Trump in order to avoid the nasty surprises other allied leaders endured. Rather than immediately contradicting Trump’s misstatements in their conversations, Abe tended to deflect and return to the point later. As a businessman, Trump was a fierce critic of Japanese trading practices and ran newspaper advertisements accusing Japan and other allies of “taking advantage of the United States” by failing to pay for the protection Washington provided. But through his skilful dealings with Trump in office, Abe managed to soften that hostility. As president, Trump was well disposed to Japan and even signed off on a trade deal between Washington and Tokyo.

Another former Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, was also a pragmatist. “Whether in the Oval Office or on the playground, giving in to bullies encourages more bullying,” Turnbull recently wrote in [Foreign Affairs](#). “The only way to win the respect of people such as Trump is to stand up to them.” So when Trump threatened to walk away from an Obama-era deal between the United States and Australia on asylum seekers and to impose tariffs on Australian steel and aluminium imports, Turnbull argued with him. He did so mainly in private, however, resisting the temptation to talk down to Trump in public. In their meetings, Turnbull also made much of their shared business backgrounds.

Criticising Trump is risky for an ally's national interest. Sympathising with him is risky for one's self-respect. The best way to thread the needle is to be pragmatic. Don't sneer, but don't gush, either. Assemble your arguments carefully and make sure they relate to Trump's interests. Fight your corner where required, preferably in private. Find common ground with Trump where you can, without betraying your values or doing something you will later regret.

A lot of leaders will find the prospect of fraternising with Trump distasteful. But they need to grimace and bear it. The alternatives — to turn away from the United States or hug Trump tight — are worse.

Allied leaders will also need to work closely with other parts of the U.S. system, including Congress, the agencies, and the military. And they should work much more closely with one another. Trump is not wrong when he says that many allies have become overreliant on America's security umbrella. They should build up their own national capabilities and work with one another to reinforce the liberal international order that Trump disparages even as it is being undermined by Moscow and Beijing. As beneficiaries of that order, U.S. allies will have to serve as its bodyguards.

Trump's plans to "make America great again" neglect a fundamental pillar of American greatness — its system of global alliances. If he is re-elected, allied leaders will need to retain their autonomy, balance, and perspective. Like everything else in life, the Trump era, too, shall pass.

Global Threats Loom if Biden Drops Out

The U.S. presidential election isn't just a domestic affair. What Biden does will have major consequences for foreign policy and world security.

CFR Article

Liana Fix

July 10, 2024

Around the globe, U.S. partners and allies are closely monitoring the American presidential election, and they are more than a little unsettled by President Joe Biden's [weak debate performance](#) and the ensuing calls for him to drop out of the race. Meanwhile, the laser-focus on Biden's fitness has created a perception of chaos and uncertainty in Washington that Moscow and Beijing could not be happier about.

As a scholar of European security, I am nervous about what is going to happen—not just because of what Biden's dropping out (or not dropping out) will mean for the outcome of the November election, but also because of the international implications of whatever happens. The U.S. presidential election is not just a domestic affair. Biden's decision will have major consequences for U.S. foreign policy and global security.

If Biden leaves the race, it will inevitably raise questions about whether he is fit to serve the remainder of his term. Dropping out would render him a lame duck at home and on the international stage. It could also embolden adversaries to test the strength of America's resolve. That could mean another round of Iranian-backed [Houthi rebel attacks on global shipping](#) in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden; a Russian escalation in Ukraine; an [expanding threat from North Korea's](#) nuclear arsenal and its arms trade with Russia; or [Chinese provocations towards Taiwan](#) or the Philippines. A U.S. president perceived as unable to do his job leaves the West without a steersman in dangerous times.

If Biden drops out, it will set off a messy succession process in the Democratic Party. The United States will be more consumed by party politics than if the race remains between Biden and Donald Trump. There has [never been a case](#) of a presumptive nominee dropping out so late in the game, and if Washington policymakers are consumed by a succession race, they won't have bandwidth to address international crises that may erupt in the run-up to November.

Among U.S. treaty allies in [NATO](#), [Japan](#), and [South Korea](#), Biden's leaving the race would raise anxiety to entirely new levels. Biden has been a stable, reliable U.S. partner after the chaotic, unpredictable Trump presidency. Many allies have pinned their hopes on Biden's mantle of continuity with post-Cold War American foreign policy—better the elderly president you know than the younger candidate you don't. In a world of increasing disorder, instability in the United States is not what allies want. But it is exactly what [adversaries hope for](#).

There is a possibility, of course, that a younger, more forceful Democratic Party candidate could revive an image of strength and vitality, perhaps even turn the election around for the Democrats and burnish the U.S. image abroad as Barack Obama did in 2008, reassuring allies tired of George W. Bush's "[with us or against us](#)" American unilateralism. John F. Kennedy, too, was young and relatively inexperienced, yet he arguably handled the Cuban Missile Crisis better than some of his more seasoned advisors might have.

A compelling new Democratic candidate could also strengthen the image of American democracy worldwide. Selecting a new nominee would demonstrate that one of the oldest democracies in the world is a transparent system in which elites are responsive to the concerns of the population and an elected leader can be challenged publicly and by his party, unlike autocrats Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping. It is this principle of accountability that continues to make the democracy of the United States an attractive model around the world, despite its current polarization.

But everything would have to come together perfectly to make the best-case scenario possible: a dignified withdrawal of Biden, an orderly succession to another candidate who would be a strong and powerful Democratic Party challenger to Trump.

In reality, the likelihood of chaos and instability is probably higher at this late point in the race. For U.S. foreign policy and global security, the risk of Biden dropping out might outweigh the rewards—as long as American friends and foes are convinced that he can still perform the toughest job in the world.

What Biden's Exit Means for American Foreign Policy

A Conversation With Timothy Naftali

Foreign Affairs Q&A

July 22, 2024

On July 21, following weeks of intense speculation, U.S. President Joe Biden announced that he would not run in the November 2024 presidential election and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to take his place. Coming at a time of geopolitical uncertainty, the decision could have large implications for U.S. foreign policy for the remainder of Biden's term.

To make sense of what Biden's decision means for the presidency and U.S. world leadership in the weeks to come, *Foreign Affairs'* senior editor Hugh Eakin spoke to the presidential historian Timothy Naftali, a faculty scholar at the Institute of Global Politics at Columbia University, the founding director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, the author of *George H. W. Bush* (a volume in the Times Books "American Presidents" series), and a general editor of *The Presidential Recordings: Lyndon B. Johnson*.

The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

In his momentous announcement, Biden said that it's in the best interest of his party in the country for him to focus solely on "fulfilling [his] duties as president for the remainder of [his] term." I wonder how easy that will be. Will the world, including not only antagonists but also partners and allies, see him as a lame duck?

I actually think that President Biden's very difficult decision today has restored some of the luster to the American commitment to Ukraine and to stabilizing other parts of the world.

Leaders see power as always in flux. And in the three weeks since the debate, the Biden administration likely found the world more skeptical about U.S. power, in the sense that it seemed more and more likely that former President Donald Trump would beat Joe Biden in the election this fall. And as a result, countries were already gaming what kind of international political environment they would be contending with starting at the end of January, with Biden no longer in the White House.

But there is now a better chance that a Democrat will win in November. And so I'd argue that, for the moment at least, foreign leaders have to take seriously the possibility that a member of Biden's team or someone else from the Democratic Party will be leading the United States, meaning that they may be able to count on support for Ukraine, for example. Some of that luster may disappear after the beginning of November. But the fact that the Democrats are no longer likely losers I think will influence the way foreign leaders, particularly American adversaries view the Biden administration.

So to the extent that a likely Trump victory was already baked into the international calculus about the United States, Biden's announcement forces a very different assessment.

And something else needs to be underscored here. Not since the early 1950s, when the internationalist General Dwight Eisenhower won the contest for the soul of the Republican Party over the isolationist Senator Robert Taft, have the two parties presented such fundamentally different worldviews with regard to America's place in international affairs. Since 1952, both parties have been internationalist in their outlook. President Trump in his first term was an exception, but the Republican Party that he led was divided on this issue.

As the recent Republican convention demonstrated, Trump has now refashioned the party completely in his own image. His choice of Senator J. D. Vance as his running mate, for example, didn't represent an attempt to bridge different points of view, but a doubling down of Trumpism. And so were he to return to power—were he to regain the White House, and Republicans to hold the House and regain the Senate—foreign leaders, friends and foes alike, could anticipate a much more isolationist America. So the fact that now the internationalist party has an improved chance to win, will necessarily alter the calculations of foreign leaders. [Russian President] Vladimir Putin can no longer be certain that he can outlast the American commitment to European stability and to the sovereignty of Ukraine.

On the matter of antagonists, however, the United States is closely involved in two major wars, in Europe and the Middle East, and dealing with complicated issues in Asia and elsewhere. Does this announcement come at a perilous moment?

Oh, yes. It's a perilous moment when the national strategy of a great power is so in question that an election could alter the country's, or at least its leadership class's, definition of the national interest. And it's especially perilous for the international system when the country in question is a superpower. This situation introduces an uncertainty into the political calculations of every leader. It is very rare for an election to decide how the power elite of a nation defines its national interest. And it's almost unheard of that this should happen for a great power.

During the Cold War, the two parties in the United States disagreed on the means by which to fight the Cold War, particularly in the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era. But they didn't disagree on the fact that the United States faced a determined adversary and that national security entailed playing a role in defending, protecting, and encouraging regional and international stability. That consensus doesn't exist anymore across the two parties.

Comparisons are naturally being made with President Lyndon Johnson's March 1968 announcement that he would not run again. And many have noted that Biden's decision is coming much later, in late July. But from a foreign policy point of view, it seems that actually, it's early: we still have six months of the presidency left. What are the real possibilities in terms of what Biden can do during this time?

President Biden can ensure the continuation of the systems that are below the surface that are helping American allies around the world. If Trump is elected, we don't know what will happen to intelligence cooperation, for example, not only with Ukraine but also with NATO allies and allies in East Asia. We don't know what will happen to the training that our military is doing to assist allies of freedom around the world.

All these processes, though they don't get a lot of attention, matter for the stability of the world. And they don't usually need special acts of Congress to be sustained; they just need a stable center in the Oval Office, and [under Biden] that's been guaranteed. Adversaries are very sensitive to the continuation of those activities. It's these day-to-day activities of the United States that are often the most alarming to them and most reassuring to our allies. International problems are rarely easy to solve, but they can be managed, and it's that gardening, if you will, that American foreign national security policy makers need to do every day to be effective.

And so the gardening can continue.

With the president in office focused on American internationalism, that's a good thing for American allies. It gives them some predictive capacity about what they can expect from the United States between now and the 20th of January. And it's a terrible thing for American adversaries, who know they are going to have to put up with a lot of American activities in support of aims that they don't share.

What about the larger Biden record? Inevitably, one thinks of what happened at the end of the Obama administration and Trump coming to office setting out to undo so many of the major Obama policy initiatives. Are there specific ways that Biden can Trump-proof some of his own accomplishments?

By stepping aside, Biden is doing the most important thing that he can do at this point to Trump-proof the United States, in terms of our national security. As the Supreme Court just reminded us, the U.S. president has enormous authority to direct our foreign policy. And so the choice of the next president is so important. Even if Trump were to beat the ultimate Democratic nominee, Biden's accomplishments in foreign policy might not all completely dissolve. Were Trump not to score a trifecta, and retain the House as well as win the Senate, one might see some pushback from Congress if a future President Trump and Vice President Vance were to try to dramatically rescind American activities abroad and sacrifice Ukraine to the wolf in the Kremlin.

So how to Trump-proof our international stature will depend on which party the American people choose to lead the two houses of Congress. If Democrats control the House, they would complicate Trump's efforts, for example, to shut down support for Ukraine. Trump could still veto a bill, but there may be the votes to overturn that veto. There will still be Republican senators and Republican members of the House who will want to vote for aid for Ukraine. So if the Democrats control the

House, Congress might be able to pass assistance packages for Ukraine and Israel, despite Trump's being in the White House.

As a result of this decision, does Biden in fact have a chance to try to shape his legacy, given the timing and that there is a definite endpoint ahead? Are there useful historical analogies for what presidents have done in these final months?

Well, this will be an unusual late presidency because of how this new period we've just entered started. In 1968, Johnson attempted to combine two very difficult decisions as a way of strengthening his legacy and improving the well-being of the United States. At the same time that he said in March 1968 he would not be a candidate for reelection in November, he announced a serious commitment to negotiating a way out of the Vietnam War. In that way, he made clear that he was devoting his late presidency to an issue of foreign policy.

Biden might view his remaining months in office as an opportunity to do something similar in the Middle East. But the current crisis in the Middle East is hardly a parallel to the U.S. policy failure in Vietnam. The United States is not a direct combatant in Israel's war with Hamas. It has to work through an ally, Israel. So there isn't a direct parallel to Johnson, who said to the world, and particularly to Hanoi and Moscow and Beijing, "Take me seriously" in seeking a diplomatic off-ramp from the war in Vietnam. "I'm no longer playing politics. I'm out of politics." I don't see there being a direct parallel for Biden, and that's OK.

History provides us with echoes, but rarely does it repeat itself; the circumstances of each case are almost always very different though the dilemmas they raise can seem similar. The people, the political culture—those can be similar, the individuals can be similar. But history isn't a crystal ball. There are unique elements to Biden's decision that should be appreciated—and should be a source of some humility in trying to figure out what's going to happen next.

From a historical perspective, is there something you see as particularly striking about the decision and how it happened?

In trying to follow from afar the discussions going on in [Delaware, where the president was at a family home, isolated with COVID-19 and struggling to decide what to do], it seemed that Biden was in part a prisoner to an unfortunate American tradition. This is the idea that only by winning a second term is the president of the United States validated. In the 1840s, James K. Polk made clear that he was seeking only one, very consequential term. Modern presidents, however, have treated their reelection as a referendum on their first terms, when the campaign would be better suited as a test of what they have to offer in a second term.

Presidents should be allowed to rise to greatness in our history simply by serving one term. The moment and the individual can coalesce and that moment may last only four years. George H. W. Bush is a good example. He was supremely qualified and had the right tools to manage the end of the

Cold War and the first years of what followed. Yet he didn't want to be just a one-term president. As a result, when he was defeated in 1992, he left office feeling depressed as if he had somehow failed as president, despite his one term having been so consequential and important. Gerald Ford was another excellent one-term president.

Biden's one-term presidency is destined to be viewed very positively. How positively will ultimately depend on whether a Democratic successor, whether it's Kamala Harris or not, is elected in November. But not all of his legacy depends on a Democratic victory in November. He brought us out of Trumpian chaos. He restored America's role in the world, restored the trust of allies. He pushed adversaries away from goals they were hoping to achieve. Without anything like the majorities of Franklin Roosevelt or Johnson, his deft touch with Congress led to a deepening of the social safety net, brought technology to bear in the problem of climate change without sacrificing American jobs, and made a generational commitment to American infrastructure.

In sum, the president has had a successfully consequential term. Unfortunately, he felt that he alone could prevent Trump from returning to the White House and so sought reelection. But sadly, he didn't have enough in the tank. It was his own body that defined that his moment had passed. I hope that, with time, he comes to view his term differently, just as I believe George H. W. Bush did, as one that was extraordinarily successful and a blessing for our country.