

The 2024 US election

## Trump 2.0 and the global order

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Bonn, 4 November 2024. For Europe, tomorrow's presidential election in the United States gives rise to one question in particular: how would a second term in office for Donald Trump change global politics? His first presidency was already marked by a radical shift in US foreign policy. The country's actions were dominated by isolationism and a withdrawal from multilateral treaties and by policies that aggressively prioritised national interests. 'Trump 2.0' could continue to drive these developments and therefore poses a serious threat to the global order and to Europe.

### **Withdrawal from the multilateral order – dangerous isolationism**

During his first period in office, Trump already showed little interest in maintaining international cooperation.

The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and other multilateral forums was a clear sign that Trump was prepared to follow up on his 'anti-globalist' views. If he were to win the election again this time, Trump might go even further. The United States might increasingly withdraw from the United Nations, NATO, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the OECD, which would diminish the country's role as a global leader but above all would obviously weaken the relevant institutions themselves.

This would cause huge damage to Europe, heavily dependent as it is on multilateral cooperation. Without the United States as a stable partner, it would be extremely difficult to address global challenges such as climate change and poverty effectively or to reform the global governance structures. At the same time, withdrawal by the United States would allow actors such as China and Russia to gain more power, which could exacerbate political tensions and detract from Europe's position.

#### **A setback for climate action**

A second term for Trump would be particularly disastrous for international climate policy, too. Trump already denied climate change during his first period in office, with the United States putting a brake on international efforts to combat global warming. The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, which proposes a clear agenda for a second Trump presidency, aims to 'stop the war on oil and natural gas' and to dismantle climate funding.

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This would be a huge setback for the European Union, which seeks to use its Green Deal to become a global leader in climate action. Without support from the United States, it would be more difficult to achieve the global climate goals and to establish a new climate finance architecture. This could widen differences between Europe and the United States in the field of climate policy.

Development policy, too, would be likely to suffer considerably under Trump 2.0. Although the cuts to the development cooperation budget were less drastic during his first presidency than feared, Trump geared

the use of US funds heavily towards the country's geopolitical interests. If he were to return to the White House, the focus of US development policy, too, might shift even further towards the geopolitical conflict with China. Europe would then increasingly be expected to close the funding gaps left by the United States, for example in the UN development system. At the same time, Europe would face even greater pressure to step up its spending on defence – particularly in view of Trump's call for the European NATO states to assume greater responsibility for their own security.

#### **New geopolitical realities – the Global South as winners?**

Whereas Trump 2.0 poses a threat to Europe and the West, some actors in the Global South will see a second Trump presidency as an opportunity. The partial withdrawal by the United States from the global order could afford them greater scope to break free from power structures dominated by the West and to increasingly help establish a multipolar global order less geared towards western values and norms. From a western perspective, there is a danger that these countries might increasingly turn to China or Russia and that Europe's role in the global order – and the rules-based global order as a whole – might be further weakened.

A second term in office for Donald Trump would create considerable challenges for the international order, but Kamala Harris as president would not be a guarantee of stability either. The United States faces huge domestic tension and would no doubt prove to be a less reliable partner for Europe under either Trump or Harris. The Indo-Pacific region looks set to become more important even under Harris, for example. Nonetheless, Harris has made a clear commitment to continuing support for NATO.

The conclusion is clear: all of these factors mean that Europe must be prepared for a new geopolitical era. The European Union and its member states cannot rely on returning to the old transatlantic partnership; instead, they must face the possibility that the United States may become a more difficult partner under Trump 2.0 and even under Harris. It is time for Europe to adopt a confident stance on the international stage and to assume a leading role in areas such as climate action, development policy and multilateral cooperation.