



America Votes 2024:
The Transatlantic Impact
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The United States' EU Policy After 2024
Alix Frangeul-Alves and Gesine Weber

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By Alix Frangeul-Alves and Gesine Weber | July 23, 2024

The results of the US elections in November will impact Washington's policy towards the EU across virtually all policy areas. The new EU Commission must anticipate and prepare for potential outcomes and deepening trends in the United States.

A Bipartisan Trend in US Foreign Policy: Focus on Competition With China

Whatever the outcome of the elections, US foreign policy will be characterized by a focus on competition with China. This continues a trend over the last three administrations that began with Obama's "pivot to Asia".

Maintaining US leadership in core industries is a main driver of Washington's strategy, and the economic and political consequences of this approach strongly affect the EU. Whether Democratic or Republican, the US administration is likely to advance industrial policies similar to the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This "made in America" policy prioritizes reindustrialization and reshoring, including through massive subsidies, and implies more competition for European companies. This approach also renders an EU-US free trade agreement less likely.

Washington might increasingly pressure the EU to adopt US standards in the high-tech sector and urge Europeans to "buy American" in all critical sectors, including defense. The US-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), which has produced only limited outcomes since its launch in 2021 due to ongoing trade disputes and divergences on China, can serve the United States as a tool for pressuring Europeans.

If political pressure does not suffice to achieve European alignment with the United States in competition with China, the EU must anticipate that Washington will use economic measures of coercion, including extraterritorial sanctions, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers.

Two Scenarios: Disruption or Continuity

Washington's approach to the EU would look very different under Trump and (assuming Kamala Harris will remain the presumptive nominee) Harris administrations.

A Trump presidency would entail significant disruptions in US-EU relations. Because Trump privileged bilateral ties during his presidency, the EU cannot expect to become a critical interlocutor in a second Trump administration. While Harris' foreign policy remains to be defined, it would likely involve continuity and engagement through the channels used by the Biden-Harris administration, including bilateral and EU-US ties, and formats such as the G7.

A second Trump administration would weaken and potentially undermine the effect of US security guarantees as part of European deterrence by casting doubts on the US commitment to NATO. In the past, [Trump declared that he could end Russia's war against Ukraine within a day](#), and his running mate, J.D. Vance, [clearly opposes further financial support for Ukraine](#). US support to Kyiv—in close cooperation with Europe—can be expected to continue under a Harris administration; at this year's Munich Security Conference, [the vice-president underlined the importance of the EU's contribution](#). However, in either scenario, a divided Congress would almost certainly obstruct extended assistance to Ukraine.

Cooperation with the EU on climate policy would greatly differ in the two electoral scenarios. As a supporter of Biden's Green Deal, and having called for more global action against climate change at last year's United Nations global climate summit in Dubai, [Harris is likely to promote US involvement in the global fight against climate change](#) and protect recent progress achieved through broader multilateral cooperation. In contrast, Trump advocates for a return to fossil fuels and a lowering of environmental standards at home. He withdrew the United States from the Paris agreement during his first presidency, and if he were to repeat this, the EU might have to step in to fill the void in global environmental leadership.

The Best Preparation: Strengthening European Sovereignty

Europe will not be the top priority but rather part of Washington's alliance-management approach to achieving its foreign policy goals. Clearly defined EU interests, and a strategy and instruments to achieve them, are therefore critical to the EU's engagement with the United States. As both electoral scenarios render coercive economic measures from Washington likely, the EU should review its vulnerabilities and accelerate the development of alternatives—for example, in acquisitions of critical technologies and goods.

The EU must prepare for a more significant role in addressing security and defense challenges in its neighborhood. It should rapidly implement its defense industrial strategy, strengthen its capacity to defend against hybrid threats, and further develop crisis-management tools such as the [Rapid Deployment Capacity](#). The EU may also borrow funds to finance its defense ambitions, just as it did in its response to Covid-19 or the energy crisis.

To mitigate the consequences of US-China competition, the EU and its member states must also speed up the process of de-risking. Larger member states such as Germany and France must enhance the resilience of supply chains and critically review Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), not least to avoid being hit with US extraterritorial sanctions.

On challenges of global governance, and most importantly, climate policy, the EU should maintain its high level of ambition and seek partnerships with emerging middle powers and countries most affected by climate change. This approach allows the EU either to team up with Washington, or to limit the ramifications of US climate policy, depending on the outcome of the elections.

A promising overall approach for the EU would be to strengthen transatlantic relations beyond Washington—for example, at the level of US cities or states. The opening of the European Parliament's liaison office in San Francisco in 2022 is a step in the right direction.

In all these domains, coherent messaging from Brussels is of paramount importance. Diverging messages among institutions, or between Brussels and national capitals—as in the reaction to events around Gaza—lead to confusion in Washington and risk undermining the EU's credibility as an interlocutor with interests of its own.

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About the Author

Alix Frangeul-Alves is a program coordinator on GMF's Risk and Strategy team. Based in Paris, she focuses on US domestic politics and foreign policy, and the geopolitics of energy.

Gesine Weber is a fellow on GMF's Geostrategy team. She works on European security and defense issues, and leads the annual Transatlantic Trends study. Based in Paris, she focuses on Europe's role as a geopolitical actor, EU defense initiatives, and security and defense policy of the E3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom).

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