



By: **Ferry Biedermann**

US midterms and the global right-wing drift



European leaders, just told by the American president who's the boss at the **G7 summit** in Evian, must be hoping that Donald Trump's wings will at least be somewhat clipped after the midterm elections this November.

They might at the same time look with a degree of envy at his poll numbers and those of his party. Yes, they seem dismal, but measured by European leaders' approval ratings and their parties' performance, Donald Trump and his Republicans are doing quite well.

Take Europe's big three: Starmer, Merz and Macron are at the absolute bottom of the political barrel. The **British Prime Minister**, despite ostensibly already heading for the exit, is actually doing better than his German and French colleagues.

Macron cannot run again, but Merz has faced the fastest collapse in popularity of any post-war German leader, including his ill-fated Social Democrat predecessor, Olaf Scholz.

Starmer hovers around a 25 per cent approval rating, which is relatively comfortable compared to Merz's and Macron's high teens. Yet, he is facing a rebellion after sweeping Labour losses in the May local and Welsh and Scottish elections.

Trump, who like **Macron** is barred from running again, still sits at a very plush close to 40 per cent approval level, despite arguably having led his country into a whole slew of controversial and damaging domestic, geopolitical and economic bear traps.

Even considering the gap between approval and disapproval, Trump still far outperforms his much less controversial and more consensus-minded European counterparts.

Very much in flux

A – despite all appearances – still unsettled conflict in the Middle East, a rampant cost-of-living crisis, ICE raids, White House ballroom bust-ups, personnel ructions, a looming rift

with MAGA, nothing has had much of a lasting impact on polling for the midterms.

Since at least the beginning of this year, the consensus view is that the House leans towards the Democrats, by a small margin, and that the Senate will probably stay Republican, although that is tightening.

Combining historical standards with the extraordinary upheavals unleashed by Trump and his acolytes, this would not be a bad result for the incumbent at all.

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For the moment, things certainly look rosier for the Republicans than before the previous Trump midterms in 2018 that delivered a **blue wave**.

It would be tempting to say that things are, five months ahead of the actual elections, still very much in flux.

There are some indicators that might support this view, such as the outcomes in the primary season that's now underway. And there's also the still hard to predict effect of all the redistricting battles, although these seem to favour the Republicans.

Bucking the trend

Yet, the remarkable stability of the polls over a prolonged period, and the fact that the above-mentioned uncertainties could well end up cancelling each other out, gives more weight to the long-standing consensus view.

Anything short of a Senate victory for the Democrats could in any case still be regarded as leaving Trump's agenda relatively unchallenged, particularly where it concerns highly sensitive appointments in the judiciary, the security establishment and elsewhere.

If, as still seems likely at this point, the Democrats fail to capture both chambers of Congress, this would mean that Trump is bucking the trend in most Western countries that sees the incumbent punished, in many places, quite severely.

In Europe, there's only one major country where the incumbent is doing relatively well, and that's Italy.

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Giorgia Meloni has managed to retain support, despite also facing some headwinds. She did lose a referendum on judicial reform recently, but that is not seen as damaging to her chances in the general elections next year.

Tellingly, her personal approval ratings took a bit of a tumble, to Trump territory, but her party, Brothers of Italy, which is widely regarded to have its roots in neo-fascism, is still comfortably ahead in the polls.

While Meloni has disavowed her neo-fascist political pedigree and tempered some of her more EU-sceptic ideas, she's considered well to the right of the European mainstream, for what that's worth nowadays.

A centre-right leader, such as Merz, is not getting the benefit of the doubt that Meloni and Trump seem to be enjoying.

The odds favour the right

One factor often cited in the relative stability in US midterm polling is that the electoral map this year just favours the Republicans in the Senate because they have fewer vulnerable seats in the running.

Another element that's widely commented on is the disaffection with the alternative that's on offer: the Democrats.

Voters are signalling that they're not happy with the entire political establishment, Republican and Democrat, so they see little reason to switch allegiances.

In fact, however unlikely that might seem from afar, Trump and his MAGA movement are still seen as the more anti-establishment choice. And since they have captured the Republican Party, the odds favour the right.

Italy's proportional representation system is very different from the US, but the idea that Meloni and her hard-right coalition are actually more anti-establishment than the left also appears to be still working in her favour.



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Even in the UK, where a system that was supposed to be largely dominated by two parties is in flux, the big challenger is the far-right Reform UK party, with the now outspokenly left-wing Greens behind at some distance.

The same dynamic can be seen in **Germany**, where the extreme right-wing AfD is up some 5 per cent over Merz's centre-right CDU/CSU.

In France too, the next government in waiting is widely seen to be the once beyond the pale Rassemblement Nationale, RN, of Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella.

The united left NFP has suffered from fissures and big egos, not least that of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who leads the hard-left La France Insoumise.

But even without that, it seems that in a presidential run-off next year, there's hardly a candidate who can stop the RN.

Far from spent

This dismal outlook for centrist, centre-right and left-leaning politics in Europe and the US is not universal.

In Spain, Pedro Sanchez and his socialists might yet retain their cobbled-together majority next year.

The right-wing surge in much of Europe and also in the US still seems far from spent

Mark Carney and his Liberals are riding high in Canada, and Labor has been sweeping Australia last year and this.

Yet, the right-wing surge in much of Europe and also in the US still seems far from spent.

At the moment, the leaders of Europe's big countries will only have to look at the political troubles they're facing at home to understand that hopes of Trump being restrained by the new Congress are very premature.