# Trump effect deepens European political divides amid rising populism



The political landscape in Europe is becoming alarmingly influenced by what some are dubbing the "Trump effect," as evidenced by the recent elections in Romania, Poland, and Portugal. These results further underscore that the political polarization witnessed in the United States is now resonating across the Atlantic, albeit in complex and troubling ways.

The weekend elections in three EU nations revealed a divided electorate, with no clear mandate emerging—an unsettling reflection of the rising populist sentiment. The shadow of former U.S. President Donald Trump looms large, as his rhetoric appears to embolden nationalist movements across Europe. The connection between Trump’s populist messaging and the ascendance of right-wing parties is undeniable; while no single party emerged victorious, there is a palpable increase in support for potent, populist narratives.

Celia Belin, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, highlighted the significant implications of Trump’s tactics in Europe, stating, “It’s stronger than it was two years ago… it gives inspiration to a ton of populist nationalist leaders in Europe.” This is not simply an American phenomenon; concerns over globalization, immigration, economic inequality, and national identity resonate throughout Europe, providing fertile ground for far-right parties prepared to capitalize on these grievances.

However, the translation of “Trumpism” into a European context is far from complete. In Romania, for example, the pro-European and pro-NATO Mayor Nicusor Dan secured about 54% of the vote, while his opponent George Simion—a Trump supporter—struggled to gain traction despite echoing familiar populist sentiments. This signifies a critical moment; voters are increasingly prioritizing stability and traditional values over divisive rhetoric.

In Poland, liberal candidate Rafal Trzaskowski narrowly defeated right-wing contender Karol Nawrocki, who carried Trump’s endorse. The results highlight a deepening ideological split within Poland concerning its relationship with the U.S., traditionally marked by strong consensus. “Now… Poland is suddenly divided on how to go about America,” noted Piotr Buras, indicating a worrisome shift in sentiment.

Portugal, too, has not clearly endorsed far-right policies. Despite the Chega party gaining a significant 22.6% of the vote, signaling a potential fracture in the two-party system, the public remains cautious. Chega’s leader Andre Ventura boldly stepped forward in his quest for higher office, yet this ambition is rooted in a broader European discourse rather than isolated populism.

This electoral climate reflects a disturbing trend. In the U.K. and Germany, right-wing parties are harnessing discontent effectively; the experienced Reform party’s recent local election success exemplifies this burgeoning political force. The Alternative for Germany party also demonstrated its growing influence, securing roughly 21% of the vote in parliamentary elections, indicating that populism is increasingly encroaching upon the mainstream.

Vance’s reflections at the Munich Security Conference illustrate the complexities surrounding Trump’s persistent appeal. He admonished against the curtailment of free speech in Europe, a sentiment likely to find resonance in far-right circles. Yet, this view is not universally held; many voters are increasingly alarmed by Trump’s polarizing impact, aligning themselves with centrist parties that promise stability, as illustrated by recent elections in countries like Canada and Australia.

Moreover, Europe's ongoing response to Trump’s policies is shifting, as the EU tightens its trade strategies in light of American protectionism. The push towards a “Buy European” strategy is not merely a defensive measure; it represents a crucial step towards achieving greater economic autonomy and resilience against external pressures.

Looking ahead, any revival of Trump or similar populist narratives in the U.S. could have dire consequences for Europe. As Belin suggests, such a resurgence could both energize populist movements while galvanizing opposition forces—creating an intricate and unpredictable political climate. The resilience of democratic institutions in Europe may ultimately depend on how these developments unfold in the coming years, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities presented by rising nationalism.

As EU leaders ponder their collective future amid increasing nationalism, the lessons drawn from Trump’s presidency and the reactions it provoked will indubitably shape their strategies for maintaining cohesion amidst ideological divides. The political terrain is shifting, and it's essential for those committed to traditional values and democratic integrity to stand firm against the tides of populism that threaten to engulf the continent.

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, 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 views the euro as a dynamic project supported by collective European action and considers rising nationalism a challenge, advocating for EU integration as a solution to collective problems such as trade, security, and digital innovation.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/cd3b82a6-49dd-431e-98aa-91ce46d2aa2c> - In response to escalating trade tensions and protectionist policies under U.S. President Donald Trump, the EU is advancing a 'Buy European' strategy to encourage member states to prioritize EU firms in public procurement. EU Industry Chief Stéphane Séjourné presented the proposal, emphasizing enhancing Europe’s strategic autonomy, especially in critical sectors like technology and raw materials. The initiative proposes amending procurement rules to allow governments to exclude non-European bidders from contracts, marking a significant deviation from current EU and WTO regulations. This strategic shift reflects Europe's attempt to fortify its economic and political independence amid mounting geopolitical pressures.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/business/eu-targets-business-barriers-enhance-competitiveness-amid-us-tariffs-2025-05-21/> - The European Commission unveiled plans to dismantle internal business barriers within the EU to improve competitiveness and mitigate the economic impact of U.S. tariffs. According to the IMF, internal barriers within the EU act like tariffs averaging 44% for goods and 110% for services—far exceeding actual import duties. The Commission aims to support business growth, particularly for smaller firms, by encouraging expansion across member states and targeting key obstacles such as limited professional qualification recognition, inconsistent packaging rules, and sector monopolies. Specific efforts include encouraging QR code use for product information and developing guidelines for temporary service provision across borders.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/08/trumps-polarising-appeal-leaves-european-populists-in-a-tight-spot> - Europe’s rightwing populist parties are divided over how to distance themselves from Donald Trump’s pressure on Ukraine. Some fear that unflinching solidarity with Trump’s nationalism will damage their domestic support. Unease over Trump’s treatment of Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and the encroachment of authoritarianism by the new U.S. administration is strongest among populist parties in western Europe and some Nordic countries. In contrast, in eastern Europe, where parts of the electorate view Russia sympathetically, support for Trump remains undimmed. This division highlights the complex relationship between European populists and Trump's influence.
6. <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/04/11/2024/trump-20-trigger-points-europe> - A re-elected Trump presidency is likely to continue pursuing an isolationist course, potentially weakening multilateral institutions that have long formed the backbone of the global order. This poses a particular challenge for Europe, which relies on these institutions to tackle global problems such as climate change and poverty. Without the U.S. as a stable partner in multilateral forums, Europe's ability to address these issues could be severely limited. Additionally, a U.S. withdrawal would position rising states like China and Russia with additional power, while Europe would need to focus on strengthening its leadership role.
7. <https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global-memos/why-us-presidential-election-matters-europe> - European leaders are concerned about a continued and possibly irreversible decline in democratic norms if Trump returns to the presidency. They worry not only about U.S. domestic politics—the danger of authoritarianism spreading in the United States—but also about the impact on the international order, which they believe could suffer an even more serious setback from a second Trump term. Many fear that a Trump return could embolden other populist-nationalist leaders in Europe and beyond, as was seen during his time in office.