



By: *Ferry Biedermann*

Trump looms over global elections



After the blockbuster global election year of 2024, a series of new high-stakes polls are converging coincidentally at the end of April and the beginning of May.

What's not coincidental is that the campaigns are all, to one degree or another, affected by Donald Trump and his disruptive tendencies. That is certainly true for America's northern neighbour, Canada, but it also plays a role in Australia, Poland and Romania.

In Canada and Australia, support for previously high-flying Trump-adjacent conservative candidates has fallen markedly in recent weeks, in the wake of the controversial start to the US president's second term. It is **possibly** enough to see the ruling Canadian Liberal and Australian Labor parties continue in power.

Poles look askance at Trump's warm words for Russia and could well opt for a more pro-European president. In Romania's presidential **election**, however, right-wing candidates are playing up their supposedly good rapport with the American president.

America's international impact

Irrespective of the outcome of these races, it's become clear that America's international impact, and its interference in electoral processes of democratic allies, has increased to levels not seen since the height of the Cold War.

Not all of this is indirect, as a result of international upheaval caused by Trump. Some of it is blunt and unsubtle.

His close ally, Elon Musk, tried **interfering** in the German elections earlier this year with his clear and outspoken support for the far-right AfD. In the current batch of elections, Trump's threats to annex Canada play a huge role.

And in Romania, his administration, including Vice-President J. D. Vance, is **stoking** the far-right, pro-Russian fire by lambasting the country's electoral commission's decision to annul the results last year and order a rerun.

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First up is Canada, of the three, the country most affected by Trump's belligerent start to his new term. Not only has he slapped tariffs on his northern neighbour, with which he himself negotiated a new free trade deal last time around, he has even threatened to end Canada's independence.

It should not come too much as a surprise that the leader of the opposition Conservative Party, Pierre Poilievre, who had praised Trump on several occasions and had adopted some of his language and tactics, has suffered.

He has particularly lost ground since Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau stood down and Mark Carney, a former governor of the Bank of England and the Bank of Canada, won the race to replace him.

Carney has channelled Canadians' anger at, and discomfort with, Trump and his administration to great effect and is now topping the polls.

He is seen as a safe pair of hands when it comes to defending Canada's economic interests as they're under attack from Trump. Unusually for a Canadian politician, he has wrapped himself in the maple leaf flag and has tapped into Canadians' newfound nationalism, vowing to defend the country's sovereignty.

Geopolitics plays a role in Australia

Australia is a slightly different case, more pre-occupied with potential Chinese encroachments than with Trump's heavy hand. Yet, China is Australia's largest trading partner, and the threat of economic chaos due to Trump's erratic trade policies is not reassuring to most voters.

Add to that the unpopularity of the American president in Australia and conservative opposition leader Peter Dutton's initial tendency to parrot his anti-woke talking points, and Trump's shadow can also be said to be hanging over the **election** in the land down under. Still, the incumbent Labour Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, is no shoo-in.

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Geopolitics also plays a role in Australia, which has the ANZUS, AUKUS and Five Eyes alliances and agreements with the US. Deterring China remains a national priority, yet Trump's belligerent approach is not playing well across the political spectrum. Most Australians do not wish to be dragged into a confrontation.

In Eastern Europe, geopolitics loom even larger, but there it is Trump's friendliness towards Russia that causes concern.

Poland

Particularly in Poland, memories of Russian occupation and dominance shape the national discourse. The country has been a staunch ally of Ukraine, and Prime Minister Donald Tusk reassured Ukrainians that they're 'not alone' after Trump and Vance's spat with Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House.

Tusk's centrist coalition just about managed to wrest control of parliament away from the equally pro-Ukrainian but right-wing and anti-EU PiS party two years ago.

It now wants to repeat that by capturing the presidency, thus paving the way for domestic reforms that would be significant in a European context, though less so with regard to Ukraine.



The candidate of Donald Tusk's Civic Platform, Warsaw mayor Rafał Trzaskowski, has said that national security and defence are at the heart of the election

Under Tusk, Poland is firmly within the EU camp once more, but it treads carefully where defence and security are concerned.

The country is worried by Trump's disdain for Europe and his lack of support for NATO. It is also willing to work on the EU's defence and rearmament programmes. Yet, it is still heavily invested in the existing US-linked defence infrastructure and will want to keep Trump on board for as long as possible.

The **candidate** of Tusk's Civic Platform, Warsaw mayor Rafał Trzaskowski, has said that national security and defence are at the heart of the election.

He claims that the right-wing PiS had expected to receive a boost from Trump's victory but that it had now turned against its candidate. The polls seem to bear him out, as he's currently in the lead, although he might well end up in a second-round run-off, where the outcome is less clear.

Romania

The Romanian presidential election is also expected to go to two rounds. Last year, the country's electoral commission annulled the first round, which had been won by pro-Russian and ultra-nationalist independent Călin Georgescu.

He has been banned this time amid ongoing

investigations into election violations and alleged campaigns in support of him by Russia and on China's TikTok. Interestingly, the annulment and his subsequent ban have been condemned both by Moscow and by Vance and Musk.

Yet, if their aim is to undermine the EU and its support for Ukraine, they need not despair, as the current frontrunner is the far-right opposition leader, George Simion.

He is as Putin-friendly as Trump and Georgescu and has been under suspicion of having ties to the Kremlin. Both Ukraine and Moldova have banned him from entering.

Last year's first-round surprise shock result shows that Romanian opinion polls might not be the most accurate, and there's also a large unpolled diaspora that votes.

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Various in second place are several politicians, including the independent, centre-right mayor of Bucharest, Nicoșur Dan, and the governing centrist coalition's candidate, Crin Antonescu. Victor Ponta, a former leftist prime minister now running on a Romanian MAGA-like platform and who boasts of ties with Trump, is also in the mix.

Both a Simion and a Ponta victory would be bad news for Ukraine and the EU. They have not threatened to cut off aid to Ukraine, as Georgescu had, and they acknowledge the importance of both the EU and NATO.

But they'd most likely align with the more EU-critical, hard and far-right European leaders, such as Italy's Giorgia Meloni and Geert Wilders of the Netherlands.

Romania has put more safeguards into place to assure a clean election yet might still see a pro-Russian, pro-Trump candidate come out on

top. Democracies facing elections in the coming years will not only have to worry about undue interference from the world's major autocracies but will also have to keep an eye on the Trump White House.