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2024, a Year of Elections: Twilight or Renewal of Democracy?

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2024, a Year of Elections: Twilight or Renewal of Democracy?



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The year 2024 broke all previous records for the holding of elections worldwide. More than sixty countries were called to the polls, including the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, India, Russia, and Turkey. Together, these countries have more than four billion inhabitants, representing half of the world's population. However, simply holding a ballot is no guarantee of the fundamentally democratic nature of the regime organizing it—it is essential to distinguish between the so-called liberal democracies (the US, France, and the UK) and the so-called illiberal or elective democracies (India, Turkey), which are also distinct from “electoral autocracies” such as Russia. These caveats notwithstanding, we can legitimately describe 2024 as a large-scale test for the future of democracy.¹ Now that 2024 has drawn to a close, we can ask: **What is the state of democracy today? What initial conclusions can we draw from the various elections held around the world over the year?**

The general feeling at the end of this extraordinary year is one of a period marked by a strong expression of democracy but also by the inevitability of its collapse. The most democratic year in recent history may also be the year of its great unraveling. After decades of steady progress since the post-war period, democracy is in retreat. The long-held and seemingly unshakable belief that democracy and liberalism go hand in hand is crumbling. According to the NGO Freedom House, in 2000, 54 percent of the world's population lived in a democracy, in 2018, the figure was 50 percent, and in 2019, it was 32 percent.² Several

¹ This view was expressed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa in September 2023, when she declared “We will know whether democracy lives or dies by the end of 2024” (Gwen Flanders, “Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa Warns that Democracy Is on the Ballot in Upcoming Elections,” *The National Press Club*, September 7, 2023, <https://www.press.org/newsroom/nobel-laureate-maria-ressa-warns-democracy-ballot-upcoming-elections>).

² Alain Frachon, “En nombre de pays pratiquant la démocratie, elle régresse ; en territoire déjà conquis, elle perd en qualité” [In terms of the number of countries practicing democracy, it is declining; in areas where it has already been established, its quality is eroding], *Le Monde*, February 8, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2024/02/08/en-nombre-de-pays-pratiquant-la-democratie-elle-regresse-en-territoire-deja-conquis-elle-perd-en-qualite_6215356_3232.html.

organizations agree on the figure of thirty-two “liberal democracies” in 2024, the lowest number since 1995. The results observed this year—culminating in the reelection of Donald Trump—can thus be seen as an eloquent manifestation of this phenomenon, its climax, or, for some more pessimistic commentators, its point of no return.

If 2024 was undeniably marked by the rise or return of illiberal or anti-democratic political forces, our assessment of the year’s electoral record should not be limited to this dimension alone. Trump’s victory should neither freeze nor distort the more general analyses we conduct, and we will show in this note that the situation is far more complex and nuanced. A careful examination of electoral processes, voter turnout, and the themes that drove the campaigns and their outcomes will enable us to draw a more nuanced picture that goes beyond the mere triumph of forces hostile to democracy.

To this end, this study will focus primarily on the major “liberal” democracies, covering four main elections:

- **The European elections on June 9, 2004;**
- **The French legislative elections on June 30 and July 7, 2004;**
- **The British general election on July 4, 2004;**
- **The American presidential election on November 5, 2004;**

It will also take a closer look at other polls—the municipal elections in Turkey and the elections in Georgia, Moldova, and Romania—focusing in particular on those where the demand for democracy has, in one way or another, increased.

Some months after 2024 has closed, the hypotheses formulated in this note will, of course, need to be extended by further work, and it is far too early to draw definitive conclusions. In particular, separate studies will need to be conducted of the elections that took place on the African continent, where seventeen countries, including Senegal, South

Africa, and Tunisia,³ were called to vote, with lasting consequences for the evolution of these regimes and their relations with several Western countries, including France—Senegal is an enlightening example in this respect. The same applies to Asia, with elections in countries such as Taiwan, India, and Indonesia marking significant changes for the future of democracy on the continent. The analysis that follows does not pretend to cover such an immensely broad spectrum, and many of its insights will need to be cross-referenced and further explored at a later stage. It does, however, identify a number of initial lessons that may provide food for thought on the future of our democracies in the months and years to come.

Five main issues stand out.

The first is the holding of elections and the weight of foreign interference. Historically, there have been many attempts to destabilize elections—mainly from Russia, China, and Iran. However, in 2024, governments were better prepared than in the past, and such interference had, a priori, little direct material impact on the conduct and outcome of elections. Nevertheless, beyond the direct effects on the results themselves, such interference has more pernicious and long-term effects on the democracies targeted in terms of their destabilization. While it is still far too early to draw up a complete assessment of the year, we appear to have entered a phase dominated by psychological interference, which aimed less at ensuring the triumph of one candidate over another and more at promoting division, chaos, and anti-Western narratives. Moreover, interference must not be reduced to its foreign dimension—its domestic manifestations must also be taken into account.

³ On this subject, see the initial analysis by the American think tank the Brookings Institution: Danielle Resnick and Landry Signé, “Democratic Resilience in Africa: Lessons from 2024 Elections,” Brookings, November 12, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/democratic-resilience-in-africa-lessons-from-2024-elections>.

Second, with regard to voter turnout: Despite an unprecedented climate of mistrust in politicians and institutions, the majority of Western countries surveyed (with the notable exception of the UK) recorded stable or rising turnout figures. The year saw record turnout in France's legislative elections, rising turnout in European elections (particularly in Germany), and the second-highest turnout in US elections since 1900 (with the 2020 election surpassing all previous scores). Although the driving forces are indeed varied, these figures point to a form of civic vitality that should not be underestimated. Some might call this a misplaced vitality—and they wouldn't be entirely wrong—but it is vitality, nonetheless. We need to analyze the reasons behind it to draw some lessons for the future and the place of civic participation in our societies. How can we transform protest or resentment-based participation into constructive participation?

On the results of the various elections: The first thing to note is the setbacks inflicted on the majority of the political forces in power. From the American Democratic Party to Emmanuel Macron's centrist coalition in France, not forgetting the British Tories and—to venture a little outside the strict scope of our analysis—Narendra Modi's BJP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP, never have incumbents been so massively and unanimously punished at the ballot box, even if some remain in power. This clearly demonstrates that global geopolitical, economic, and cultural issues played a role during the polls—sometimes more so than the efforts made by each national camp to defend itself. The undeniable consolidation of the so-called populist parties is the second major lesson to be drawn from these results—and it is closely tied to the first—but it is accompanied by growing divisions within their ranks, particularly at the European level, and should not obscure certain setbacks, as seen in Poland or the Scandinavian countries.

On the issues that drove the campaigns: The striking consistency within the Western world is a good indicator of the growing globalization of the issues at stake: the economy, purchasing power, immigration, and health top the list almost everywhere and should prompt governments to address fundamental questions of inequality and wealth distribution, as well as identity and the fear of decline or disappearance. The discrepancy between certain priority issues for voters—such as health care—and the way they are treated by the media and the political establishment is also indicative of the ability of populist leaders to impose the terms of debate and propose apparently simple answers to extraordinarily complex issues that other political forces can no longer address. Finally, the clear retreat of environmental issues is another central lesson that emerges from this first assessment.

The final observation concerns the way politics is conceived of and conducted today: Democracy, like politics, increasingly resembles a “product”—for some, an outdated product to be replaced by something else. It is a product that must satisfy electoral clienteles who are inundated with often contradictory content via social media platforms that have become uncontrollable. It is a product in which considerable sums are invested (for example, in the United States, where the cost of campaigns has never been so high, exceeding US\$15 billion). It is also the target of strategies and tools intended to damage it—by which we are referring to political interference, particularly by Russia and China.

1 Organization, Participation, and Polarization

1.1. ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION, INTERFERENCE, AND DESTABILIZATION: A NEW NORMAL?

a. Interference: A High Number of Threats but Better-Prepared States and Societies

Before analyzing the drivers of votes and the results of the various elections, let's look at the conditions under which the elections took place—both material and immaterial. The question of how smoothly an election runs immediately raises the issue of the informational context in which it takes place, both in the lead-up to and on voting day.

From this point of view, the year 2024 was marked by a record number of attempts at foreign interference. The “Interferences 2024” project conducted by the Atlantic Council think tank demonstrated that the American presidential campaign was subjected to an unprecedented number of destabilization attempts⁴—unprecedented not just in scale but also in sophistication and scope. On the eve of the US election, a joint statement from the FBI, CISA, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence⁵ noted the importance of Russian operations intended to “undermine public confidence in the integrity of US elections and stoke divisions among Americans.” The statement predicted an intensification of these threats, particularly in the “swing

⁴ Atlantic Council and DFR Lab, *Interference 2024: The 2024 Foreign Interference Attribution Tracker*, <https://interference2024.org>.

⁵ National Coordinator for Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience (CISA), “Press Release: Joint ODNI, FBI, and CISA Statement,” November 4, 2024, <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/joint-odni-fbi-and-cisa-statement-1>.

states.” Finally, it highlighted the increase in Iranian interference targeting Donald Trump’s campaign—it should be recalled that the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal during his presidency, like the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Al-Quds Force, a branch of the Revolutionary Guards, in 2020 left a bitter taste for Tehran. Iranian interference borrows certain methodological elements of Russian interference and has evolved in its foundations since the banning of the RT and Sputnik channels in 2022 following the outbreak of war in Ukraine. These bans have led Russia to rethink its influence strategy and refine its methods, creating a veritable market for interference outsourced by the commissioning state, whose ramifications and players have proven more difficult for the administration to grasp.⁶

In addition to the Iranian and Russian threats, there is also a growing Chinese threat, as explained by US intelligence in a declassified report published in October.⁷ The report refers to the increased sophistication of Beijing’s influence activities, linked in part to the exploitation of generative artificial intelligence and the use of TikTok. The social network was reportedly used by a Chinese propaganda unit to target Democratic and Republican candidates in the 2022 mid-term elections.

The multiplication of these threats also concerns European countries, including France. According to a note from the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) relayed by Politico, May 2024 marked an all-time record in terms of the spread of false information about the European Union a month ahead of the election. The false information concerned the voting procedures and sought either to dissuade citizens from going to the polls or to sow division and polarization. Support for Ukraine, the Green Deal, and immigration were among the most

⁶ Maxime Audinet (interview), “Comment la guerre transforme-t-elle l’influence russe?” [How has the war affected Russian influence?] Expressions by Institut Montaigne, September 3, 2024, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/comment-la-guerre-transforme-t-elle-l'influence-russe>.

⁷ “Foreign Threats to US Elections after Voting Ends in 2024,” National Intelligence Council, October 8, 2024, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2024/4006-foreign-threats-after-voting-ends>.

frequently circulated topics, as the Commission⁸ pointed out. In France, attempts to destabilize the early parliamentary elections were also attributed to Russia—specifically to the “Matryoshka” operation, a pro-Russian campaign targeting the media and the fact-checking community.⁹

But the United States, like the European countries that were targeted, was more prepared than in the past and had learned some lessons from the 2016 and 2020 campaigns. Being prepared enabled the various states to guard against the risks and contain some of their effects. According to various experts consulted on this subject, there is indeed a “gap” between the situation observed in 2016–2017 (marked by the “Macron Leaks” in France, in particular) and that of today. The naivete that then prevailed has been replaced by both state and non-state awareness. In France, this has led to the creation of VIGINUM (a body attached to the SGDSN, the General Secretariat for Defense and National Security, which is responsible for combating foreign digital interference) and the setting up of investigative commissions and dedicated departments at the Quai d’Orsay and the Ministry of the Armed Forces. At the European level, the subject was first put on the agenda in 2015 under the heading *Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference* (FIMI), before gaining momentum from 2018 onwards through the publication of an action plan against disinformation ahead of the 2019 European elections; votes on several resolutions on the subject in the European Parliament; the adoption of the Digital Services Act (DSA), which enjoins online platforms to fight disinformation; the creation of a new Committee on Foreign Interference in the European Parliament, etc.

⁸ “Press Release: European Elections: EU Institutions Prepared to Counter Disinformation,” European Commission, June 6, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_3124.

⁹ *Matryoshka: une campagne prorusse ciblant les médias et la communauté des fact-checkers* [Matryoshka: A Pro-Russian Campaign Targeting Media and the Fact-Checking Community], SGDSN (France), June 10, 2024, <https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/matryoshka-une-campagne-prorusse-ciblant-les-medias-et-la-communaute-des-fact-checkers>.

There is also the non-governmental sector, with part of civil society now mobilized and aware of these issues, as demonstrated by the growing number of debunking, fact-checking, and awareness-raising NGOs (Disinfo Cloud in the United States, EU Disinfo Lab and EUvsDisinfo in Europe). In the United States, this democratization of information about interference issues was reflected in 2024 in the almost weekly declassification of US intelligence documents, revealing to the general public the identity and nature of destabilization attempts by Iran, Russia, and China, particularly on social media.

According to the information we have today, the strict conduct of elections in the countries under consideration does not appear to have been significantly disrupted by large-scale foreign interference.

Subsequent studies will enable us to confirm this, but it seems that the electoral process took place under conditions that were, if not optimal, at least regular, particularly in the United States, where there was considerable concern about the organization of the ballot and the recognition of its results. At the European level,¹⁰ the Vice-President in charge of transparency, Věra Jourová, declared at the beginning of October¹¹ that these attempts at destabilization had not caused “any major incident likely to disrupt the European elections.” Concerns about the massive use of deep fakes did not materialize to the extent feared. Elsa Pilichowski, director of public governance at the OECD, confirmed that the use of AI had not been a “game changer” during the election. However, she also warned of the extent of the risk, which is still very much present, and for which European states were insufficiently prepared.¹²

¹⁰ *The list of measures taken by the EU since 2015 in this area is appended.*

¹¹ *Although they are not considered to have had any impact on the outcome of the vote at this stage, it is worth noting the false bomb threats that targeted polling stations, briefly disrupting voting in Georgia.*

¹² *Mathieu Pollet and Pieter Haeck, “Commission says disinformation efforts failed to sway EU election,” Politico, October 15, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-says-disinformation-efforts-failed-to-sway-eu-election-vera-jourova>.*

Two Russian Interference Operations Uncovered: Doppelgänger and Overload

Operation Doppelgänger

Operation Doppelgänger involves “cloning” mainstream and government media sites and spreading anti-Western, anti-Ukrainian, and pro-Russian messages. The identification of this large-scale destabilization operation—which targeted the American campaign as well as the French and European elections—led to the conviction of some of its actors by the American justice system in September 2024. The aim of this large-scale operation was to deceive internet users into believing that they were consulting legitimate online sources with a view to instilling doubt and mistrust regarding a number of major issues shaping ongoing election campaigns (immigration, conflict in the Middle East, LGBT rights, etc.¹³). The identification of the operation led to the sanctioning of ten Russian citizens and two organizations, including the RT channel. In France, it was VIGINUM that detected Doppelgänger’s attempts to interfere in 2023 and, in particular, revealed its involvement in the propagation of photos of graffiti depicting the Star of David, which appeared on the walls of Paris after the terrorist attack on October 7 on a large number of social media platforms. Although some of its members have been identified and punished, Doppelgänger still exists, and the threat is far from over.

¹³ Roman Osadchuk and Eto Buziashvili, “Explainer: The Russian Influence Operations Targeting the 2024 US Elections,” Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), September 6, 2024, <https://dfriab.org/2024/09/06/how-doppelganger-and-other-russia-linked-operations-target-us-elections>.

Operation Overload

Operation Overload, also a Russian initiative targeting the US presidential campaign, involved diverting the energy of fact-checkers by inundating them with false content to be verified. Revealed in June 2024 by a report from the Finnish company Check First, it aimed to flood journalists with fake content while amplifying its visibility. More than eight hundred organizations in over seventy-five countries were reportedly targeted by this disinformation campaign.

b. Long-Term Consequences for Democracy and Trust

While the direct impact on the conduct and outcome of elections may have been slight, the long-term consequences are very significant, and governments are ill-prepared to deal with them. Indeed, it seems that the primary ambition of these operations, whether Russian, Iranian, or Chinese, was less to help any particular candidate win than to damage democracy, whether American or European, and to stir up or fan the flames of division within Western societies. In the United States, it was less a question of making Trump or Harris triumph than about fostering distrust and chaos.

The case of the United Kingdom illustrates the evolution of this phenomenon: while few interference operations were revealed during the general elections in July, numerous attempts at destabilization and penetration of the national public debate were observed during the demonstrations in August in reaction to the knife attack in Southport that left three little girls aged between six and nine dead. The scale of the protests was partly due to the dissemination by far-right websites

and accounts of erroneous rumors about the identity of the attacker—claiming that he was a Syrian refugee who had entered the country illegally (in reality, he was a British teenager born in Cardiff to Rwandan parents). Several Russian accounts are said to have actively participated in the amplification and propagation of this false information, as revealed by the new Labour government.¹⁴ These operations always find their breeding ground in a weakened national context, whose flaws are exploited and exacerbated by anti-Western interference operations.¹⁵ In the British case, then, Russian interference consisted less in creating false information from scratch than in amplifying existing rumors with the potential to be highly flammable. **It is important to remember that these interference operations are not solely responsible for the tensions they seek to exploit—which are rooted in very real cultural, economic, and social contexts that national governments must take into account.** While they are not the only cause, they are nevertheless powerful and dangerous catalysts. In fact, there is also **purely domestic interference and destabilization that does not need to be fueled by external forces**—as we saw in the US with **Project 2028**, a supposedly pro-Harris initiative that in reality aimed to undermine her campaign by distorting and radicalizing her proposals via online ads and content. Spearheaded by the conservative organization Building America's Future, its main backer is Elon Musk, as revealed by Open Secret.¹⁶

Thus, although the destabilizing actions observed throughout 2024 did not directly affect election results, they did exacerbate distrust of democratic institutions. The danger is, therefore, even more insidious

¹⁴ Hayley Dixon, “Foreign States Amplifying Disinformation Fuelling Riots, Says Starmer,” *The Telegraph*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/05/foreign-states-southport-riots>.

¹⁵ Joe Morley-Davies, “How Did Foreign Actors Exploit the Recent Riots in the UK?” RUSI, August 28, 2024, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/how-did-foreign-actors-exploit-recent-riots-uk>.

¹⁶ “Progress 2028: Group Impersonating Harris Backers behind Misleading Ads,” *AFP Fact Check*, November 5, 2024, <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.36LD9V6>.

and concerning, as it does not simply target specific predictable moments in the democratic process in order to interfere in them but gradually undermines all of its foundations. While it is extremely difficult to measure the effects on behavior of this type of political interference, particularly electoral behavior, there is every reason to believe that it amplifies polarization and the fragmentation of societies, at least in terms of access to information. In the long term, it lends greater credibility to anti-Western narratives that seemed completely unheard of just a few years ago but that have gradually taken root in public opinion.

For many, the European response in the face of the scale of this threat has been far too weak. It consists of identifying (albeit increasingly effectively) a threat that has already materialized and warning the general public. But beyond the regulatory and awareness-raising weapons it has acquired, the EU has no coercive tools to genuinely retaliate against actors, nor is it capable of stemming these attempts at interference at the root before they even materialize. So today, it is less a question of thinking in terms of electoral interference—which is now a constant fact to be systematically taken into account—and more one of talking about global political interference and the means we wish to equip ourselves with to respond to it. This is all about prophylaxis and immunizing populations over the long term.

Finally, it should be pointed out that while these attempts at interference have not been able to hinder the electoral process in the main countries analyzed in this report—which, since 2016, have equipped themselves with robust institutions to respond to interference—this is not the case in all countries, as the examples of Moldova, Georgia, and Romania at the end of 2024 demonstrated. In these three countries, European and Ukrainian issues were instrumentalized in favor of the pro-Russian camp, and significant uncertainty still hangs over the results of the various elections and the future of the regimes.

Election Interference in Moldova, Georgia, and Romania

Moldova and Georgia, which are both official candidates for EU membership but were historically linked to Russia, voted in decisive presidential and parliamentary elections in October. On Thursday, November 28, the Georgian prime minister announced the suspension of EU membership negotiations following a highly contested electoral process in the country.

Moldova

In Moldova, Maia Sandu, the pro-European outgoing president, won on November 3, with 55 percent of the vote against Alexandru Stoianoglo, who is considered to be pro-Russian (45 percent). Largely due to the support of a diaspora that was 77 percent in favor of Maia Sandu, the victory was less clear-cut than expected, after a disappointing first round for the incumbent (42.5 percent of the vote) and could be challenged as early as the legislative elections scheduled for July 2025. The first round of the presidential election was accompanied by a referendum on the constitutionalization of European integration, in which the “yes” vote narrowly won out, with 50.4 percent of the vote. In Moldova, whose current borders include part of Bessarabia (annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812) and the self-proclaimed Republic of Transnistria east of the Dniester River (which has still not been recognized), Russian pressure on the electoral process is strong. In October 2021, before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia tried to bring Moldova back into its exclusive sphere of influence by drastically raising gas and electricity tariffs, on which the country had been 100 percent dependent until recently, on the grounds that, since the country wished to join the EU, it was appropriate to charge Chisinau for its energy

at the same price as that set for Europeans. Moscow hoped that the resulting economic shock would undermine support for Maia Sandu and EU integration. The Moldovan think tank WatchDog¹⁷ revealed the existence of a major disinformation network in July, and in October, police¹⁸ confirmed a massive vote-buying scheme designed to induce Moldovans to vote against Maia Sandu. The Moldovan Ministry of the Interior estimated that Moscow had spent around \$100 million prior to the first round (\$15 million was paid directly to voters). In response, several pro-Russian TV channels lost their licenses by decision of the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service, and the authorities in Chisinau took steps to regulate voting by the diaspora living in Russia or Transnistria. The number of polling stations in Russia was limited to just two in Moscow, compared with the five proposed by the Electoral Commission, reducing the number of ballot papers available to the 250,000 Moldovan voters residing in Russia to around 10,000. Following the elections, the White House, through National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, denounced Moscow's involvement, and Maia Sandu told a press conference that foreign powers had actively interfered with the electoral process.

Georgia

Georgia, meanwhile, voted on October 26 to elect members of its parliament. The party in power since 2012, "Georgian Dream," founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a Francophile oligarch who made

¹⁷ Andrei Rusu, "Evaluation of Promotional Campaigns of Șor and Platon: Analysis of Investments and Tactics Used in July 2024," WatchDog, August 2024, <https://watchdog.md/en/analyzes/208204/evaluarea-campaniilor-de-dezinformare-finantate-de-sor-si-platon-impactul-si-reactia-limitata-a-platformelor-sociale>.

¹⁸ "Noi metode de finanțare ilegală a unor partide politice documentate de PA și INI" [New methods of illegal financing of political parties documented by the Prosecutor's Office and the National Integrity Agency], Poliția Republicii Moldova, October 3, 2024, <https://point.md/ro/novosti/obschestvo/gip-v-sentiabre-iz-rf-pereveli-15-mln-na-to-htoby-skomprometirovat-vybory>.

his fortune in post-USSR Russia, won with 54 percent of the vote. President Salomé Zourabichvili, a Frenchwoman of Georgian origin who became a naturalized Georgian, is committed to the opposition parties and has repeatedly denounced the “special Russian hybrid war operation.”¹⁹ This was the first election since the war in Ukraine, against the tense backdrop of violent protests against a June 3 law requiring any organization receiving more than 20 percent of its funding from abroad to register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power.” The promulgation of the law led to the freezing of Tbilisi’s application to join the EU. International observers (the joint observation mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR, the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE, the Council of Europe, NATO, and the European Parliament) acknowledged the efficient organization of the elections but stressed the high degree of polarization and wide differences in the financial capacities of the ruling party and opposition groups. The NGO My Vote²⁰ denounced the results as spurious, given the lack of respect for voting secrecy and intimidation.

Salomé Zourabichvili asked the Constitutional Court to annul the legislative elections, denouncing a rigged election and refusing to hand over her mandate, which expired on December 14, to a parliament she considers illegitimate. Viktor Orbán, who held the rotating EU presidency in the second half of 2024, welcomed the “victory of the peace camp.” On November 28, pro-Russian Prime Minister Kobakhidze announced the postponement of EU accession negotiations until 2028, despite this objective having been enshrined in the Georgian constitution.

¹⁹ “Enretien: Géorgie: pour la présidente Zourabichvili, ‘il ne reste rien d’un régime démocratique’” [Interview. Georgia: For President Zourabichvili, ‘Nothing Remains of a Democratic Regime’], *Ouest France*, December 16, 2024.

²⁰ *My Vote Speaks of ‘Large Scale’ Rigging Scheme as Preliminary Results Give Lead to GD,* “Civil Georgia, October 27, 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/631251>.

Romania

In Romania, which has been a member of the EU since 2007 and is also a member of NATO, presidential and parliamentary elections were held between November 24 and December 1. The second round of the presidential election, scheduled for December 8, 2024, was canceled at the last minute, following the invalidation of the first-round results by the Constitutional Court. Independent candidate Călin Georgescu, whom polls had placed at less than 5 percent of intended votes in early October, came out on top in the first round with 22.3 percent of the vote, against a backdrop of suspected interference. This pro-Russian and far-right figure ran his campaign almost exclusively on the TikTok social network platform, defending, in particular, the interruption of military aid to Ukraine and benefiting from the approval of a large part of the electorate hostile to candidates from traditional parties. The day after the first round, anti-Georgescu demonstrations multiplied across the country. Suspicion hung over the virality of the content shared by Georgescu on TikTok and the financing of his campaign. On December 4, the Supreme National Defense Council, which had denounced a cyberattack on the electoral process a few days earlier, declassified documents attesting to Russian manipulation of the election in favor of Georgescu. More than 25,000 TikTok accounts, whose origins are difficult to trace, were allegedly involved in his campaign, and influencers were paid to promote his candidacy on the social network. On December 5, two days before the second round, the Romanian Constitutional Court annulled the entire presidential election process. This was a historic decision in which, for the first time, the use of a social network was called into question. This annulment has had ambivalent effects on Romanian democracy: While affirming the insincerity of the

ballot and seeking to defend democracy in the country, it has fueled mistrust of the Supreme Court among the thousands of voters who cast their ballots for Georgescu. According to several observers, this decision can only reinforce polarization in the country. On December 17, the European Commission opened an investigation into TikTok following accusations of Russian election manipulation. On January 2, Călin Georgescu appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to challenge the annulment of the election. After the Supreme Court decision, the Romanian government postponed the elections until May 4th and 18th. Though favorite for May elections, Călin Georgescu's candidacy has been rejected by the electoral commission.

1.2. TURNOUT: BAD CAUSES, GOOD EFFECTS?

a. Overall Stable or Rising Turnout in Most Western Countries...

The vitality of a democracy cannot be measured by any single factor. Participation and abstention figures must be examined in light of other indicators, such as confidence in political institutions and personnel, the quality and diversity of public debate, and the existence of solid checks and balances. But let's start here with the electorate, which offers admittedly patchy data—as democracy is not limited to electoral participation alone, and the electorate is only one “part” of the citizenry—but which has the advantage of providing the most robust and comparable figures over the long term.

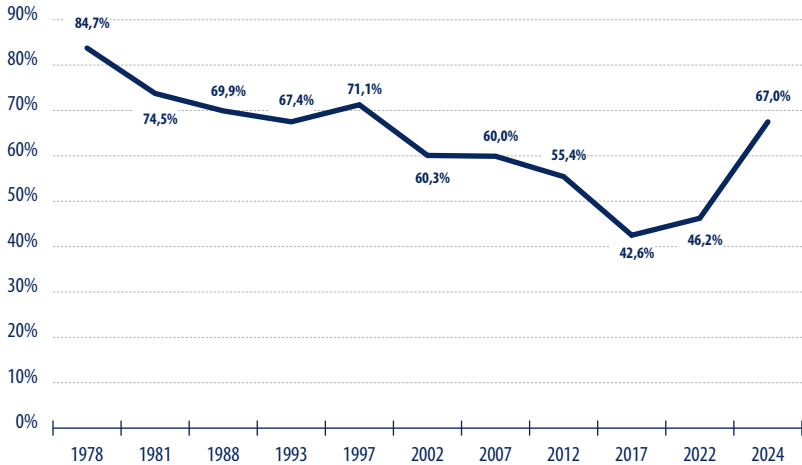
If we look at voter turnout in the European and French legislative elections, we see an increase—very clear for the French legislative elections, relative and differentiated according to member states for the European elections.

In France, abstention has risen steadily since the 1993 legislative elections, from 32.6 percent in the second round in 1993 to 40 percent in 2007, peaking at 57.4 percent in 2017 before falling back to 33.4 percent in 2024, the most spectacular drop ever recorded in the history of the Fifth Republic. **The drop is as significant as it is circumstantial: It would be an illusion to think that the issue of abstention is over and that this election has magically resolved it.** On the contrary, many voters feel that the government has failed to take their votes into consideration, which could accentuate their disengagement and push turnout back to its previous low levels. While the mobilization of the Republican front was one of the most powerful markers of this sequence, the disappointment that followed raises serious doubts about the ability of such a front to reform and be followed by voters in future elections. In fact, 45 percent of voters consider the Republican front to be “a tactic enabling traditional parties to retain power” (68 percent of RN voters and 50 percent of abstainers).²¹ The behavior of voters in 2024 is therefore likely to be part of the “intermittent voting” phenomenon, theorized by researcher Anne Muxel, among others, and which INSEE reported would increase in 2022,²² indicating that 16.3 percent of voters registered on the French electoral rolls had not voted in any round of voting (systematic abstention), 36.4 percent had participated in all rounds of the presidential and legislative elections (systematic voters), and 47.3 percent had voted at least once but not in all rounds (intermittent voters).

²¹ Ipsos, Institut Montaigne, CEVIPOF, *Le Monde*, Fondation Jean Jaurès, “Enquête électorale française, élections Européennes – Vague 4” [French Electoral Survey, European Elections – Wave 4], April 2024, <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-04/ipsos-enquete-electorale-europeennes-2024-vague-4-rapport-complet-WEB.pdf>.

²² Élisabeth Algava and Kilian Bloch, “Vingt ans de participation électorale: en 2022, les écarts selon l’âge et le diplôme continuent de creuser” [Twenty years of electoral participation: in 2022, gaps based on age and education continue to widen], *Insee Première*, no. 1929, November 17, 2022, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6658143>.

Figure 1: Turnout in the second round
of legislative elections in the Fifth Republic



Source: Ipsos.

A similar rise in turnout was seen in France during the European elections, although on a more modest scale: There was a 51.5 percent turnout in June 2024, compared with 50.1 percent in 2019 and 42.4 percent in 2014. While turnout has risen in European elections in France, it is difficult to correlate this with an increase in French interest in European issues, with the majority (58 percent, versus 52 percent in 2019) declaring that they vote according to candidates' national proposals.²³

The increase observed in France is in line with the average trend across Europe, as **the consolidated turnout rate for Member States rose slightly between 2019 and 2024**, from 50.6 percent to 50.9 percent. This average increase conceals major disparities between states.

²³ Ipsos et al., "Enquête électorale française."

Participation in Hungary, for example, rose by more than fifteen points (from 43.4 percent in 2019 to 59.5 percent in 2024). It also rose in almost all of the EU's founding states: in France, Germany (+3), the Netherlands (+4), and Belgium (+1), but fell in Italy (−6), Poland (−5), and Austria (−3). **The case of Germany is interesting.** With a 64.8 percent turnout, **the country achieved its highest score since reunification.** Turnout was 60 percent in 1994, the date of the first European elections in the reunified Germany.

Voting at Sixteen for European Elections in Germany

A March 2023 European Parliament report,²⁴ commissioned by the EU's Constitutional Affairs Committee, points out that abstention in European elections is particularly high among young people (over 70 percent). Against this backdrop, and mindful of the democratic risks this poses for a country with an aging demography, Germany's law of January 11, 2023 granted the right to vote to young people from the age of sixteen for the European elections in June 2024.²⁵ It thus joins Belgium, Austria, Greece, and Malta. Young people aged 16 could already vote in local and regional elections in six of Germany's sixteen Länder and in municipal elections (with the exception of five Länder: Saxony, Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, Hesse, and Bavaria). This measure produced 1.4 million new voters in the June 2024 election, or 2.2 percent of the electorate (around five million new voters out of a total of sixty-five million).

²⁴ Tomaz Deželan, "Young People's Participation in European Democratic Processes," AFCO committee, European Parliament, March 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/745820/IPOL_STU\(2023\)745820_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/745820/IPOL_STU(2023)745820_EN.pdf).

²⁵ "Wahlalter bei Europawahl auf 16 Jahre abgesenkt" [Voting age for European elections lowered to 16], Deutscher Bundestag, accessed December 18, 2024, <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw45-de-europawahlgesetz-917458>.

The disaffection of young people with the Green vote is one of the salient lessons of the election. Whereas the European youth vote tipped the balance in favor of the Greens in 2019, the trend was noticeably different in 2024. In 2019 in Germany, according to the Infratest dimap institute, 20.7 percent of voters in all age categories voted for the Greens, compared with 34 percent of those under thirty. In 2024, the Greens won only 12 percent of German voters and 10 percent of those under twenty-five. There was also a rise among young people in voting for the extremes: only 6 percent of under-thirties voted for AfD in 2019 (the figure was 11 percent for the population as a whole); in 2024, 17 percent of under-thirties voted for AfD (16 percent for the population as a whole). Moreover, 6 percent voted for the far-left populist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance. Finally, there was a tendency for the youth vote to become more dispersed: 28 percent of Germans under twenty-five voted for small parties such as the “Animal Protection Party” (Tierschutzpartei) or the pro-European Volt Party (7 percent, almost as many as for the SPD, which garnered 9 percent). As Infratest dimap’s analysis of the poll for the German public broadcaster shows, the traditional parties scored worst among young people, with CDU attracting 17 percent of the youth vote (versus 30 percent in the general population) and the SPD 8 percent (versus 14 percent in the general population). **Lowering the voting age to sixteen, therefore, did not benefit the parties that had called for it** (SPD, Grünen, FDP, and Linke).

However, two facts stand out: Young people aged 16 to 22 are more in favor of European integration and its deepening than the average voter, according to a report²⁶ published last March

²⁶ Jochen Roose, “Meine 1. Europawahl” [My first European election], Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, March 25, 2024, <https://www.kas.de/de/monitor-wahl-und-sozialforschung/detail/-/content/meine-1-europawahl>.

by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, which is close to the CDU. Other analyses²⁷ carried out in recent months highlight Generation Z's priorities. The most recent, by Shell,²⁸ shows that the fear of war in Europe is by far the greatest concern (81 percent) for young people and confirms that concerns about climate change are declining.

Turnout also rose significantly in the German regional elections

held in the *Länder* of Brandenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony (+11.6 percent in Brandenburg compared with 2019, +8.7 percent in Thuringia, +7.9 percent in Saxony). Against the backdrop of great fragility for the ruling coalition and the historic rise of the far-right AfD party, these elections played an important role in the political reconfiguration of a country that has definitively entered its *Zeitenwende*.

The US election also brought many voters together. While 2020, with a turnout of 65.9 percent, remains the country's all-time record, **the 2024 presidential election comes close, with a turnout of around 65 percent**, making it the second highest since 1900.²⁹ Consolidated data for all fifty US states will not be available until 2025, but these initial figures provide enlightening indicators of the democratic vitality of a country accustomed to much lower turnout rates than the OECD average. By comparison, the turnout rate for the 2024 US election remains lower than that of India (65.8 percent), Sri Lanka (79.4 percent), or Indonesia (81.8 percent).

²⁷ Simon Schnetzer, Kilian Hampel, and Klaus Hurrelman, *Trendstudie Jugend in Deutschland* [Trend study on youth in Germany], Datajockey Verlag, 2024.

²⁸ "Die Shell Jugendstudie" [The Shell youth study], Shell, 2024, <https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/initiativen/shell-jugendstudie-2024.html>.

²⁹ Federal Election Commission, "Election Results and Voting Information," <https://www.fec.gov/introduction-campaign-finance/election-results-and-voting-information>.

**b. ...Indicative of the Exacerbated Polarization
of Electorates?**

According to several surveys, this rise in turnout—particularly in the United States—is partly correlated with the increase in political polarization.

Political polarization³⁰—characterized by a marked and conflicting ideological and programmatic split between two or more parties—is coupled with so-called affective polarization, denoting an emotional aversion to and detestation of the opposing political party or parties. Ideological and programmatic disagreements are superimposed on a very personal hatred of the political opponent. Emotional polarization gives rise to Schadenfreude,³¹ the unhappy joy we feel when confronted with the misfortune of others—in this case, the political enemy being fought.

In the United States, a number of researchers trace the emergence of political polarization back to the Reagan presidency (1981–1989) and the partisan “realignment”³² of Democrats and Republicans. From the mid-1980s onwards—with an acceleration in the 1990s under the influence of Republican Newt Gingrich³³—the two parties that have always structured American political life gradually ceased to converge

³⁰ See Dalston G. Ward and Margit Tavits, “How Partisan Affect Shapes Citizens’ Perception of the Political World,” *Electoral Studies* 60 no. 102045 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.009> and Markus Wagner, “Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems,” *Electoral Studies* 69 no. 102199 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102199>.

³¹ VNicholas A. Valentino, Ted Brader, Eric W. Groenendyk, Krysha Gregorowicz, and Vincent L. Hutchings, “Election Night’s Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation,” *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381610000939>; Leonie Huddy, Lilliana Mason, and Lene Aarøe “Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015):1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000604>.

³² Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, “Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate,” *The Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647642>.

³³ A member of the House of Representatives, over which he presided from 1995 to 1999, Newt Gingrich is considered one of the key inspirations behind Donald Trump’s deliberately divisive politics.

and became part of a much more pronounced binary division, which has continued to grow ever since, culminating in the arrival on the American political scene of Donald Trump. This long process of political polarization in the United States has led to a reduction in the number of points of convergence between the parties, such as their ability to find common ground and create compromise. One of the most blatant symptoms of this polarization in terms of political action is the difficulty each year of passing a budget in Congress, which now almost automatically creates the risk of a “shutdown.”³⁴ These situations of budgetary stalemate linked to the growing polarization of the political landscape are not exclusive to the United States, with 2024 offering eloquent examples of the same phenomenon in France and Germany.

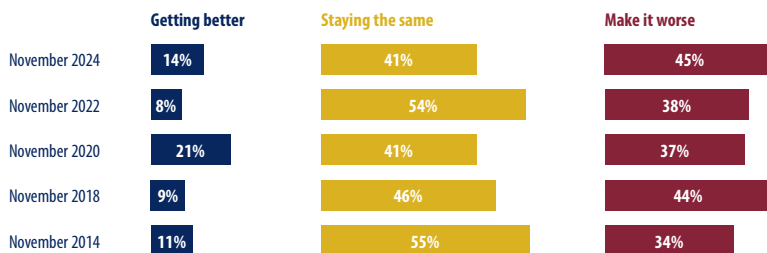
If a dose of polarization is indispensable in any democracy, its excess is considered poisonous. The scientific literature of the last ten years has focused on the negative effects on democracy of polarization, particularly so-called affective polarization. More recently, however, the ambivalence of the effects of polarization has been the subject of more in-depth research. **One of the accidentally positive effects of polarization is a possible increase in voter turnout:** By making oppositions between parties easier to identify, it refutes the adage that politicians are “all the same.” In a way, political polarization can encourage electoral investment. The more similar the party platforms, the more difficult it is for the voter to distinguish between them, and the lower the projected importance of the vote. On the other hand, the further apart and more polarized their ideological corpuses become, the simpler partisan identification becomes—to a certain extent, too extreme a polarization leaves the vast majority of moderate voters orphaned.

³⁴ A shutdown refers to a halt in government activities caused by a deadlock between the executive and legislative branches over the adoption of the federal budget.

Beyond “realignment” and the clearer distinction between parties as facilitators of choices, “affective” polarization brings with it a deeper shift **whereby the political adversary becomes an enemy to be slaughtered**. It is no longer simply a question of the classic political process of alternation but of an existential battle to be waged. **The shift from the register of alternation to that of confrontation can thus encourage electoral commitment**, as it is unbearable to imagine that the adversary could remain in / come to power. Motivation and commitment grow, fueling hatred, fear, and resentment. **The “emotionally polarized” will therefore automatically vote more, as the perceived stakes will be seen as considerable**.

Donald Trump’s reelection last November could accentuate this phenomenon of polarization, in the United States as elsewhere, by encouraging the disinhibition of some of his counterparts (or rather, would-be counterparts), galvanized by the MAGA leader’s victory, attributed in part to his outrageous style and marketing genius. However, this victory will only attract more hostility from those on the other side of the spectrum who have always demonized him and will continue to do so, confirming a polarization that is no longer merely fleeting but lasting—one that might even be described as irreparable.

Figure 2: Share of voters who consider that the coming year, relations between Republicans between Republicans and Democrats will...



Note: Nearly half the public expects polarisation in Washington to worsen next year.

Source: Survey of US adults conducted Nov., 12-17.2024.

To a lesser extent, similar attitudes can be observed in France and elsewhere in Europe.

According to a barometer developed by Madrid's Charles III University,³⁵ France is the most politically polarized country in Europe, a polarization that is manifesting itself before our very eyes and that has become particularly pronounced since the dissolution of the National Assembly on June 9, 2024. The ideological cleavages between the three blocs that now structure political life are increasingly strong, and the ability to find points of convergence and compromise is diminishing accordingly.

Other European countries are no exception in this regard. A study carried out in 2023 by researchers from the Universities of Vienna and Amsterdam³⁶ on Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands established a direct correlation between the increase in affective polarization and

³⁵ EU Political Barometer, Charles III University, Madrid, <https://eupoliticalbarometer.uc3m.es>.

³⁶ Eelco Harteveld and Markus Wagner, "Does Affective Polarisation Increase Turnout? Evidence from Germany, The Netherlands and Spain," *West European Politics* 46, no. 4, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2087395>.

the intention to vote. Using longitudinal election data from each of the three countries, the researchers demonstrated that elections featuring the candidates who generate the highest levels of antipathy are those with the highest turnout. The study also shows that this phenomenon is not confined to the most politically committed citizens but also concerns voters who are initially less invested.

Emotional polarization thus enables an electorate that is usually far removed from voting to regain the path of civic-mindedness via an ambivalent route.

A final element highlighted by the study is the “spiral” effect that exists between affective polarization and participation, with the two phenomena being self-perpetuating. The more polarized voters are, the more they participate; the more they participate, the more personally and emotionally involved they are in the results, and the more polarized they become. Researchers predict a concomitant increase in both phenomena in the coming years and are wondering how to break this spiral. In particular, the fundamental role played in this field by the media, which tends to be far more polarized than society as a whole, is highlighted.

In Europe, as in the United States, the challenge is to regain control of the emotional polarization–participation spiral by directing it toward civic debate in the service of the general interest. One way of doing this is, of course, the key role played by the media—not just traditional media but also social networks and podcasts, which had a significant impact on the American election campaign.³⁷ There is, moreover, a direct link between polarization and public broadcasting budgets, with the latter bearing responsibility for the reliability of information and the degree of polarization.

³⁷ Maxwell Modell, “US Election Shows How Podcasts Are Shaping Politics—and What the Risks Are,” *The Conversation*, November 19, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/us-election-shows-how-podcasts-are-shaping-politics-and-what-the-risks-are-243325>.

c. The British Counter-Example

Bucking trends in France, Germany, and the United States, **the turnout for the British general election in 2024 was historically low** (60 percent, compared with 67.5 percent in 2019). According to the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR),³⁸ a center-left think tank, the “real” turnout was even lower, with only half of Britons who could have voted actually turning out to do so (IPP bases its figures not on the proportion of people registered to vote but on adults of voting age and eligible to vote, including non-registered voters). According to the think tank, this represented the lowest turnout since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1928. The IPP also noted significant disparities between constituencies, with voting being much higher in constituencies where the electorate is older and more affluent. The think tank is therefore calling on the new Labour government to introduce an electoral modernization bill aimed at increasing turnout and reducing inequalities in elections, including automatic voter registration, extending the right to vote to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, and tightening the rules on donations to political parties. These are proposals that Keir Starmer has partly taken up, as such a bill is said to be under consideration.

³⁸ Parth Patel and Viktor Valgarðsson, “Half of Us: Turnout Patterns at the 2024 General Election,” Institute for Public Policy Research, July 12, 2024, <https://www.ippr.org/articles/half-of-us>.

Fighting Abstention in the UK: Electoral Reform on the Agenda of the New Labour Government?

The reform envisaged by the new Labour government, referred to succinctly in Keir Starmer's King's Speech on July 17, aims to simplify the electoral process and remedy the persistent problems of under-registration, particularly among young people, minorities, and the most disadvantaged.

Around eight million eligible voters are thought to be currently unregistered in the UK, a situation exacerbated by the introduction of new voter identification requirements in 2023 that have been criticized for disproportionately excluding vulnerable populations. Alongside automatic voter registration, there are wider discussions about electoral reform, including the introduction of an element of proportional representation. Critics of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, echoing the French debate on the *fait majoritaire*, argue that it does not reflect the diversity of the electorate, as illustrated by the significant imbalances between votes cast and seats won in recent elections. Keir Starmer indicated that this reform would be in line with his vision for combating democratic inequalities and restoring confidence in the electoral system. However, its implementation will require overcoming Conservative resistance and managing competing political priorities within the new government. Since July, very few announcements or advances have been made on this subject.³⁹

³⁹ Peter Walker, "Dozens of New Labour MPs Join Group Pushing for Electoral Reform," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/nov/25/dozens-of-new-labour-mps-join-group-pushing-for-electoral-reform>.

How can we explain such a low level of electoral mobilization in the country? How can we link turnout here to the phenomenon of polarization that the UK experienced to a critical extent during the Brexit period? Not all liberal democracies are homogeneously affected by polarization, which fluctuates constantly; it is on the rise in many but also regressing in some. This is particularly true of “affective” polarization. A study carried out by Stanford and Harvard researchers in 12 OECD countries identified several dynamics in terms of affective polarization.⁴⁰ The authors identify three groups. The first, which is solely made up of the United States, corresponds to a massive surge in polarization since the 1980s. The second group, comprising five countries including France, shows increasing polarization but at a lower level than in the US. The final group comprises six countries, including the UK, where affective polarization has been declining, particularly since the ‘00s. The study shows that polarization increased in the country during the Thatcher years (1979–1990), before falling back during Tony Blair’s two terms in office (1997–2007), and then fluctuating with successive Conservative governments. However, the general trend since 2000 has been toward a decline on average in affective polarization across the country. Other studies have clearly shown a peak in polarization at the time of Brexit and its lasting anchorage in British society since then. However, this polarization is more difficult to pin down in surveys, as it primarily played out between “Remainers” and “Leavers,” and these two categories did not align neatly with the two major parties that structure the country’s political life, as each party was internally divided by opposing factions—particularly the Conservative Party.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Levi Boxell, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro, “Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 106, no. 2 (2024): 557–565, https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_01160.

⁴¹ Six out of ten Conservative voters would have voted for Brexit, half of Labour voters would have voted for Remain.

Could British society, which saw a peak in polarization with Brexit, be in the process of “depolarization,” returning to a more classic left/right alternation? It is too early to say, and we don’t know at this stage whether this regression reflects a new maturity, a societal appeasement, or, on the contrary, a deleterious indifference. While the Stanford study classifies the UK as a country where affective polarization is regressing, many other surveys⁴² insist on the high degree of political polarization that persists in the country, and which is notably reflected in the rise of the National Conservative movement—which is close to the MAGA movement in the US—and the arrival in the British Parliament of five MPs from Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party in the 2024 general election. Nevertheless, the hypothesis of a decline in polarization, based on a return to a more classic alternation between a conservative right and a moderate left, rid of its most divisive and controversial figures—such as Keir Starmer’s predecessor Jeremy Corbyn (but also Boris Johnson and Teresa May)—should not be ruled out. Moreover, the changeover was motivated less by hatred, detestation, or fear than by an immense weariness and a desire to turn the page on fourteen years of Conservative government—a weariness that must also partly explain the low turnout at the polls. The early days of the Starmer government, with its plans on immigration⁴³ and the economy, also seem to mark the return of a form of programmatic convergence between Conservatives and Labour in the country. Could this explain the historically low turnout? It is certainly not the only factor—we have outlined some of the reasons identified by the new government itself above—but it may be part of the explanation.

⁴² Tannah Carter, “The United Kingdom and Brexit: A Case Study in Affective Polarization,” *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies* 41 (2024), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sigma/vol41/iss1/5>.

⁴³ Olivier Tosseri and Nicolas Madelaine, “Crise migratoire: ‘pragmatique,’ Keir Starmer veut s’inspirer des solutions de Giorgia Meloni” [Migrant crisis: ‘pragmatic’ Keir Starmer wants to draw inspiration from Giorgia Meloni’s solutions], *Les Échos*, September 16, 2024, <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/europe/crise-migratoire-pragmatique-keir-starmer-veut-sinspirer-des-solutions-de-giorgia-meloni-2119226>.

1.3. THEMES: IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID!

a. Inflation and Purchasing Power Are at the Heart of the Electorate's Concerns

Electoral surveys carried out before and after the major elections revealed a high degree of consistency in the issues of concern to voters. **The economy and purchasing power almost invariably ranked at the top of these priorities** despite widely varying situations observed across different countries.

In the UK, for example, in 2019, in a context still very much marked by the exit from the EU, the three dominant themes for the electorate were Brexit, the common market, and Europe, followed by health, the National Health Service (NHS, the British health care system), and, finally, education. By 2024, the top three had shifted. Health had risen to the top, followed by the economy and immigration. If we add the "economy" item to the other item present in the Ipsos surveys, "inflation, rising prices," this pair comes out on top, with a real convergence among electorates. While there are differences between Conservative and Labour voters on nearly all other issues, they place the economic question on an equal footing—whereas topics like immigration reveal significant divides (considered a priority by 18 percent of Labour voters but by 47 percent of Conservatives). It is, therefore, a consensus priority in the country, transcending political affiliations. And this is not an unfounded priority, given that the British economy has undergone a long period of stagnation in recent years, more marked than that of its neighbors. Although a rebound was recorded in the first quarter of 2024, the country's economy had grown by just 2.3 percent since the end of 2019. Over the same period, the French economy grew by 3.8 percent, Italy by 4.7 percent, and the United States by 9.4 percent. The war in Ukraine and the rising price of gas for a country heavily dependent on it, like the long-term consequences of Brexit, explain this weak growth.

This is compounded by very poor public finances: The public deficit will amount to 4.5 percent⁴⁴ of GDP in 2024, and British public debt will represent 102 percent of GDP in autumn 2024.

Inflation and purchasing power are also considered priorities in France—they are the top concern for 38 percent⁴⁵ of French people—which again correlates with a very significant deterioration in our public finances and an increase in debt. In both countries, the issue of housing is absolutely central to these debates.

In the presidential election in the United States, the economy hadn't counted for so much since 2008 and the financial crisis. This is borne out by Gallup's polling data from 1996 to 2024. Candidates' proposals on the economy were "extremely important" for 52 percent of voters, compared with 44 percent in 2020 and 42 percent in 2016. According to Google Trends, searches by internet users for terms related to inflation rose by 115 percent compared to the 2020 election, the highest thematic increase recorded between the two polls. It should be pointed out, however, that while economic issues were largely the priority for Trump voters, they were overtaken by issues relating to the future of democracy for Harris voters. The primacy of economic concerns in the United States—in contrast to the British situation—may come as a surprise insofar as the country's situation was, over the course of 2024, far less unfavorable than it had been in the preceding months: growth was at 2.5 percent in 2023, and estimated at 2.8 percent for 2024, the process of disinflation had been well underway since summer 2020, the unemployment rate was at 4.2 percent,⁴⁶ etc. But the majority of the electorate continued to feel that the economic situation had

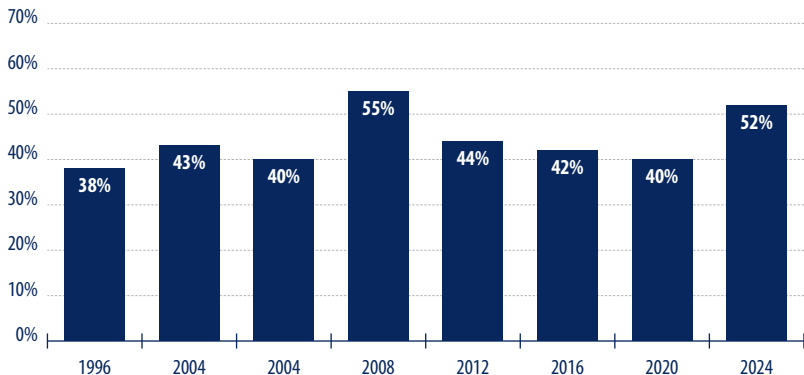
⁴⁴ Office for Budget Responsibility.

⁴⁵ "Fractures françaises 2024 : anatomie d'une chute?" [French fractures 2024: Anatomy of a fall?] conducted by Ipsos for Le Monde, Cevipof, the Fondation Jean Jaurès, and the Institut Montaigne, December 2024, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/publications/fractures-francaises-2024-anatomie-dune-chute>.

⁴⁶ "Situation économique aux États-Unis" [Economic situation in the United States], Directorate General of the Treasury (France), September 19, 2024, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/US/situation-de-l-economie-americaine-et-perspectives-a-moyen-terme>.

deteriorated, and this was particularly true among Republicans. A YouGov study showed the volatility of these sometimes-unfounded sentiments: Whereas at the end of October, a few days before the election, 63 percent of Republican voters said their personal economic situation had worsened over the past year, a few days later, after Donald Trump's election, only 48 percent thought so.

Figure 3: Share of voters who consider that the economic proposals of the presidential are 'crucial' to their vote



b. Immigration and Health Care are among the Top Three Priorities for Voters, but Receive Very Different Political and Media Treatment

Controlling illegal immigration is one of the top three concerns in France, the UK, and the US. The migration issue is, moreover, intertwined with the economy insofar as it is correlated more with issues of economic downgrading and welfare than with insecurity. This issue has been widely taken up in the European and American campaigns,

but there is far less of a consensus on this topic than on economic and health issues, which preoccupy voters of all parties. According to exit polls,⁴⁷ immigration was the top election issue for 20 percent of Trump voters, but the figure was below 5 percent for Kamala Harris voters. Similarly, in the French parliamentary elections, while immigration issues were a priority for Rassemblement National voters (77 percent put it in the top three of their concerns), they came a long way behind for Nouveau Front Populaire voters (only 4 percent⁴⁸ made it one of the three main determinants of their vote).

The importance of health care, which is one of voters' top priorities but receives very little coverage in the media and by politicians, should be emphasized here. It is the number one issue in the UK, as mentioned above but is also very present in France (40 percent of French people place health among the three issues that concern them most, an increase of three points in one year, as shown by the latest EESC⁴⁹ report on the state of France). Health also played a key role in the American campaign: even though health-care spending is highest in the United States (16.6 percent of GDP, compared with 8.9 percent⁵⁰ in France), this has not prevented a deterioration in American health, with obesity, diabetes, and the opiate crisis cited as some of the reasons for the decline in life expectancy in the US (–2.5 years between 2014 and 2021).⁵¹ While the issue of abortion rights mobilized a great deal

⁴⁷ Stephanie Perry and Patrick J. Egan, “NBC News Exit Poll: Voters Express Deep Concern about America’s Democracy and Economy,” NBC News, November 6, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/nbc-news-exit-poll-voters-express-concern-democracy-economy-rcna178602>.

⁴⁸ Ipsos, Institut Montaigne, CEVIPOF, Le Monde, Fondation Jean Jaurès, “Enquête électorale française, élections Européennes – Vague 6” [French Electoral Survey, European Elections —Wave 6], June 2024, <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/ipsos-enquete-electorale-francaise-2024-vague-6-rapport-complet-WEB.pdf>.

⁴⁹ “Sortir de la crise démocratique – Rapport annuel sur l’état de la France en 2024” [Overcoming the democratic crisis – Annual report on the state of France in 2022], CESE, October 2024.

⁵⁰ “Dépenses de santé” [Health expenditures], INSEE, November 23, 2023, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/7666887?sommaire=7666953>.

⁵¹ “Press Release: Life Expectancy in the U.S. Dropped for the Second Year in a Row in 2021,” National Center for Health Statistics, 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220831.htm.

of attention during the campaign, the other issues of access to health care were passed over in silence, despite the fact that, according to a survey by KFF,⁵² a leading American NGO based in San Francisco, health is the second most important concern of American voters, just behind economic issues. According to the same study, 55 percent of Donald Trump voters and 76 percent of Kamala Harris voters made health one of the decisive issues in their vote. On average, therefore, health is crucial for 65 percent of voters. Another YouGov⁵³ survey published in January 2024 showed that health was the second issue of greatest concern to Americans (69 percent), behind inflation (75 percent). A topic of concern for 61 percent of voters across the political spectrum, immigration ranked only sixth, behind Supreme Court nominations (63 percent), foreign policy (62 percent), and crime (61 percent). Nevertheless, it was the issue on which polarization (a 43 percent gap) was most marked among voters: 39 percent of Democratic voters considered the issue very important, compared with 82 percent of Republican voters. A similar gap (51 percent) was found for climate issues, which are essential for 11 percent of Republican voters but for 62 percent of Democratic voters. The subjects of health and purchasing power are linked: Between 2017 and 2022, four out of ten Americans went into debt because of medical bills.

This discrepancy between citizens' concerns and the treatment of certain subjects by politicians and the media attests to the growing ability of populist leaders to impose the terms of democratic debate, as pointed out in an Institut Montaigne⁵⁴ note published ahead of the European election. This ability to impose their agenda stems from a double dynamic that is essentially rhetorical: that of "common sense,"

⁵² "KFF Health Tracking Poll September 2024: Harris v. Trump on Key Health Care Issues," KFF, September 10, 2024, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/poll-finding/kff-health-tracking-poll-september-2024-harris-v-trump-on-key-health-care-issues/>.

⁵³ *The Economist/YouGov Poll*.

⁵⁴ "Union européenne: portée et limites des nationaux-populistes" [European Union: Reach and Limits of National Populists], Institut Montaigne, April 2024, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/publications/union-europeenne-portee-et-limites-des-nationaux-populistes>.

courage, and truthfulness—we dare to take up subjects that others have cowardly neglected for lack of courage—and that of outrage, caricature, and invective (as in the case of Donald Trump’s campaign and his comments on immigrants, particularly Haitians). From a populist point of view, these subjects should be dealt with by simple, radical responses (mass deportations, remigration). On the other hand, a subject such as health care is unlikely to give rise to such simplistic responses and will therefore be less easily integrated into the populist repertoire in the absence of possible political capitalization. In turn, it will receive less coverage in the media, which often follows the tempo set by these leaders. It is also revealing that a party like the Rassemblement National in France approaches the subject of health care through the prism of state medical aid, and thus, in a barely roundabout way, reintegrates it into its anti-migrant rhetoric. Faced with its immense complexity, the subject is unlikely to yield simple and easily understandable answers, making it less appealing to populist leaders, less integrated into political debates, and, ultimately, less covered by the media. **The challenge for future campaigns is to put an end to the monopolization of the terms of debate by populist leaders. It is necessary to position the debate in the right place and at the right level and to ensure that it benefits from appropriate political and media amplification.**

c. Climate Issues Relegated to the Background

In Europe, the UK, and the US, environmental issues were peripheral to the various elections.

The EU is symptomatic of this decline. To appreciate the extent of this, it is important to go back to the 2019 elections. Climate issues were omnipresent, and in the aftermath of the results, there was talk of a “green wave” or even a “green tsunami.” The EPP and the Social Democrats, the two largest groups in the Parliament, had lost many seats to the young

Renew formation and the Greens. With just over 10 percent of the vote, the latter obtained seventy-four seats, twenty-two more than during the previous legislature. This strengthening within Parliament had a major political impact, as climate issues were elevated to the top of the agenda not only by the Greens but by all the parties in the centrist coalition, including the EPP. The Green Deal was one of the priorities of Ursula von der Leyen's first term at the European Commission.

In 2024, the landscape changed. The war in Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East, inflation, and the risk of economic recession—particularly in Germany—were at the heart of the campaigns, far ahead of the environmental issue, which the agricultural protests at the beginning of the year had called into question. In April 2024, Eurobarometer⁵⁵ showed that the electorate was concerned about the fight against poverty and social exclusion (33 percent), public health (32 percent), the economy and job creation (31 percent), and defense and security (31 percent). The secondary nature of environmental issues for a section of the electorate was reflected in the votes, with the Green group in the European Parliament suffering one of its biggest setbacks. With fifty-three MEPs, the group lost twenty-two seats and is now the sixth-largest group in the Parliament. It was in fourth place during the previous legislature. This setback will have a major impact on the climate policies pursued by the new Commission over the next four years. The new Commission, endorsed by a narrow majority of MEPs on November 27 (370 votes in favor, 282 against, and 36 abstentions), will approach the green transition from a primarily competitive and strategic angle. Competition from the US and China for green technologies and the risks of dependence on fossil fuels will inevitably give a more economic tinge to discussions that will also be made more difficult by the strengthening, within the Parliament and the Commission, of political forces hostile to environmental policies.

⁵⁵ “Spring 2024, Use Your Vote—Countdown to the European Elections,” *European Parliament Eurobarometer*, April 2024, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3272>.

In the United States, we are seeing a similar backlash. Climate issues were at the heart of the 2020 presidential campaign: According to a survey conducted by the High Meadows Environmental Institute, climate change was the most important long-term concern for Biden voters, while 44 percent of voters—across all parties—ranked it among their top five priorities, ahead of health and minority rights.⁵⁶ In 2024, according to a Pew Research Center survey, only 37 percent of Americans ranked climate change among their priorities—with real differences within the electorate: 11 percent of Trump voters considered the subject “very important,” compared with 62 percent of Harris voters. The weight of the climate for Democratic voters did not, however, lead the party’s candidate to insist on these subjects during her campaign, in which they were relatively absent—an absence that was noticeable at the party’s convention in Chicago. Kamala Harris even backtracked on some of her 2019 pledges, notably the ban on oil and gas extraction by hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”), a retreat that many justified by the need to win over the electorate of Pennsylvania, a hotbed of shale gas exploitation. This shift may seem all the more surprising given that in the months leading up to the election, the United States experienced major natural disasters, the intensity of which is accentuated by climate change, such as hurricanes Helene and Milton.

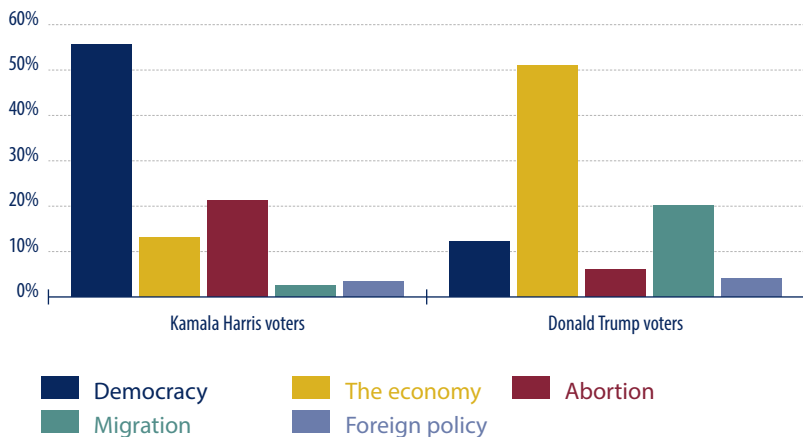
d. What Role Did the Return of War Play in the Various Elections?

The last major change to consider regarding the 2024 elections is the return of war as a key issue. Absent—or at least more distant—from the 2019 European and 2020 American polls, it has reentered the democratic debate on both sides of the Atlantic, with the war in the Middle East and Russia’s war in Ukraine. **It seems that the economic—and**

⁵⁶ “By the Numbers: How Climate Change Influenced Voters in the 2020 Presidential Election,” High Meadows Environmental Institute, 2021, <https://environment.princeton.edu/how-climate-change-influenced-voters-in-the-2020-presidential-election>.

energy—consequences of the wars counted more than the wars themselves in voters’ choices. In the United States, according to exit polls, the international situation came a long way behind the economy, democracy, immigration, and abortion. There is, therefore, a massive discrepancy between the media coverage of these issues (particularly of the demonstrations in American and, to a lesser extent, French universities) and the reality of what drives people to vote.

Figure 4: The most decisive issues
by electorate



While the international situation and the wars in Gaza and Ukraine did not have a significant impact on voting, the results of the various elections will undoubtedly have an impact on these two conflicts. In Europe, the rise of certain far-right parties could, if not block aid to Ukraine, at least slow down the country’s EU accession process. In the US, the election of Donald Trump heralds major changes in how these two wars are waged.

2 Results and Outlook

2.1. RESULTS: INCUMBENTS PUNISHED, POPULISTS STRENGTHENED

a. A Setback for All Incumbent Governments —Including Illiberal Ones

The first lesson to be drawn from the results is that incumbents have been massively punished. As John Burn-Murdoch points out in the *Financial Times*,⁵⁷ this is the first time in 120 years that politicians in power have been so heavily punished at the ballot box. This is borne out by the data compiled by the international research project ParlGov, which analyzed the ballots cast in ten major voting countries this year.

From the American Democrats to the British Conservatives, Emmanuel Macron's party, the Japanese Liberal Democrats, and even Narendra Modi's BJP, the ruling parties and their leaders suffered an unprecedented series of setbacks in 2024.

These massive and simultaneous setbacks are in line with what we wrote earlier about the uniformity of campaign issues and the anger of populations who attribute the deterioration of their personal economic and social situations to the action (or inaction in this case) of the governments in power. The global economic situation and voters' expectations are therefore largely (but not exclusively) responsible for this setback. To this, we can add the immense desire for a change of government that was felt just about everywhere: in the UK, to get out of fourteen years of Conservative government; in the US, where the latest data show that the Trump vote was first and foremost motivated by a

⁵⁷ John Burn-Murdoch, "Democrats Join 2024's Graveyard of Incumbents," *Financial Times*, November 7, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/e8ac09ea-c300-4249-af7d-109003afb893>.

desire for change;⁵⁸ and in France and Germany, where there was a clear rejection of the heads of state and government.

This setback is not limited to the so-called liberal democracies, as if we venture beyond the strict scope of our analysis, several countries such as India and Turkey also suffered such setbacks.

The Municipal Elections in Turkey

The last major election for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before the presidential election of 2028, the Turkish local elections of March 31, 2024, were marked by a very strong advance by the Kemalist opposition. The Republican People's Party (CHP) won 35 percent of the vote and thirty-five cities, including the already-held municipalities of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, as well as fourteen additional municipalities and provinces, including in conservative regions of Central Anatolia. Reelected in 2023, despite predictions that he would lose, Erdoğan had made the takeover of Istanbul his top priority. This was an ambition that ended in failure, as the AKP won just 37 percent of the vote and twenty-four cities (compared with 44 percent of the vote and thirty-nine cities in 2019). As Selin Uysal and Aurélien Denizeau write, "Local politics play an important role in Turkey's fragile but resilient democracy. Local elections reveal a more nuanced and granular cartography of a Turkish political geography, which has been tri-polar over the past twenty years, divided between the Kemalist coastal regions, the conservative interior of Anatolia, and the Kurdish southeast."⁵⁹ Soli Özel⁶⁰ also underlines the extent to

⁵⁸ *Pew Research center.*

which the economy played a central role in Erdoğan's defeat, as it did in all the elections mentioned above, and despite the security arguments deployed by the president, who had presented the Kemalist party as a supporter of the Kurds. Indeed, while the educated urban classes, disappointed by the opposition's failure in the presidential election, were less mobilized in favor of the opposition in the March election, their abstention was offset by that of traditionally pro-power voters who, left behind by the government's ill-conceived economic policies, even chose to turn to the CHP for the first time. Soli Özel also notes a certain opposition to the government's policy of Islamization, which can be seen in the large number of women elected to head municipalities, even in ultra-conservative towns. Pensioners, disappointed by the failure to increase their pensions, may well have played an important role in this sanction vote against Erdoğan. As Soli Özel points out, between the weight of inflation and that of abstention, the dynamics of the May 2023 presidential election were reversed. As Uysal and Denizeau write, these elections thus illustrated former president Süleyman Demirel's famous aphorism: "There is no government that an empty saucepan cannot bring down."⁵⁹ The massive mobilization that followed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu arrest, on March 20th, an influential figure in the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the main opponent of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, contributed to the crisis of legitimacy of the incumbent president.⁶²

⁵⁹ Selin Uysal, Aurélien Denizeau, "Turquie: cartographier le basculement aux élections municipales. 10 points, 10 cartes et graphiques" [Turkey: Mapping the shift in the municipal elections. 10 points, 10 maps, and graphs], *Le Grand Continent*, April 2, 2024, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2024/04/02/turquie-cartographier-le-basculement-aux-elections-municipales-10-points-10-cartes-et-graphiques>.

⁶⁰ Soli Özel, "Municipales en Turquie: de la solitude des sommets, plus dure sera la chute ?" [Municipal Elections in Turkey: From the loneliness of the heights, the harder the fall?], *Institut Montaigne*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/municipales-en-turquie-de-la-solitude-des-sommets-plus-dure-sera-la-chute>.

b. Strengthened Populists, Particularly in Europe...

The reelection of Donald Trump in the United States on November 5, 2024, and the **strengthening of illiberal or far-right formations in the European Parliament following the June elections are eloquent indicators of the rise of populist leaders on both sides of the Atlantic**. With 187 national-populist MEPs (from the ranks of France's RN, Fratelli d'Italia, Germany's AfD, and Poland's PiS), compared with 141 in the previous legislature, the rise of these groups is part of a long-term dynamic whose driving forces need to be analyzed.

At the European level, the growth of these groups in Parliament is accompanied by their strengthening within other EU institutions. The new European Commission chaired by Ursula von der Leyen, which took office on December 1, following a favorable vote by MEPs, includes figures from these parties: Italy's Raffaele Fitto, a former member of the Meloni government and now the Commission's Executive Vice-President in charge of territorial cohesion, and Hungary's Oliver Varhelyi, European Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare. These two appointments, whose impact should not be overestimated—neither of the two portfolios being eminently strategic for the future of the EU—nevertheless upset the balance of an institution that has often kept these groups on the sidelines. As a result, they are now represented in all three European institutions—Commission, Council, and Parliament—and their influence is set to grow.

While the rise of these parties in Europe is real, it is nevertheless less significant than anticipated. Far from minimizing the extent or potential impact, the scores obtained by these formations were below those predicted by the polls, most of which predicted a far-right victory

⁶¹ Uysal and Denizeau, "Turquie: cartographier le basculement aux élections municipales" [Turkey: Mapping the shift in the municipal elections].

⁶² Soli Özel, "Turkey : A Crisis of Legitimacy and Massive Social Mobilization in a Regional Power" Institut Montaigne, April, 18 2025.

in nine out of twenty-seven EU countries. In the end, they came out on top in four member states:⁶³ France, Italy, Austria, and Hungary.⁶⁴ And it was France that sent the largest contingent of Eurosceptic MEPs to Strasbourg, if we add up the thirty RN MEPs and the five from Reconquête. In several of the EU's founding countries, the rise of the national-populists has been confirmed, but the predicted tidal wave has not materialized.

**c. ... but Still More Divided at
the European Level...**

While the national-populist parties have made numerical progress within the European Parliament, they are more divided and now fall into three distinct groups.

During the previous legislature (2019–2024), two groups coexisted: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), made up largely of MEPs from Poland's PiS, Fratelli d'Italia, and Spain's Vox; and the "Identity and Democracy" (ID) group, made up of France's Rassemblement National, Germany's AfD, and Matteo Salvini's Lega. The first group comprised sixty-eight MEPs, the second fifty-nine, making them the fifth- and sixth-largest groups in Parliament, respectively. These two groups were joined by the non-attached MEPs from Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary, which had left the EPP in 2019 to avoid the humiliation of being ejected following several breaches of the rule of law in its country.

Numerous attempts to bring the two groups together were made during the 2019–2024 legislature, but they consistently ended in failure, largely due to the lack of partisan consensus among the parties involved. Each party faced very different yet always pressing national issues, which no European coalition could have transcended or mitigated.

⁶³ "2024 European Election Results," European Parliament, accessed November 24, 2024, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/>.

⁶⁴ The far-right Vlaams Belang also came out on top in Dutch-speaking Belgium.

In a report⁶⁵ published a few weeks before the European elections, we already highlighted the deadlock of an “international of European nationalists,” constrained by domestic demands too contradictory to allow for effective collaboration. We warned, however, of the blocking capacity of these different groups, whether they were in coalition or not. In the absence of a structured, shared European agenda, they form a cumbersome “coalition of opposites” likely to hold up decisions on a number of subjects, such as climate change, and to put their own issues—and those of their electorate—on the agenda, starting with immigration.

Following the 2024 elections, the landscape was reshaped.⁶⁶ While the European Conservatives and Reformists group is holding its own, it has lost the Spanish members of Vox and finds itself relegated behind a new group, the Patriots for Europe, formed on the initiative of Viktor Orbán and chaired by Jordan Bardella (RN). These two groups are joined by a newcomer, “Europe of Sovereign Nations,” formed by the German AfD, which was excluded from the previous “ID” group by the RN on account of controversies involving its former leader, Maximilian Krah.

Beyond the divisions at the European level, there are wider international cleavages. While there is a direct and solid link between Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz and Donald Trump’s United States (every year, a major congress of European and American Republican politicians meets in Budapest), not all of Orbán’s allies have the same closeness to the forty-seventh president of the United States. Several branches are pushing in sometimes opposite directions. The first, driven by Orbán and Trump, has such fervent supporters in Europe as Italy’s Matteo Salvini, Britain’s Nigel Farage, and France’s Eric Zemmour. It has not renounced the radicalism of its discourse, approaches migration issues only from the angle of security and civilizational threat, and gives little credence to multilateralism, particularly at the European level. Defending the interests

⁶⁵ “Union européenne: portée et limites des nationaux-populistes” [European Union: Reach and Limits of National Populists].

⁶⁶ The composition of these three groups is shown in the Appendix.

of a nation threatened by foreigners, cancel culture, and “wokism” permeates their rhetoric, which is often simplistic and bellicose. This branch, galvanized by Donald Trump’s reelection, could, if not expand, at least radicalize its discourse even further, as is the case with Nigel Farage in the UK, who hopes to benefit from this victory to make headway among the British electorate. But there are divisions within this branch itself, with the statism of an Orbán, for example, clashing with the visceral anti-statism of Trump, now embodied by the figure of Elon Musk. Strictly in terms of discourse, another branch is emerging at the European level, bringing together Italy’s Giorgia Meloni and France’s Marine Le Pen. Having embarked on a long process of de-demonization, both leaders have renounced overly radical rhetoric in order to play along with the institutions and gain a form of credibility, particularly on the international stage. While both had enthusiastically welcomed Trump’s victory in 2016, they remained much more cautious and moderate on November 5, 2024. This reserve can be explained by a fundamental point: the potentially severe consequences of the measures Trump might take for their national electorates. Raising tariffs, in particular, could weaken the economic situation of their constituents, especially the most distressed. Over-enthusiasm on their part could therefore be perceived as a form of betrayal by voters who are—let’s not forget—increasingly numerous and diverse in sociological, generational, and geographical terms.

d. ... and Declining in Some Countries

The general increase in the number of populist parties in the European elections should not overshadow major setbacks in countries such as Hungary, Poland, and the Scandinavian nations.

The first relative but significant setback concerns Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz in Hungary. His party, which has reigned unchallenged on the

national political landscape since 2010, has been challenged by a new political force that has emerged with impressive speed on the Hungarian political scene. Led by a former member of the Orbán government, Péter Magyar, the opposition Respect and Freedom movement (TISZA), which was nonexistent in the 2019 European elections, won 29.6 percent of the vote, compared with 44.8 percent for Orbán's party (Fidesz won 52.5 percent of the vote in 2019). The historic rise in turnout mentioned above is certainly linked, at least in part, to the emergence of this challenger on the political scene. The seven MEPs of the new TISZA party now sit in the European People's Party (EPP), Orbán's former group, in the Strasbourg Parliament. TISZA, which achieved the best score against Fidesz in the European elections since Orbán came to power in 2010, could challenge the Hungarian political balance and establish itself as a credible alternative to Fidesz for the 2026 parliamentary elections. In fact, Politico included Péter Magyar in its selection of the twenty-eight most influential personalities in Europe in 2025.

This result is proof that democracy, even in countries where it was considered completely stifled, retains a form of resilience and can function when it is aligned with the aspirations of the people.

Another national-populist force in retreat is Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS), at both local and European levels. In power since 2015, the PiS faced its first setback in the October 2023 parliamentary elections, when it lost its majority in the Sejm to a coalition led by the Civic Platform of former European Council President Donald Tusk. In April 2024, local elections confirmed this alternation. The Tusk-led coalition won 52.2 percent of the vote, against 33.9 percent for the PiS (down 11.5 percent on 2019). Finally, in June, PiS suffered another setback in the European elections: The party, Viktor Orbán's historic ally, lost ten points compared to 2019. For many, this election marked the "return of Poland to Europe," a return that would make up for some of the shortcomings of an increasingly faltering Franco-German partnership. On the strength of these elections, and despite an unstable political coalition,

Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a connoisseur of European mechanisms, is preparing to make his mark among heads of state and government. In particular, he could play an important role in the follow-up to the war in Ukraine.

Finally, there has been a notable decline in these parties in the Scandinavian countries. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, usually regarded as social-democratic strongholds, have in recent years seen a rising trend on the nationalist right. Contrary to expectations and contrary to all the opinion polls, the Left and the Greens finally won a majority in the 2024 European elections. In Sweden, the Greens won 13.8 percent of the vote, behind the Socialist Party (25 percent), which recorded its biggest increase, and the Conservative Party (17.5 percent). The national-populist Sweden Democrats party (13.2 percent) is down on 2019, when it stood at 15 percent. In Finland, Li Andersson's radical left-wing Left Alliance won with 17.3 percent of the vote (+4 percent since 2019), ahead of the Socialist Party (15 percent), but just behind Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's National Coalition Party, which has shared power since June 2023 with the national-populist True Finns party, which took just 7.6 percent of the vote (–6 percent since 2019). In Denmark, the Socialist People's Party became the country's leading political force, with 17.4 percent of the vote (+5 percent), ahead of Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's Social Democratic Party.

To understand these results, which stand in stark contrast to those elsewhere in Europe, it is worth mentioning the place occupied by the climate in the concerns of Nordic voters, ranking ahead of the subject of immigration and despite the right-wing narrative of a “punitive ecology.” The defense of the welfare state, in a tense social climate, is also one of the reasons for the left-wing vote, particularly in Sweden and Finland (which has been experiencing protests against the government's austerity policy since 2023). Last but not least, support for Ukraine in countries close to or bordering Russia has been a driving force behind the left-wing vote. Sweden has been an official member of NATO

since March 7, 2024, alongside Finland, which joined on April 4, 2023. As Yohann Aucante⁶⁷ recalls, by the start of 2024, public opinion in Sweden, which was traditionally rather unfavorable to NATO membership (35 percent at the start of 2022) had risen to over 60 percent in favor, with 25 percent opposed and the rest undecided. In Finland, approval was even clearer: 80 percent.

All of these results must be viewed with perspective and nuance. While they show that populist parties are on the rise in some places, this is by no means irreversible or inevitable. Democracy continues to function, as shown by the examples of Hungary and Poland, where the opposition, despite systems that were said to be locked down by the parties in power, managed to make their voices heard and perform well at the ballot box. Sanctioning incumbents is also part of a form of democratic vitality that we would be wrong to underestimate and which calls into question the practice of power and good governance in each of the countries concerned. This new configuration nonetheless poses several major challenges, which we will analyze in the very last part of our study.

2.2. AFTER 2024: AGONY OR METAMORPHOSIS FOR DEMOCRACY?

What prospects do the elements discussed above open up for 2025 and beyond? While many already see in 2024 the agony, disavowal, or failure of liberal democracy, we propose instead to interpret it as the start of a new era that we must attempt to define and better understand. First, the electoral results and the reasons behind the vote argue in favor of a structural rather than cyclical interpretation of the period we are currently navigating. Second, we will show that a profound

⁶⁷ “Suède: de l’UE à l’OTAN, le Nord au centre” [Sweden: From the EU to NATO, the North at the Center], Institut Montaigne, February 8, 2024, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/suede-de-lue-lotan-le-nord-au-centre>.

ontological change is taking place, with democracy gradually transforming into a product from which the consumer/voter expects immediate results, capable of satisfying their personal well-being, which is increasingly understood in terms detached from the common good, thus bringing about a major change in the way politics is conceived of and conducted. The third major question raised by this year's results is not one of failure but rather of certain drifts in the so-called liberal democratic institutions, which we need to address with clarity in order to repair them more effectively.

a. A Political Evolution More Structural
than Cyclical

In his 2018 book *Le peuple contre la démocratie* [The people vs. democracy],⁶⁸ Yascha Mounk described the rise of anti-system leaders around the world, from the United States to Austria, Poland, and Hungary, from Trump to Beppe Grillo, Erdoğan, and Aléxis Tsípras. At the time, he wondered, “The question, then, is whether this moment will turn into an epoch—and call into question even the survival of liberal democracy.”

Eight years after Donald Trump's first election, we may well have transitioned, as Mounk suggested, from a “moment” to an “epoch.” The argument that the first wave of populist victories was an “accident” of democracy is no longer valid. In the United States, Donald Trump's reelection in November is an eloquent demonstration of this. He is the first Republican candidate since George W. Bush in 2004 to win the popular vote, with 77.2 million votes, 2.5 million more than in 2020.

⁶⁸ Yascha Mounk, *Le peuple contre la démocratie* [The people vs. democracy] (Éditions de l'Observatoire, 2018).

The rise of national-populist parties in the European Parliament is part of the same dynamic: Far from being an isolated or temporary phenomenon, it is a lasting progression that already began with the 2014 and 2019 European elections. This progression is also reflected in the arrival in and retention of power of leaders such as Giorgia Meloni, who, as part of a coalition that she dominates, is defying the chronic instability of which Italy has long been the victim by establishing herself permanently in her country's political landscape and increasingly weighing in at European level, settling into the place left gaping by Paris and Berlin. We may still be living in a democracy, since the electoral process has been respected, but people's intentions and their relationship to the exercise of power have indeed changed.

Voting patterns have also changed: The protest vote is declining, while the support vote is on the rise, as observed in Europe and France in particular. The Rassemblement National voter base, for example, has grown steadily over the last ten years, reaching across all generations, socio-professional categories, and regions, with the party now leading among employees, blue-collar workers, pensioners, and in all towns with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants. The eleven million French people who voted for the RN or its allies in the early legislative elections did so first and foremost out of support for the party's proposals on immigration (47 percent of the party's voters), then because they consider it to be the party that "better understands and represents people like us" (39 percent of its voters). This is no longer a simple expression of temporary anger or a desire to turn the tables but rather a growing support for a party that has undergone a profound transformation in recent years. The party is increasingly credible, and seen less and less as a threat to democracy (51 percent of French people now believe that the RN "does not represent a danger to democracy in France," 10 points

⁶⁹ "Baromètre d'image du RN, édition 2024 une étude Verian pour Le Monde et L'Hémicycle" [RN Image Barometer, 2024 Edition: A Verian Study for Le Monde and L'Hémicycle], Verian, November 25, 2024, <https://www.veriangroup.com/fr/news-and-insights/barometre-dimage-du-rassemblement-national-edition-2024>.

more than in 2022).⁶⁹ On the other side of the spectrum, the La France Insoumise party appears much more dangerous in the eyes of the French: 72 percent of French people consider it to stir up violence, and 69 percent believe that it is dangerous to democracy.⁷⁰

How can we integrate this new reality? How can we grasp the questions raised by these parties, which concern large swathes of the electorate, without resorting to the simplistic nature of some of their answers? Demonization and denunciation—whether of political leaders or voters—are certainly not the key, as demonstrated by the steady rise of these parties in recent years.

However, a structural evolution does not necessarily imply an irreversible trend, and we have clearly shown in the preceding analysis that a number of so-called populist or anti-system movements have declined after several years in power, as in Poland, for example. For this to happen, we also need to recognize the democratic aspirations to which these political forces respond and find new ways of dealing with them. “Refusing to acknowledge that there is something democratic in the energy that propelled them to power,” writes Yasha Mounk,⁷¹ “prevents us from understanding the nature of their pull—and makes it harder to think carefully and creatively about how to stop them.”

⁶⁹ Ipsos, Institut Montaigne, CEVIPOF, *Le Monde*, Fondation Jean Jaurès, “Enquête électorale française, élections Européennes – Vague 7” [French Electoral Survey, European Elections – Wave 7], August 2024, <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-08/ipsos-enquete-electorale-francaise-2024-vague-7-rapport-complet-WEB.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Mounk, *Le peuple contre la démocratie* [The people vs. democracy].

⁷¹ Giuliano da Empoli, *Les ingénieurs du chaos* [The engineers of chaos], (JC Lattès, 2019).

⁷² “Les réseaux sociaux nourrissent-ils les populismes ? Échange entre Asma Mhalla et David Chavalarias” [Do social networks fuel populism? A discussion between Asma Mhalla and David Chavalarias], *Expressions par Institut Montaigne*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/les-reseaux-sociaux-nourrissent-ils-les-populismes>.

b. Democracy as a Product, Voters as Consumers

The second key element to emerge from this election year is the rapid mutation of democracy into a product and voters into consumers. At over \$15.9 billion, the 2024 presidential campaign ranked as the most expensive campaign in US history. This amount includes the sums invested by the presidential and congressional candidates. The 2024 campaign surpassed the 2020 campaign (\$15.1 billion) and cost twice as much as the 2016 campaign (\$6.5 billion). Advertising campaigns accounted for the biggest investments, to the tune of \$10.5 billion. These amounts, unrivaled in Europe due to the much stricter supervision of campaign financing, nonetheless project democracy into a dimension that is not entirely foreign to us.

In the United States, as on the Old Continent, democracy is gradually transforming into a product, the subject of increasingly targeted marketing campaigns designed for consumers who must be satisfied at all costs. Each person thus embodies a type of clientele that must be satisfied, at the risk of neglecting all others. This is what Giuliano da Empoli was already outlining in *Les Ingénieurs du chaos*⁷² when he deciphered the strategies deployed by leaders such as Matteo Salvini, who succeeded in turning a small online marketing firm⁷³ into Italy's leading party. While his party has since weakened considerably, the techniques used have grown in sophistication and intensity. The importance of social media in campaigns is part and parcel of this phenomenon of hyper-individualization and the overturning of any hierarchy of political or citizen discourse. It also fills the gaping void left by parties that no longer meet voters' expectations (only 14 percent of French people have confidence in political parties today).⁷⁴ This phenomenon, which was in its infancy during the elections of the early 2010s,

⁷⁴ "Fractures Françaises 2024," a study by Ipsos for the Institut Montaigne, CEVIPOF, the Fondation Jean Jaurès and Le Monde, December 2024, <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/fractures-francaises-2024-une-crise-de-confiance>.

is now a structural element that must be taken into account. Artificial intelligence could make it even more pronounced, opening up new possibilities for personalized targeting. The sovereign voter thus becomes an equally sovereign but perhaps even more intransigent consumer, demanding that their vote pays off, that they get something in return.

Reduced to the status of a mere product, democracy loses its sanctity. Constitutions can be twisted, electoral results given little credence, and crises downplayed, because after all, the consumer is king, and their desires must be satisfied without delay. In this last respect, responsibility is shared and is not the prerogative of the “populists.” The decisions taken by the French president since the June 9 dissolution (appointing a prime minister from the party that came fifth in the legislative elections, for example), like Joe Biden’s decision to pardon his son before leaving office, contribute to this weakening and fuel mistrust.

c. The Failings and Excesses of Our Liberal Democracies

Finally, it is impossible to understand the current period without clearly identifying the failings and excesses of our liberal democracies. The very high levels of mistrust in political personnel and institutions around the world are the most eloquent symptom of this. As Yasha Mounk⁷⁵ explained back in 2018, the rise of leaders he describes as “illiberal democrats” (Trump, Orbán, or Beppe Grillo) is inseparable from the rise of an “undemocratic liberalism,” which he deems equally devastating. So, what does he mean by anti-democratic liberalism? This is reflected in the proliferation of agencies and para-statal or supranational authorities, the extension of the power of central banks and unelected judges, and the gradual alienation of citizens from the decisions

⁷⁵ Mounk, *Le peuple contre la démocratie* [The people vs. democracy].

that concern them. He points in particular to the excesses observed at the European level at the time of the eurozone crisis, notably in Greece in 2015, or the weight taken on by US federal agencies in relation to that of the legislature (in 2007, for example, Congress passed 138 laws, while unelected federal agencies finalized 2,916 regulations—similar orders of magnitude could surely be found in France).

This “de-democratization” of our institutions is coupled with a great deal of semantic and political confusion surrounding notions that are central to democracy. Confusing authority with authoritarianism, compromise with corruption, exemplarity with surveillance, has led to the adoption of attitudes, discourses, and rules that have distorted the way politics is conceived of and conducted, and also hinder engagement. **Since Trump’s election in 2016, we have perhaps focused too much on the rise of populism and the rise of illiberal leaders without sufficiently addressing the other side of the coin: that of a democratic retreat of some of our institutions.** It is imperative to approach the question from this dialectic angle and to accept a clear-eyed trial of our own liberal institutions—without, of course, resorting to caricature. We cannot put the populists on trial if we are incapable of addressing this question at the same time. Of course, this is not a question of wiping the slate clean and going back on the major advances that some of these institutions have made possible (the rescue of the euro zone in the case of the EU, the response to increasingly complex issues in the case of the agencies—whether environmental, health, financial, or technological issues requiring special expertise).

The imperative today is to reinject democracy into these institutions, to question their functioning, and, in some cases, their justification. The issue is not to abolish these institutions—national or supranational—which help stabilize our economies and societies—but to reform them in order to find “a point of balance between expertise and consideration of the popular will,” between power conferred by the people and delegations of authority operated by a few.

Between high voter turnout, changes in electoral interference, the sanctioning of incumbents, and the transformation of the democratic object, the picture that emerges is full of contrasts. It is not a sign of an inescapable democratic decline, but rather the reflection of a very profound metamorphosis, accompanied, in some areas, by a vitality that must be nurtured while changing its driving forces. The deadlines of 2025 (in Germany, or possibly in France, in the event of early legislative elections), then 2026 and 2027 (the French presidential elections, the midterms in the United States) must be approached by integrating all these elements and facing them head-on at their proper level. Finally, as 2024 drew to a close with the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, bringing to an end nearly fourteen years of war and half a century of Ba'athist rule, history shows us that while democracies are fragile, dictatorships are just as vulnerable.

Measures Taken at the European and National Levels to Combat Interference

AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

European awareness has been heightened by two scandals: Russian influence in the Czech Republic via the fake news website Voice of Europe, which has been in operation since 2017, and the “Qataragate” scandal (a corruption network involving Qatar and Morocco, in the context of Doha’s organization of the soccer World Cup) at the end of 2022, which implicated an Italian former MEP, his former parliamentary assistant and Eva Kaili, MEP and Vice-President of the Parliament.

2015

The subject of interference is put on the European agenda for the first time under the heading “**Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)**.” The EU sets up the **East StratCom Task Force (ESCTF)** within the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**, which aims to communicate effectively on the EU’s policies toward its eastern neighborhood and produces a weekly magazine in Russian and English, *Disinformation Review*, aimed at public opinion in Eastern Europe.

2018

On December 5, the European Commission and the EEAS published a **ten-point action plan against disinformation** to respond quickly and in a targeted manner to any disinformation attacks ahead of the 2019 European elections.

A **Code of Good Practice on Platforms** is drafted, to be reinforced in 2022 by the DSA and adopted by more than thirty digital players (including Google and TikTok, despite Twitter's withdrawal in May 2023).

2019

On October 10, the Parliament adopted a **Resolution** stating that ***"attempts to influence the decision-making process in the EU pose a risk to European democratic societies."*** It is passed by 469 votes (143 against and 47 abstentions).

2020

Creation of a **Committee on Foreign Interference** in the European Parliament, INGE.

2022

The **Digital Service Act** of 2022 obliges online platforms to fight disinformation (notably by labeling AI-created content to better identify deep fakes and by setting up emergency response protocols in the event of a disinformation attack going viral).

Publication of the **INGE I report** on foreign interference in all of the European Union's democratic processes, including disinformation, marked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It points to a Parliament ill-prepared to deal with interference.

Creation of a new Committee on Foreign Interference in the European Parliament, **INGE II**

2023

Publication of the European Parliament report, ***"Foreign Interference, Urgently Protecting the 2024 European Elections,"*** from INGE II.

2024

In the run-up to the June vote, the President of the Parliament, **Roberta Metsola**, says that ***“this election will put our democratic systems to the test.”***

Aware of the risks, in January, the EEAS published a **special report** focusing on the forthcoming European elections.

Parliament resolution: *“New allegations of Russian interference in the European Parliament, the forthcoming European elections and the impact on the European Union.”* The text, initiated by the EPP, is passed by 429 votes out of 504. It mentions the German AfD and the Rassemblement National, particularly Thierry Mariani’s participation in election observation missions in Russia. Among other things, it provides for the publication, on the Parliament’s website, of a ***“Russian Hybrid Influence Index”*** designed to list political players in member and candidate countries “with links to Putin’s regime and involved in disseminating Kremlin narratives.” The resolution also calls for **the Copenhagen criteria** (EU membership criteria) to be updated to assess “the resilience of the candidate country to Russia’s hybrid influence” and for parliamentary security to be strengthened through training for MEPs and security clearance systems for parliamentarians working on sensitive issues.

Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, voted for by 470 MEPs (with 50 against and 105 abstentions). It prohibits foreign funding of political advertising during the three-month period preceding each election. These measures will come into force eighteen months after the vote, in July 2025.

Comprehensive Artificial Intelligence Act, which combats misinformation by introducing transparency requirements for AI-generated content.

Directive “Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders against Manifestly Unfounded or Abusive Legal Proceedings” introduced to defend journalists’ freedom from interference.

European regulation on the freedom of the media, aimed in particular at protecting the confidentiality of sources and prohibiting the use of surveillance technologies against journalists.

At the **Copenhagen Democracy Summit** in May, Ursula von der Leyen, then still a candidate for reelection, promises to set up a reinforced arsenal to combat interference: **a European democratic shield**.

IN FRANCE

2021

Creation of **VIGINUM**, inspired by the Commission’s 2018 action plan, attached to the National Secretariat for Defense and National Security.

July 2021: **The Pegasus affair**, spyware sold by the Israeli company NSO, which shows French vulnerabilities.

2023

Annual report of the Parliamentary Delegation for Intelligence for the year 2022–2023, which considers the risk of interference to be high and as coming not only from Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran but also from some of France’s allies. It warns of the naivete of public decision-makers and economic and academic players and makes eighteen recommendations, some of which are classified as defense secrets.

The **Military Programming Law** for the years 2024 to 2030 allocates an additional five billion euros to the human resources of the intelligence services.

2024

Information report by Constance Le Grip submitted to the European Affairs Committee, chaired by Jean-Philippe Tanguy. It attests to the danger of foreign interference in France, and mainly incriminates Russia and China, documenting the “Russianization” of Chinese practices.

Law of July 25, 2024, aimed at preventing foreign interference in France: It provides for measures in terms of transparency (new register of foreign-influenced activities) and intelligence (use of algorithms, freezing of assets) and enhances penalties for violations.

The Three National-Populist Groups in the European Parliament since the June 9 Elections

PATRIOTS FOR EUROPE

The Patriots for Europe group comprises eighty-four MEPs from fifteen national parties representing twelve countries. It is the third-largest group in the European Parliament, behind the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Social Democrats (S&D) and ahead of the RCE and Renew. It was formed in June 2024 on the initiative of Viktor Orbán (Fidesz, Hungary) and is chaired by Jordan Bardella (RN).

It is mainly made up of the thirty French MEPs from Rassemblement National (RN), the ten MEPs from Fidesz (Hungary), the eight MEPs from Matteo Salvini’s League (Italy), the six MEPs from FPÖ (Austria) and the six MEPs from Geert Wilders’ Party for Freedom (PVV). Despite its weight,

the group has not been given any responsibility within the EU bodies due to the “cordon sanitaire” applied to it by the majority of the Parliament’s groups, following the practice already put in place during the previous legislature. The Patriots for Europe are distinguished from the other groups by their closeness—past or present for some—to Vladimir Putin’s Russia and their hostility to NATO.

THE EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVES AND REFORMISTS

The European Conservatives and Reformists group comprises seventy-eight MEPs from twenty-two national parties representing eighteen countries. It is the fourth-largest group in the European Parliament, behind Patriots for Europe and ahead of Renew. Set up in 2009, it is mainly made up of the twenty-four MEPs of Fratelli d’Italia, the eighteen MEPs of the Polish PiS, and the five MEPs of the Alliance for Romanian Unity. It is, then, made up of a constellation of small national parties with Eurosceptic leanings. Unlike the *Patriotes pour l’Europe* group, which outnumbers it, the CRE group is not subject to the cordon sanitaire and is considered more “agreeable” by its partners. Ideologically, it takes more liberal positions from an economic point of view, takes a firmer stance on the war in Ukraine, and supports NATO.

EUROPE OF SOVEREIGN NATIONS

The Europe of Sovereign Nations group comprises twenty-five MEPs from eight national parties representing as many member states. It was created in June 2024 after the European elections, following the exclusion of the German AfD from the Identity and Democracy group by the French *Rassemblement National* (RN). The majority of the group is made up of the fourteen German AfD MEPs, the three Polish *Hope* MEPs,


and the three Bulgarian Renaissance MEPs. It also includes a French MEP from the Reconquête party. Its positioning is the most radical of the three far-right parties: fighting immigration, opposing the Green Deal, and rejecting all aid to Ukraine.

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*Institut Montaigne welcomes thoughts
and ideas on how to address these issues
collectively to put forward recommendations
which serve the public interest.*



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2024 broke all previous records for the number of elections around the world. More than 60 countries went to the polls including the United States, France, Great Britain, Taiwan, India, Russia, and Turkey. While holding an election does not necessarily mean that the regime organizing it is fundamentally democratic, 2024 can legitimately be described as a large-scale test for the future of democracy. We have just turned the page on 2024 and a new cycle is beginning. What is the state of democracy at the start of 2025? What initial lessons can be drawn from the various elections? Could the most democratic year in recent history also be the year of democracy's great deconsolidation? While 2024 undeniably marked the rise or return of illiberal or anti-democratic political forces, the electoral results for the year should not be limited to this single dimension and do not allow us to conclude that democracy's opponents have triumphed. A closer examination of four elections—the European elections on June 9, the French legislative elections on June 30 and July 7, the British general elections on July 4, and the US presidential election on November 5—highlights that. Foreign interference, voter turnout, overall trends in the results, campaign themes, and new ways of conceiving democracy all paint a picture full of contrasts at the end of 2024. Rather than speaking of decline, let us face the metamorphoses of democracy in order to better defend it and adapt it to the upcoming challenges in 2025.



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