



# **America Votes 2024: The Transatlantic Impact**

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**A New Blueprint for US Foreign Policy:  
The 119th Congress and US-Europe Relations**

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# A New Blueprint for US Foreign Policy: The 119th Congress and US-Europe Relations

By Kate Stotesbery and Alix Frangeul-Alves | October 23, 2024

*While the US presidential campaign draws global attention, the upcoming congressional elections on November 5 will significantly affect Europeans, too. No matter who enters the White House, the new Congress' policies will steer US–Europe relations, with ramifications for security alliances and economic and climate policies.*

Key issues expected to dominate the foreign policy agenda of the next US Congress include economic competition with China, security in the Indo-Pacific, Israel and Iran, and root causes of immigration at the southern border. If it does not pass before January, [artificial intelligence \(AI\) legislation will be another bipartisan top priority](#) with international ramifications. Whether or not to provide further US funding for Ukraine is yet another key decision before the next Congress. The “China First” approach is expected to persist regardless of party control in the two chambers, with lawmakers viewing nearly all domestic and foreign policy issues through the lens of US competition with China. These priority issues, coupled with internal hurdles, will presumably limit Congress' focus on many core areas of US-Europe policy cooperation, including any new progress on trade policy and energy investments and other areas of tech policy.

## Two Key Scenarios for Future Transatlantic Cooperation

The most probable scenarios are, first, a divided Congress in which the Democratic Party wins back the majority in the House of Representatives and Republicans win the Senate; and second, a unified Republican Congress, with the GOP holding the majority in both chambers. In any case, Republicans are expected to take control of the Senate as they hold a structural advantage, with Democrats defending 23 seats out of 33 races in states leaning toward the GOP.

In a scenario in which Congress is divided, the incoming president would face challenges in pushing forward their agenda. This situation would heighten polarization in US politics, leading to more internal conflict and diminishing lawmakers' foreign policy bandwidth. In a Harris administration with a Democratic House majority and a Republican Senate majority, bills on the Indo-Pacific's security environment and those [related to the competition with China](#) might [advance](#), particularly given Vice President Harris' clear articulation of US-China competition in her platform and in her [Democratic National Convention speech](#). The Harris administration and the House will no doubt keep pushing for further support for Ukraine and the [acceleration of the energy transition](#), although it might receive some pushback from Republican senators. Based on the Biden Administration's increased scientific investments and [bipartisan Hill support](#) for federal investment in the Arctic, [increased prioritization of the Arctic is also to be expected](#). This change could open avenues for scientific and defense collaboration with Nordic countries.

With the same composition of Congress under a Trump administration, the Republican Senate will be positioned to coalesce around and lead the charge for the Trump administration's priorities, while House Democrats would work on oversight. A unified government—a Republican House and Senate with a Trump White House—would shift toward a Congress that worked hand-in-glove with the administration to accomplish its foreign policy priorities. Based on public statements and potential policies that are noted in Project 2025 and reflect Trump's previous administration actions and campaign promises, that could include an [active China policy](#) and [support for Israel](#), a [questioning of traditional alliances and NATO's deterrence function](#), [pressure on allies](#) to contribute more for collective defense, and promotion

of trade barriers and tariffs. The GOP would probably also [prioritize fossil fuel production and push away from a fight against climate change](#). Despite numerous messaging bills that appear divergent, the parties share priorities on China and Israel, meaning that policy in these areas will probably not be greatly affected by the outcome of the elections.

Changes in leadership within the US foreign relations committees would impact European interests. Jeanne Shaheen, the [expected successor](#) to Ben Cardin as the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, champions US support for Ukraine and US global leadership, as well as economic stability in European markets. Michael McCaul, the current Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, is a [proud defense hawk](#) with a robust legislative record who staunchly advocates for US global engagement. He is pursuing an extension of his term limit to remain in his position but is facing competition from several Republican challengers.

### **Finding Resilience Amid Shifting Political Landscapes**

Whatever the outcome of the US congressional elections, delayed or reduced US support for Ukraine is quite possible, and increased pressure to align on China will be an engine for the EU to reassess its cooperation with Washington. To navigate these challenges, Brussels should adopt a dual approach: it should establish a clear EU policy toward the United States and strengthen European defense capabilities. This strategy would be a win-win for the EU and the United States, allowing them to achieve shared goals with regard to the war in Ukraine, enhance interoperability and alliance effectiveness, and most of all, share the defense burden.

Utilizing existing resources can also deepen transatlantic ties, especially amid potential US domestic turmoil and pressure for European alignment with US foreign policy. In addition to deepening and broadening engagement with Congress, European states should develop new, permanent communication channels at local and state levels. Stakeholders at these levels are often viewed as more trustworthy due to their on-the-ground involvement. They often hold jurisdiction over matters central to the transatlantic alliance, from energy to elections, and act out US-European shared values. Europeans should therefore adopt a transparent approach and engage on clear and targeted issues with their local and state-level US counterparts—including the most skeptical—to develop a trust-based relationship. The EU must also leverage its economic power and diplomatic channels to ensure that any shifts in US policy do not fracture its own approach to security and trade. Diversification of the EU's supply chains is therefore essential if Brussels wants to achieve its industrial and climate goals. Partnerships with countries rich in critical materials—such as some Latin American countries—would allow Brussels to accelerate its twin transitions (green and digital) and keep up the world's innovative pace in a more strategically autonomous way.

In light of these upcoming shifts, Europeans seeking deeper strategic cooperation should bolster their defense capabilities and formulate a clear outreach strategy to the United States—one that expands state and local engagement and centers congressional engagement in cooperation on specific, concrete, shared economic and security priorities to effectively tackle current challenges.

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### **About the Author**

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