

# NEWSBYTES

June 12, 2024

No. 1155

Since 2001

A ministry of Calvary Chapel of Appleton

“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

## Far-right parties could undermine democratic values of EU if elected to its parliament



People walk under a banner advertising the European elections outside the European Parliament in Brussels, Jan. 24, 2024. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

## **DATE OF ELECTION**

June 6-9

## **TYPE OF ELECTION**

Parliamentary

## **WHO'S RUNNING**

Tens of thousands of candidates from across the 27 EU member nations are running to serve in the 705-seat European Parliament. Candidates run on party lists, with parties including Viktor Orbán's nationalist Fidesz in Hungary; Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally in France; Germany's Greens; Ireland's Sinn Féin; Greek anti-capitalists, and many others in between. Candidates include those who have strongly supported Ukraine since Russia's invasion, as well as some pro-Kremlin voices. Candidates represent a range of views on the Middle East and Israel's offensive in Gaza.

## **WHY IT MATTERS TO THE WORLD**

The European Parliament is the only publicly elected body in the European Union. The EU was created after World War II to foster peace, and now has 450 million people and the world's second-largest economy. The Parliament plays an increasingly important role in European legislation with global impact, including EU climate standards, the GDPR online privacy law and regulation of AI and tech giants. The European Parliament also is involved in wartime financing for Ukraine, as well as aid to Palestinians. Immigration is a big voter concern today. Far-right parties and their discourse are expected to weigh heavily on election campaigning. Some of these groups are threatening the democratic values that underpin European unity and the EU itself.

# **A year of elections in democracies around the world is revealing deep dissatisfaction among voters**

BY NICHOLAS RICCARDI, ISABEL DEBRE AND DANICA KIRKA

June 4, 2024

In a community center in East London, about 20 men gathered for their regular lunch meeting, sipping coffee and tea from mismatched mugs and engaging in an increasingly popular pastime in the world's democracies: Complaining about their government.

They feel estranged from the country's leadership — its wealthy prime minister and their members of parliament.

## **Over 50 countries go to the polls in 2024**

- The year will test even the most robust democracies. Read more on what's to come here.
- Take a look at the 25 places where a change in leadership could resonate around the world.
- Keep track of the latest AP elections coverage from around the world here.

"It feels like you are second-class people. Our MPs don't represent us people. Political leaders don't understand what we go through," said Barrie Stradling, 65. "Do they listen to people? I don't think they do."

In a coffee shop in Jakarta, Ni Wayan Suryatini, 46, bemoaned the results of the recent election, in which the son of Indonesia's former president ascended to the country's vice presidency and the opposition parties seemed to do little to stop him.

"It is difficult to trust them since they only want to reach their goals. As long as they achieve their goals, they will forget everything else," Suryatini said of politicians.

And inside her cheerfully cluttered craft shop in Greeley, Colorado, Sally Otto, 58, contemplated with dread the upcoming U.S. presidential election between President Joe Biden and the man he defeated in 2020, former President Donald Trump: "I feel like we're back where we were, with the same two poor choices," Otto said.

As half the world's population votes in elections this year, voters are in a foul mood. From South Korea to Poland to Argentina, incumbents have been ousted in election after election. In Latin America alone, leaders and their parties had lost 20 elections in a row until this past weekend's presidential election in Mexico, according to a tally by Steven Levitsky, a Harvard professor of government.

The dynamic is likely to repeat itself as the European Union launches its legislative elections this week, where conservative populist parties are expected to register gains across the continent. EU parliamentary elections are usually an opportunity for voters in individual countries to vent their frustrations because the candidates they elect will have power in Brussels rather than their own national capitals. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called elections for later this summer in which his party is expected to struggle.

"In many ways we've never had it so good, objectively speaking, and yet people are so unsatisfied," said Matthias Matthijs, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, D.C.

The reasons for the dissatisfaction are many, from social media's ability to magnify problems to the painful recovery from the coronavirus pandemic to the backlash toward economic and cultural changes sparked by globalization and mass immigration.

Though in places like Europe the populist right has notched several gains and is expected to make more, there is little ideological consistency globally to the unhappiness. In a recent Pew poll across 24 democracies, a median of 74% of respondents said they didn't think politicians cared what people like them think, and 42% said no political party represented their viewpoint.

"It's about economics and culture, but it's also about the functioning of politics itself," said Richard Wike, managing director of Pew's Global Attitudes Research, citing polarization of voters into warring camps. "It can lead to a situation where politics is seen as a zero-sum game. People see more of an existential threat from the other side, and that makes people unhappy about democracy."

Experts say there is one notable exception to the trend of global anger with elected leaders — places where the leaders are anti-establishment, populist strongmen of all ideological persuasions.

"Antisystem outsider, populist figures are winning more than in the past," Levitsky said. "Whether they constitute any movement is unclear to me."

In Mexico, leftist President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is termed out but broke the streak of losses for Latin American leaders' parties as his hand-picked successor, Claudia Sheinbaum, won Sunday's presidential election. In Argentina, newly elected president Javier Milei, a self-described "anarcho-capitalist" dubbed "the madman" by admirers, remains popular despite the country's crippling economic problems that have persisted following his austerity and deregulation reforms.

"I was never interested in politics because nothing ever changed," said Sebastian Sproviero, a 37-year-old engineer at a Buenos Aires concert that featured Milei belting out rock anthems. "Now it has."

In India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been criticized for eroding the world's most populous democracy, the Pew poll found the country had the highest support among all surveyed countries for a more authoritarian form of government, with two-thirds of respondents there backing a strong leader system of government.

Still, even some of the more authoritarian governments such as Modi's have had to deal with dissatisfaction with the status quo. Modi appears to have won his third term as India's prime minister in national elections that wrapped up Tuesday, but his conservative Hindu nationalist party had an underwhelming showing and will likely need to join a coalition to form a government.

In Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has stocked the judiciary and media with loyalists and revised the country's constitution to favor his party, a former member of his Fidesz party, Péter Magyar, has emerged as a new, increasingly popular critic and challenger.

"More and more people in Hungary are increasingly feeling this antiestablishment desire," said Péter Ember as he attended one of Magyar's recent demonstrations in Budapest. "We really want to reform this existing political culture, from the opposition to the ruling party. We want a new one, and we want people that work for us."

The global anti-incumbent mood, coupled with the success of antiestablishment populists, comes amid several warning signs for the health of democracy. The Pew poll found democracy's appeal slipping, even as it remained the preferred system of government around the world. Freedom House, a Washington-based organization that promotes democracy, said its "Freedom Index" measuring democratic health globally has declined for 18 straight years.

Adrian Shahbaz, a vice president at Freedom House, attributed the erosion of support to a series of crises since the turn of the century, including the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks in the U.S., the 2008-09 global recession and the coronavirus pandemic. Adding to the stress, he said, is the increasing focus on identity issues such as transgender policies and immigration in democratic politics, especially in Europe and the U.S.

"The key cleavages in democracies tend to be around identity issues rather than economic ones," Shahbaz said. "That in itself can be very risky because democracy depends on a civil identity that goes beyond tribal identifications."

Still, the picture is not all gloom for democracy. The anti-incumbent fervor also helped spur some victories for people's rights to choose their own leaders.

In Senegal in March, voters selected a new president after the incumbent unsuccessfully tried to postpone the election. In Guatemala last year, Bernardo Arévalo, a sociologist and anticorruption crusader, won the country's presidential election despite efforts by the incumbent party to block certification of his victory.

One of the greatest tests comes in the U.S. in November when voters will decide whether to stay with Biden or return Trump to the White House. The former president unsuccessfully tried to overturn his 2020 election loss, leading to the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and two of the four criminal cases he's currently facing. Biden, meanwhile, is hampered by an unenthusiastic public — 61% of adults did not approve of his performance in office in an AP-NORC poll taken in March. A CNN poll found 53% of registered voters were unhappy with the choice between Biden and Trump.

The low poll numbers frustrate many Biden advisers given the U.S. economy's relatively strong recent performance compared with the rest of the world. But international pollsters say the U.S. shows particularly stark signs of polarization and unhappiness. The Pew poll

identified sharper levels of polarization in the U.S. than in most other democracies. The Gallup Organization found that the U.S. ranks at or near the bottom in confidence in its institutions among the wealthy G7 countries.

One of the few things that unites U.S. voters is frustration over their choices in this fall's presidential contest, a relic of the country's winner-take-all constitutional system, which naturally devolves into competitions between two major political parties fought in the few states where the Electoral College votes are up for grabs.

"I'm angry, but it's like, what is the solution to my anger? Who am I going to vote for is a great question because the answer is I really don't know, to be quite honest," said Kenji Takada-Dill, a 30-year-old video editor in Seattle. "We've known for a long time that the two-party system doesn't work. None of the candidates represent my beliefs or my values."

In Greeley, a city of 112,000 that lies on Colorado's plains 60 miles northeast of Denver, Otto, the craft store owner, said she probably leans conservative but has long tried to ignore politics. That's proved harder since she started using social media to promote her business, where the country's nasty partisan feuds have leaked into her feeds as she promotes ceramics classes and youth programs.

Stepping into the store with her two children, Kristina McGuffey, 41, also bemoaned the increasing toxicity of U.S. politics.

"I just love the way America was founded, one nation under God," McGuffey said. "We've become people who, when we don't get our way, we throw a hissy fit."

## **Biden's plan to save Hamas**

DANIEL GREENFIELD

*The deal the White House is pushing is "nearly identical to Hamas' own proposals."*

After families across Israel had lit their Sabbath candles, returned home from synagogue services and begun their festive meals, President Biden looked at his watch in D.C.

"Just checking it's afternoon," he said. And then got started on his speech to save Hamas.

There was nothing accidental about the timing of the speech on Friday afternoon, at a time when much of America's political establishment was heading out for the weekend while Israeli Jews were celebrating the Sabbath and many were not even using electronic devices.

After celebrating former President Trump's conviction, Biden announced a new deal under which Hamas would rule Gaza, get billions in U.S. aid and dozens of its terrorists would be released from prison in exchange for every hostage. Or every hostage's dead body.

Under the terms of Biden's proposal, Hamas wins and Israel gets back survivors and corpses.

Finally, American taxpayers will be on the hook for an "extensive three- to five-year reconstruction program for Gaza that's fully backed by us" and which will cost endless billions.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz holds up a photo of baby Kfir Bibas and a montage of several young women, all held hostage by Hamas in Gaza. Credit: MFA. (source: JNS)

The deal that Biden laid out gives Hamas everything it wanted, including staying in power. An end to Israeli attempts to eliminate the terror group, and all the money it could possibly need. Rather than an Israeli proposal, this is almost the exact same "ceasefire" deal that Hamas, Qatar and Egypt had assembled and that Hamas then made a show of accepting a few weeks ago.

All Biden did was brush off the Hamas proposal and then declare that it was an Israeli proposal.

Indeed, a follow-up call with a senior White House official had him admit that, "it's nearly identical to Hamas's own proposals of only a few weeks ago" and that "what is now in front of everybody is basically the terms by which Hamas was prepared to move forward."

Again, he repeated, "Hamas has said they'd be prepared to do deal X, and what is now on the table is basically that with some very minor adjustments."

Biden described the Hamas proposal as the "Israeli proposal" and urged Israel to accept it. In reality, he had taken an Israeli counter-proposal, changed crucial elements so that it matched Hamas demands at a time when the Israeli government would not be able to respond and unveiled it to the world while daring Israelis to call him a liar. All to save Islamic terrorists.

Netanyahu poured cold water on the proposal, stating that, "Israel's conditions for ending the war have not changed: The destruction of Hamas military and governing capabilities, the freeing of all hostages and ensuring that Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israel. Israel will continue to insist these conditions are met before a permanent ceasefire is put in place. The notion that Israel will agree to a permanent ceasefire before these conditions are fulfilled is a non-starter."

Israeli Defense Minister Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated that the country would “not accept Hamas rule” and was fighting to destroy Hamas and liberate the hostages.

Benny Gantz, the third member of the ‘war cabinet,’ upon whom the Biden administration had been relying to force acceptance of the deal, made no initial statement at all. An anonymous White House official expressed “disappointment” that he hadn’t endorsed the proposal. When he did issue a statement, it was a confusing word salad that praised Biden but stated, “The State of Israel stands united in our wish to return the hostages, it is a superior moral obligation that does not diminish our commitment to achieve the war’s objectives.”

So much for the “Israeli proposal.”

Not a single member of the Israeli government had explicitly gotten behind Biden’s proposal to leave Hamas in power (or with a fig leaf “technocratic” government to handle the foreign aid.) Neither did they explicitly take on the Biden administration by disavowing it. And the Biden administration is doubling down on forcing Israelis to accept the proposal and save Hamas.

IDF soldiers during operational activity in the Jabalia area of northern Gaza on May 20, 2024. Credit: IDF. (source: JNS)

Had this really been an Israeli proposal, it would not have been announced on the Sabbath, and would have been featured at a press conference in Israel. Instead it was met with uncomfortable silence and awkward statements in Jerusalem. The pressure campaign out of D.C. on specific Israeli government officials made it all too clear whose “proposal” this really was.

This is a proposal by Hamas and its allies, Egypt and Qatar, along with Hamas allies in the Biden administration who are fighting to keep it alive, that Biden is imposing on Israel.

It’s a proposal to allow Hamas to cash out hostages and their bodies in exchange for victory.

While the Biden administration demanded that the Israeli government endorse his proposal, there were no such expectations of Hamas.

The White House on a follow-up call claimed that Hamas “just got this last night” and that he was “not going to respond to public statements made by some Hamas officials here and there. They know what’s in the deal. They know it’s nearly identical to what they put on the table.”

Hamas, the administration claimed, “know what’s in the deal” but also “just got this,” and what Hamas leaders say does not matter because they keep saying that they intend to go on attacking Israel until it is destroyed and that flies in the face of a “permanent ceasefire.”



The White House official announced that the administration will ignore Hamas promises to go on waging terror as part of a cover-up to push the Hamas proposal to save the terror group.

He also explicitly rejected the Israeli expectation Hamas would be destroyed.

Introducing his proposal, Biden claimed that it “would bring about a better ‘day after’ in Gaza without Hamas in power” and then laid out a deal with Hamas that would keep the Islamic terror group in power. Having begun his speech with a lie, he kept on lying all through the rest of it.

But Biden assured Israelis that they don’t have to worry.

“The people of Israel should know they can make this offer without any further risk to their own security because they’ve devastated Hamas form—forces over the past eight months. At this point, Hamas no longer is capable of carrying out another Oct. 7,” he said.