# European elections reveal polarised politics amid enduring Trump effect



The recent electoral landscape in Europe reveals the complex and often contradictory influence of American political dynamics, most notably the “Trump effect.” As evidenced by elections in Romania, Poland, and Portugal, this phenomenon is reshaping the contours of political discourse, inciting both a rise in far-right populism and a robust liberal pushback, albeit with mixed outcomes.

On Sunday, Romanian voters opted decisively for Nicusor Dan, the pro-Europe Mayor of Bucharest, who secured around 54% of the vote, while his rival, George Simion, a hard-right candidate admired by Donald Trump, garnered approximately 46%. Simion’s platform resonated with discontent over economic challenges and alleged foreign interference in the electoral process, which he claimed was orchestrated by external powers, a narrative echoing broader trends of populist rhetoric in Europe. Following the election, Simion announced his intention to challenge the results, alleging meddling, particularly from France and Moldova, which underscores the increasingly contentious nature of European electoral politics. The resilience of Dan's centrist stance has been interpreted as a relief for many European leaders wary of a shift towards populism.

In Poland, the presidential election also showcased polarisation, with right-wing candidate Karol Nawrocki, backed by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and Trump's endorsement, narrowly trailing liberal contender Rafal Trzaskowski, who received about 31% of the vote to Nawrocki's 29.5%. Analysts argue that the election is a litmus test for Poland's future trajectory—whether it will continue on a pro-European course or lean further into nationalist conservatism. Voter turnout was significant, at approximately 66.8%, highlighting citizens’ engagement with the current political climate, influenced by both local and transatlantic issues. The competition has divided the electorate, reflecting a larger ideological split in Poland concerning its relationship with the United States and the European Union.

Meanwhile, Portugal witnessed a notable surge in support for the far-right Chega party, which secured a record 22.6% of the vote, signalling a significant disruption in the traditional two-party dominance. Even though Chega did not win the election, leader Andre Ventura’s ambitions remain high, as he declared his intent to continue campaigning for the premiership. This rise is emblematic of the broader challenges facing the established political order across Europe, wherein populist sentiments are gaining traction among disillusioned voters, often exacerbated by economic insecurity and immigration anxieties.

Moreover, the ramifications of these electoral outcomes extend beyond national borders. Political experts, such as Celia Belin from the European Council on Foreign Relations, have noted that Trump’s influence has invigorated several populist movements across Europe, which may draw inspiration from his “Make America Great Again” mantra. Countries such as Germany, where the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has made substantial gains, and the UK, where the Reform party has disrupted traditional politics, exemplify this trend. Belin asserts that while the push of right-wing populism is stronger now than two years ago, the varied political landscapes across Europe make the ultimate impact of Trumpism unpredictable—akin to a double-edged sword fuelling both far-right bases and energising liberal opposition.

The intricate interactions between these political movements are further complicated by the rise of centrist figures and liberal coalitions that advocate for inclusive approaches amidst a backdrop of rising nationalism. In light of the ongoing energy crises and security challenges stemming from geopolitical instability, leaders like Paschal Donohoe, Ireland's finance minister, maintain that the EU must harness integration to provide solutions, balancing conservative concerns with progressive values to combat the allure of populist rhetoric.

However, perceptions of the Trump administration remain divisive within Europe. Many voters express scepticism towards the former president and the political ideologies he embodies. Historical evidence suggests that associating with populist figures may not guarantee electoral success. Recent elections in Canada and Australia have demonstrated that established parties can effectively counter anti-establishment narratives, suggesting that a careful appraisal of domestic sentiment is essential for any aspiring populist figures in Europe today.

The journey ahead for European politics remains fraught with challenges and opportunities, shaped by an intricate web of local discontent and broader international influences. As national elections unfold, the implications for liberal democracy, EU unity, and regional stability will be pivotal not only for the future of these countries but also for the collective response to the ideological divisions marked by the Trump effect.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://ruralradio.com/kbear/abc_news/trumps-impact-on-european-politics-rise-of-the-right-and-liberals-pushing-back-abcid734d07ad/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/e607b82a-56b7-4dde-8cfa-8d44b6d4837e> - In a podcast titled 'Is Trump a threat or an opportunity for the EU?', Ireland’s finance minister and president of the Eurogroup, Paschal Donohoe, discusses the resilience and future of the European Union amid global challenges. He emphasizes the political determination underpinning the euro and the EU, particularly during crises like the Eurozone debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Donohoe considers rising nationalism a challenge but maintains that EU integration is a modern solution to collective problems such as trade, security, and digital innovation. He also addresses rising populism and immigration, advocating for a centrist, balanced approach that combines control with openness, highlighting the economic and social benefits of migration to Ireland and the EU.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/romanian-hard-right-presidential-candidate-challenges-election-defeat-2025-05-21/> - George Simion, Romania's hard-right presidential candidate, announced plans to challenge his recent electoral defeat, alleging external interference from France and Moldova. Simion, who initially conceded after losing to centrist candidate and Bucharest mayor Nicusor Dan—who won with about 54% of the vote compared to Simion's 46%—reversed his position, demanding the Constitutional Court annul the election. He cited foreign meddling as grounds, echoing reasons used to annul December’s election over alleged Russian interference. Simion's allegations follow claims by Telegram founder Pavel Durov that France's intelligence agency attempted to suppress Romanian conservative voices, which the agency denied. Durov expressed willingness to testify in support of Romanian democracy. Additionally, Simion accused Moldova of vote-buying, though Moldova’s foreign ministry has not responded. Romanian election officials have yet to comment. European leaders reportedly reacted with relief to Nicusor Dan’s centrist victory.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/e8e53e68-80b4-4ca4-ada5-4f8907712a0d> - Elections in Romania and Poland are pivotal for the future of democracy in Eastern Europe. In Romania, George Simion, an ultranationalist and former football hooligan, is leading a populist charge and faces Bucharest’s centrist mayor, Nicușor Dan, in a run-off. Romania, although economically progressed since joining the EU in 2007, suffers from high inflation, poor educational outcomes, and stalled anti-corruption efforts. Simion capitalizes on public dissatisfaction, especially from the diaspora, and his potential presidency threatens to pivot Romania away from its longstanding pro-EU, pro-NATO alignment. In Poland, Karol Nawrocki, aligned with the conservative PiS party, is trailing behind Warsaw’s liberal mayor Rafał Trzaskowski in presidential polls. A win by Trzaskowski could enable Prime Minister Donald Tusk to implement delayed judicial reforms and fully reorient Poland toward EU mainstream politics. Conversely, a Nawrocki victory would continue the PiS influence, limiting reforms. The broader concern is the erosion of democratic norms amid misinformation, weak media institutions, and foreign manipulation, particularly in Romania. These elections are being seen as referendums on the future trajectory of both nations—liberal democracy or entrenched populism—with significant implications for EU unity and regional stability.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-presidential-election-test-if-pms-pro-eu-vision-is-trump-proof-2025-05-18/> - In Poland's presidential election, centrist candidate Rafal Trzaskowski narrowly led with 30.8% of the vote, just ahead of nationalist Karol Nawrocki's 29.1%, according to an exit poll. The close result sets up a June 1 runoff that could determine whether Poland continues on its current pro-European Union course or shifts toward a nationalist, more conservative path. The unexpectedly strong performance of far-right candidates, who collectively garnered nearly 22%, represents a setback for Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s pro-EU coalition. Trzaskowski vows to support government reforms, including reversing controversial judicial changes made by the Law and Justice (PiS) party. A win for Nawrocki, supported by the far-right and visited by Donald Trump, could maintain the political deadlock that has persisted since Tusk took office in 2023. Voter turnout was 66.8%. Analysts say the result is a blow to the ruling coalition, revealing a divided electorate. The Polish president holds veto power, making the outcome crucial for the government's reform agenda. Nawrocki emphasizes Polish nationalism and conservative values, while Trzaskowski champions EU integration and social inclusivity. The closely contested runoff will be pivotal in shaping Poland's future political direction.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/fc697c949bfc3296bfbaf0a1e1c67449> - Poland is set to vote for a new president on Sunday amid growing concerns over regional security, democratic integrity, and its role within the European Union. With President Andrzej Duda’s term ending in August, 13 candidates are vying to succeed him, though a June 1 runoff is widely expected between liberal Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski and conservative historian Karol Nawrocki. Poland’s geopolitical location—bordering Russia’s Kaliningrad, Belarus, and Ukraine—heightens the election’s significance, especially given NATO’s reliance on Poland for military logistics to Ukraine. Both frontrunners support U.S.-European defense cooperation, but differ markedly in other areas. Trzaskowski favors EU integration and judicial reforms, while Nawrocki, supported by the right-wing Law and Justice party, promotes nationalist policies and expresses skepticism towards Brussels. The presidency, although symbolic, holds considerable power over foreign policy, the military, and legislation. The election outcome could significantly influence Poland’s democratic trajectory and the ruling coalition’s reform agenda. The race also holds vital stakes for the future relevance of the Law and Justice party, which has consistently challenged EU norms during its time in power.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/trump-admirer-simion-hopes-voter-anger-will-win-him-romania-presidency-2025-05-16/> - George Simion, a hard-right, Eurosceptic Romanian lawmaker and admirer of Donald Trump, is a leading contender in Romania's upcoming presidential run-off election. He has surged in popularity due to public discontent over economic hardships, corruption, and the annulment of a previous election due to suspected Russian interference. Simion advocates a 'Romania first' agenda, criticizing EU leadership, supporting conservative values, and opposing military aid to Ukraine, which he argues should be compensated. His potential election raises concerns among political analysts about Romania's international standing, investment risks, and NATO stability. Simion's party, the Alliance for Uniting Romanians, has quickly risen from fringe status to the second-largest in parliament. If elected, Simion could appoint Calin Georgescu, a far-right figure, as prime minister, solidifying a nationalist pivot. Despite referring to Russian President Putin as a war criminal, Simion has downplayed regional threats from Russia. His controversial moves include advocating energy nationalization and restoration of Romania's pre-WWII borders, actions that have strained relationships with neighboring Moldova and Ukraine, where he is declared persona non grata.