

Opinion **US presidential election 2024**

What the world thinks of Harris versus Trump

Strongman leaders around the globe would welcome a victory for the Republican former president

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Gideon Rachman YESTERDAY

Sitting in Europe, it is easy to believe that the whole world is willing on Kamala Harris. Not so. Many powerful governments want Donald Trump to win the US presidential election.

The pro-Trump camp includes Israel, Russia, India, Hungary, Argentina and Saudi Arabia. In the pro-Harris camp you can find Ukraine, most of the EU, Britain, Japan, Canada, Brazil, South Africa and many others.

Russia's stake in a Trump victory is obvious. The prospect that a Trump-led US would cut off aid to Ukraine would hand Vladimir Putin the victory he has so far been denied on the battlefield. The Russian leader's smirking [remark](#) that he would prefer Harris to win simply demonstrates that he has mastered the art of trolling.

Putin's dream is the EU's nightmare. If Ukraine is vanquished, the eastern flank of the EU and Nato would be exposed to potential Russian aggression. Even if Trump did not actually pull the US out of Nato (as some former aides have [said](#) he might), he could gravely undermine the alliance by repeating his suggestion that the US will not automatically defend its Nato allies.

Trump's promise to impose 10-20 per cent tariffs on all imports is also a major threat to the European economy and, in particular, to big exporting countries such as Germany. It could spark a trade war with the EU.

There are, however, governments in Europe that break with the pro-Harris consensus. Italy's Georgia Meloni has political roots in the far right and may feel well positioned to mediate between Trump and the EU. Hungary's Viktor Orbán has built a special relationship with the Maga right in America. They share his loathing of immigration and seem [keen to learn](#) from his success in undermining Hungary's democratic institutions.

Orbán would see a Trump victory as a sign that the ideological winds are blowing in his direction across the west. Populist and far-right parties in Europe — such as France's National Rally and the Alternative for Germany — might also look to a Trump White House for guidance and support. With Trump back in office, Europe's liberal democracies would be in danger of being caught in a vice between the US, Russia and the far right within Europe itself.

Trump's stress on power politics and his indifference to democracy and human rights worries the EU. But it makes him the preferred partner for Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel, Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Arabia and Narendra Modi's India.

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Harris is regarded with suspicion in Israel because she has been marginally more critical of Israel than Joe Biden — and avoided attending Netanyahu's recent speech to Congress, pleading a prior engagement. As one Israeli executive told me: "Eighty per cent of American Jews will vote for Harris. But 80 per cent of Israelis would vote for Trump."

Trump.

The Biden administration long ago abandoned talk of making Prince Mohammed a “pariah”, and is instead working towards a new Saudi-US security treaty, as a way of bolstering American influence in the Middle East. But MBS will remember that Democrats led the effort to shun him after the gruesome murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The Saudi leader may also have picked up on hints that the Harris team are more sceptical about providing security guarantees to his country than Biden’s advisers. By contrast, MBS and his coterie have long enjoyed close diplomatic and business [ties](#) to the Trump camp and, in particular, to the former president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

The commitment to a strong relationship with India is now bipartisan in Washington. Modi’s government has signed important agreements with the Biden administration. But Modi and his followers see the Democrats as too inclined to pressure them on minority rights and the protection of democracy. In India it is now common to blame interfering US liberals for bringing about “regime change” in Bangladesh earlier this year — which the Indians fear will bring Islamists to power. As a fellow strongman leader and ethno-nationalist, Modi would feel more comfortable with Trump than Harris, despite her familial links to India.

In east Asia, however, America’s allies have every reason to be seriously concerned about the prospect of a Trump presidency. The Biden team has done a good job of building up the US alliance system in the Indo-Pacific, in a bid to contain Chinese power. But Trump has made it clear that he regards key US allies such as Japan and South Korea as freeloaders. He has also [implied](#), at times, that he has little interest in defending Taiwan.

All that should be music to the ears of the Chinese leadership, which would love to see Taiwan abandoned and the destruction of the American alliance system in Asia. On the other hand, Trump has also promised to impose tariffs of as much as 60 per cent on Chinese imports — and the US remains China’s largest export market. Trump is also surrounded by anti-China hawks such as Mike Pompeo, his former secretary of state. If the hawks are given free rein, then US policy on China could become much more confrontational.

For many foreign governments, the crucial difference between Trump and Harris is not just ideological but temperamental. A Harris administration would be stable and predictable. Trump would bring wildness and volatility back to the Oval Office.

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