GLOBAL ELECTION REVIEW: AN INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, over 50 countries have experienced a democratisation process and today only seven countries in the world do not have an electoral system in place at the national level: Brunei, Eritrea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan and the Vatican City. While the political participation, especially by women and minorities seems to be rising, the global democratic freedom levels have been experiencing a steady decline, both in new and old democracies, which are struggling to cope with the challenges of a complex and interconnected world.

Elections, when conducted with integrity, remain a fundamental instrument to the rule of law, public accountability and peaceful political change in the world. However, they have also been used by autocratic powers and corrupt governments to gain advantages and secure their positions while enjoying formal political legitimacy. The election process cannot always be equated to the existence of a fully-fledged democracy, but they can provide a precious insight into a country’s trajectory, the stability of its government and the likelihood of a conflict erupting. While radical political transformations are often associated with violent coup d’états, it is important to be aware that, for instance, in the African continent most of the regime changes have happened by the ballot and not by the gun.

How likely are the upcoming elections to cause significant change? Will they affect its businesses and citizens? Will they result in violence or fundamentally compromise the rule of law? All these questions are often overlooked by travellers and their impact on the single individual is often underestimated.

This Global Election Review provides a risk assessment of all countries headed towards an election or a referendum, as well as an analysis of those that just conducted one. Using a variety of indicators, the report examines the risk levels related to their political impact, their likelihood of being targeted by a terror attack, trigger civil unrest or cause significant disruption in travel. While providing a snapshot of the main political factions, their agendas and the key issues in the elections, it gives travellers, businesses and stakeholders an overview of the national and the geopolitical context needed to gain full understanding of the country’s political environment.
Panama is set to go to the polls on 5 May to elect a new president, vice president, 71 parliamentary seats and 81 mayors. This will be the sixth democratically held elections since the ousting of the military regime of General Manuel Antonio Noriega Moreno. The incumbent president, Juan Carlos Varela, is constitutionally barred from running.

Panama’s politics suffers from endemic corruption issues that have damaged the faith of the populous in the governing establishment, with all major parties and candidates facing corruption allegations. This includes the sitting president Varela, who is accused of receiving bribes from Odebrecht, a Brazilian construction company involved in several scandals across the continent. Due to these issues, the general public is increasingly pushing for an institutional reform to the country’s three branches of power. However, the possibility of a constitutional reform to be integrated in the upcoming elections has been ruled out by the Electoral Tribunal.

According to the polls, the favourite candidate is currently Nito Cortizo, leading with 51 percent of the votes, with his main opponent Rómulo Roux scoring 23 percent. Cortizo, a businessman who served in the government as Ministry of Agricultural Development between 2004 and 2006, is seen positively due to its relative lack of bribery scandals and runs on a platform favouring economic development, public spending and implementation of the rule of law, particularly in the form of judicial reform. His main opponent runs on a similar platform encouraging GDP growth, infrastructural development and enhance security measures against crime.
The population of South African will go to the polls on 8 May to select the new members of its National Assembly and provincial legislatures. These will be the sixth elections since the end of apartheid, and they will determine the next president of South Africa, as well as the future of one of the biggest economies in the continent. This vote is also the first since Jacob Zuma, in power since 2009, was ousted from office in February 2018 after a series of corruption scandals.

This election represents a decisive moment for the political future of South Africa. The sitting President Cyril Ramaphosa is attempting to legitimise his power after having replaced Zuma; however, a rising radical opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), is gaining significant support among the populous. While the ANC, historically known as the “freedom party”, still enjoys an overall majority with over 50 percent of the projected votes, internal fractures and widespread corruption allegations have put a strain on the party’s cohesion. According to polls, however, the most notable shift shows positive gains by the EFF, which doubled its approval from 7 percent during the 2014 elections to a sizable 14 percent. Their belligerent approach to the political debate is likely to produce some level of unrest in the run-up and aftermath of the elections, particularly in connection to the widespread economic grievances. With the structural imbalances inherited from the apartheid era and an unemployment rate of 30 percent, the EFF calls to restructure the economic system in favour of the black majority resonates with many.

The year 2018 saw serious unrest which caused disruption nationwide, this is also likely to occur in the election period. During the 2014 general election, South Africa experienced severe electoral violence, including episodes of political murder and intimidation, which is likely to occur again during the 2019 election.

On 3 April, the township of Alexandra in Johannesburg already experienced protests and demonstrations against the living conditions of the poor and the inefficiency in the government’s service delivery. Protesters also expressed disillusionment regarding the impact of the May elections on day-to-day life and priorities of the South African population.

The ANC is known as the “freedom party” and has ruled South Africa since the election of its spiritual leader Nelson Mandela in 1994. The party deems itself as a force of national liberation and aims to solve the socio-economic differences created by Apartheid-era laws.
Lithuanians will go to the polls to elect a new president on 12 May 2019, in an election that will decide if the nation will continue to pursue a foreign policy of alignment with NATO and opposition to Russia. Lithuania follows a unitary semi-presidential form of government, meaning that power is split between the president and parliament.

The sitting president Dalia Grybauskaite, also known as the “iron lady”, will not be eligible for re-election due to constitutional limits and the electoral race sees three main candidates: Gitanas Nausėda, Saulius Skvernelis and Ingrida Šimonytė. Due to historical grievances, the Lithuanian political debate generally focuses on the regional security environment, its relations with the EU, the US and Russia. Lithuania’s geographic position in Europe, sandwiched between a hostile Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, coupled with a sizable Russian minority, makes it highly susceptible to the threat of its pressure. These fears were escalated in 2014 with Moscow’s annexation of Crimea and the growing militarisation of Kaliningrad, where Putin has allegedly been moving tankers and bombers, as well as short range nuclear-capable missile systems. This has led to an increased NATO presence in the Baltic states and Poland, as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve.

In the months prior to the election, Lithuanian intelligence services have raised warnings of Russian interference in the election process, mainly through cyber-attacks, misinformation and social media propaganda. While none of the main candidates can be considered as favourable towards Moscow, the current favourite, Gitanas Nausėda, generally avoids referring to Russian aggression and has referred to the annexation of Crimea as a fait accompli. However, the focus of the political debate on the Russian threat and the increase of national defence spending is motivating socio-economic discontent regarding the lack of interest in economic development. In the past year, Lithuania has seen repeated strikes and protests against the deteriorating living and working conditions of teachers and doctors, more of which may be held during the campaigning period and the elections.
On May 13 Filipino voters will head to the polls to elect half of the members of the Senate and House of Representatives, in what is widely considered an assessment of sitting President Duterte’s popularity halfway through his 6-year term. The Senate currently represents the biggest source of his opposition and a favourable re-shuffle would allow him to consolidate support from all branches of government and fulfil his campaign promise of a constitutional change aiming at decentralising governance and making the Philippines a federal nation.

His controversial policy making, and in particular his “war on drugs” that has thus far killed over 5,000 people, had a polarising effect on the Filipino population and has led to an increase in localised violence; but his overall approval ratings seem to remain stable. To enforce a constitutional change, however, Duterte would need at least three-quarters of both the Senate and the House, as well as a majority in a national referendum, which seems unlikely at this stage. Several attempts in the past year to cancel the elections in order to prioritise work on constitutional reform have caused heightened tensions.

Previous elections in the country have seen claims of fraud and vote-rigging which could lead to protests in 2019. Moreover, the Philippines is currently fighting an insurgency in the south of the country which may disrupt the election.
Prime Minister Scott Morrison has called for parliamentary elections on 10 April. According to the Constitution, the voting needs to take place within a maximum of 33 days after being announced, leaving very little time for political campaigning, which increases its intensity.

Voting in Australia is enforced for all people aged 18 and over, this has ensured a turnout of above 90 percent in all recent elections. These elections are set to be a key evaluating factor on the policy-making of the Conservative government, looking to win its third term. The main opposing faction is the Australian Labor Party led by Bill Shorten. Both parties however are suffering from severe instability and internal turmoil.

Since 2010, Australia had five different Prime Ministers, due to a string of leadership fights and virtual coup that showcased the extent of the political fractures within the two main parties. The Labor party is currently ahead in the polls, but the margin does not guarantee absolute certainty, and there is still a moderate likelihood of a rapid leadership change, as no PM in the past 8 years has fully completed the three-year term.
The Malawi Election Commission has confirmed that the elections for local government, members of parliament and the president will be held on 21 May. These elections also mark the 25th year of the transition to a multiparty democracy, during which the country has seen four different presidents succeeding through relatively peaceful democratic transitions. While these presidents belonged to three main parties – namely the DPP, UDF and PP – these upcoming elections are seeing the fragmentation of these political factions into smaller parties, as well as the resurgence of the Malawi Congress Party, which was marginalised after the 1994 transition. The MCP, the only political party allowed during the Hastings Kamuzu Banda’s regime, represents for many that period of oppression, making its success in the pre-election polling unsurprising.

Among the candidates, the incumbent President Peter Mutharika, from the Democratic Progressive Party, will run for a second term, despite mounting accusation of corruption. His main opponent currently is Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party, while his former Vice President, Saulos Chilima, will run under the banner of his newly formed party, the United Transformation Movement (UTM). The loss in popularity of the DPP has been attributed to the very serious corruption allegations, as well as a controversial Land Reform bill implemented in 2016, which failed to achieve its objective to truly safeguard smaller agricultural communities and promote the rural transformation necessary to transition to a sustainable post-colonial economic structure.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world and the political debate tends to focus around issues concerning economic growth, solutions to improve the infrastructure, a reduction in frequent power cuts and resolve public corruption, which are often blamed for the widespread poverty. Thus, the campaigning centres on practical measures to better the quality of lives, especially on local basis.
Elections to the European Parliament will take place between 23-26 May 2019 to elect the current 751 MPs. These are held every 5 years and generally experience a very low turnout, hovering around 45 percent, despite the Parliament being the main decision-making body of the EU along with the Council. The current parliament membership was meant to be reduced to 705 in the aftermath of Brexit, which remains a very contentious issue in the EU. As a result, the political debate will likely centre around topics related to the EU membership, especially considering the widespread rise of right-wing parties within the political scene of several nations.

Additional concerns regarding the erosion of the guiding principles of the Union started to emerge with the establishment of increasingly right-leaning nationalist governments in countries like Poland and Hungary, which subsequently experienced an increase in media oppression and racially-motivated crime. The apparent inability of the EU to effectively deter this behaviour due to its decision-making structure that requires unanimous approval has caused a significant loss of trust in the European system. The ongoing refugee crisis has been attributed as the key enabler of the rise of these far-right and often populist movements, which tend to accuse the EU of a fundamental policy failure and lack of concern for the livelihoods of its own citizens, suffering from a decade of economic stagnation.

Overall, it remains unlikely that the elections will result in violent unrest, but political rallies are to be expected, particularly in London and possibly Paris, depending on the evolution of the Yellow Vest movement.
The elections in Madagascar, set to be held on 27 May, will determine the 151 members of the National Assembly. The Independent National Electoral Commission announced that only 431 candidates have registered to run, as opposed to over 2000 in 2013. Most of the candidates will run either under the banner of the ruling party Young Malagasies Determined (TVG) or the main opposition party Tiako I Madagasikara (TIM). The voting comes shortly after the presidential elections, held in November 2018 and concluded in December, which resulted in the victory of Andry Rajoelina. The electoral process saw several episodes of violent unrest, both during and in the aftermath, mostly motivated by allegations of fraud and contestation of the results.

Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 90 percent of the population living below the poverty line and often subject to disease epidemics, such as the plague in 2017 and the current measles crisis. The country, also known as “Big Island”, has a history of severe political instability and unrest that started with its independence from France in 1960, coupled with an endemic corruption issue and general weakness in governance and accountability institutions. The main power is held by a small political and business establishment, with common instances of collusion between the two – Madagascar ranks 152nd out of 176 in the International Corruption Perception Index. The cyclical political crises and violence are motivated by the deep economic and power imbalances among different geographic regions and sections of the population, and often results in the intervention of the military forces, as during the 2009 political break-down.

**MAIN PARTIES AND CANDIDATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanora Malagasy Vonona (TGV)</td>
<td>Currently in power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiako'I Madagasikara (TIM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Nationale pour la Développement et le Démocratie (UNDD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andry sy Riana Enti-Manavotra an'i Madagasikara (AREMA)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asa Vita no Ifampitsarana (AVI)</td>
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**KEY ISSUES**

- Emergency Response (Global Pandemics)
- Public Corruption
- Economic Development
- Infrastructural Development
The seven phases of the 2019 Indian general election to the Lok Sabha are ongoing and not due to be completed until 23 May. The democratic process is the largest in the world with about 900 million Indian citizens eligible to vote. All 543 members of the Lok Sabha will be elected using a first-past-the-post system. The sitting Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was expected to win by a landslide until the legislative elections in November and December saw the BJP lose control of Chhattisgarh, Madhya and Rajasthan states. Nationwide issues such as the job crisis, falling wages and increasing hardship experienced by the farmer population are also contributing factors in damaging Modi’s popularity and sparking protests demanding government aid. However, Prime Minister Modi’s main opposition comes from the centre-left Indian National Congress (INC) and its leader, Rahul Gandhi, who is the latest offering from one of India’s most prominent political dynasties. The INC’s anti-Modi rhetoric saw it gain ground from the BJP in key states in the legislative elections of 2018; a rhetoric Gandhi has continued for the general elections. Additionally, Gandhi’s message has been one of economic regeneration and a promise to undo some of Modi’s more controversial policies, which he claims have led to a surge in mob violence in India. Turnout for the elections has been good, similar to the 2014 elections. However, the fourth phase of Indian elections has seen a low turnout in parts of Kashmir after separatist groups called for a boycott. Experts say the voting trend shows people’s disillusionment with the political process in the troubled state.

Single political parties rarely form majority governments in India and group themselves into alliances based on their broad position on the left-right spectrum. As such, Modi’s BJP leads the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition of Progressive centre-right to right-wing political parties. The INC, main opposition party, leads the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition of left and centre-left political parties, formed after the 2004 general election.

Past elections have seen some violence and unrest; however, the current election has been relatively peaceful. The only major point of violence has been a Maoist attack that killed 15 police personnel and one civilian in the west-central state of Maharashtra on 1 May. The men were traveling in convoy to provide reinforcement to a police post in the Gadchiroli district when a landmine detonated, killing all 16 men, including the driver.
Finland
14 April

Benin
28 April

Andorra
7 April

Spain
28 April

Israel
9 April

North Macedonia
21 April/5 May

Ukraine
31 March/21 April

Maldives
6 April

Solomon Islands
3 April

Indonesia
17 April

Spain
28 April

Ukraine
31 March/21 April

North Macedonia
21 April/5 May

Maldives
6 April

Solomon Islands
3 April

Indonesia
17 April

GLOBAL ELECTION REVIEW • APRIL 2019
Ukraine held its second round of presidential elections on 21 April, placing comedian Volodymyr Zelensky sizably ahead of incumbent President Petro Poroshenko. The high voter turnout signaled a strong push for change from a population clearly frustrated with the existing political establishment.

Throughout the campaign, Zelensky, who plays a corrupt president in a popular sitcom, has repeatedly admitted his political inexperience and has employed social-media and satire to gain popularity. This perception of transparency and honesty has contributed in building his public approval, especially as his opponent faces serious allegations for his involvement in a fraud scandal involving defence spending. While corruption is not uncommon in Ukrainian politics, in the context of a continuous increase in the defence budget in order to hedge against the Russian aggression, these allegations are perceived as almost treason.

Zelensky’s political and foreign policy agenda is uncertain at this stage and his campaign offered little clues, as it was mostly focused on highlighting his difference compared to the other candidates. His willingness to speak both Russian and Ukrainian during the election campaigning may indicate a more realistic stance towards Moscow and a desire to end the conflict that is crippling the nation’s economy. However, Putin’s recent decision to establish facilitated procedures for the residents of the Donbas region to obtain Russian passports is likely to escalate tensions and prevent any attempt to solve the crisis.

With regards to national politics, the new President will need to secure support in the Parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, where his opponent Poroshenko holds approximately 48 percent of the seats. Servant of the People, Zelensky’s newly created political entity, currently has no seats in the Parliament, and a conflictual relationship between the President and the Prime Minister could paralyse decision-making almost completely.
The Solomon Islands successfully held its general election on 3 April for 50 seats in the National Parliament, the first ones since the withdrawal of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in the summer of 2017. The mission had the aim of re-establishing the rule of law after a period of ethnic violence and conflict that killed hundreds. The islands are, in fact, home to a myriad of different cultures and languages, which translates into a heavily partitioned political landscape, making the election process riddled with complexity. The almost tribal system and cultural specificities causes heavy localism in policy making and hinders the formation of a cohesive government and is currently delaying the formation of a governing coalition.

The voting, however, proceeded peacefully and with relative efficiency with the assistance of air transportation provided by Australia and New Zealand defence forces, even despite the absence of peacekeeping forces. The result resembles one of the previous elections, characterised by a high retention of incumbent parliamentary candidates, reportedly due to an unbalance in the resources that they can dedicate to promotion and campaigning. Manasseh Damukana Sogavare was elected Prime Minister for the fourth time since 2001.

The international significance of this election, as mentioned in the forecast, is tied to the Islands’ recognition of Taiwan, or the Republic of China, over Beijing. This is effectively a trade-off between political legitimacy for economic benefits, a strategy historically employed by Taipei to edge against Chinese claims. However, due to increasing exports to China, now the largest trading partner to the Solomon Islands, the economic potential of maintaining a relationship with Taipei with little long-term growth prospects is being questioned by almost all policy makers.

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<tr>
<th>RESULTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kadere Party</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>16% of the seats</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Solomon Islands Democratic Party</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>16% of the seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>United Democratic Party</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8% of the seats</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>People’s Alliance Party</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% of the seats</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Solomon Islands United Party</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3% of the seats</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independent candidates</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23% of the seats</td>
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**TURNOUT** 80%

**KEY ISSUES**

- Foreign Policy
- Public Corruption
- Economic Reform
Parliamentary elections were held on 6 April to choose the 87 members of the People’s Majlis – the main legislative body of the Maldives – with the Maldivian Democratic Party achieving a sizable majority and securing 65 seats. This historical victory, which will allow the formation of a single party government for the first time since 2008, is a crowning achievement for the sitting President Ibrahim Mohammed Solih. In fact, since his election in 2018, the President has been struggling with opposing forces in his coalition that have managed to substantially hinder his policy-making efforts. The result clearly indicates the desire of the voters for the successful implementation of his electoral promises, namely the improvement of the human rights in the Maldives and the establishment of a reliable judicial system. The MDP has campaigned on the promotion of rule of law and justice, as well as the introduction of basic social welfare, such as minimum wage, unemployment benefits and a personal-income tax. This is contrasted with the previous Yameen presidency, which lasted from 2013 to 2019, during which a state of emergency suspended all constitutional protection and granted the security forces powers to make indiscriminate arrests, in what quickly became abuse of power. Both were used for political and judicial persecution, including attempts to prevent the opposition from running, as well as for widespread arrests.

These elections also have a geopolitical context, as the main political factions have opposing stances on the international alignment of the islands, which is currently contested between China and India due to the islands’ strategic location in the Indian Ocean, and vicinity to the UK/US Diego Garcia military base. The Yameen presidency historically sided with Beijing, but Saleh campaigned on a platform favouring New Delhi, prompting Indian Prime Minister Modi to fly to Malé to attend the inauguration ceremony. While the new majority will allow the sitting president to pursue a more decisive foreign policy, it remains unlikely that he will succeed in completely distancing himself from China, Beijing still holds the majority of the Maldives’ public debt and it represents the largest source of investment, whose conditions still apply to the new government. The ease with which it is possible to have access to Chinese investments is, in fact, often used to compensate for unpopular or unsuccessful policies, allowing Beijing to gradually increase its influence.
Andorra held elections on 7 April to determine the composition of the General Council, its unicameral parliament, for the four years ahead. Fourteen MPs are elected from a single national constituency under a proportional, closed-list system, while two members are elected from each of the seven municipalities through a majoritarian system. The most significant development in these legislative elections is the loss of the parliamentary majority by the largest party, the Democrats for Andorra. The main opposition party also changed, as the Liberals of Andorra gave way to Social Democratic Party.

**TURNOUT** 68%

**RESULTS**

- **Democrats for Andorra**
  35% of the votes, 17% of the seats

- **Social Democratic Party**
  30% of the votes, 17% of the seats

- **Liberals of Andorra**
  12% of the votes, 7% of the seats

- **Third Way**
  2% of the votes, 7% of the seats

**IN POWER**

Co-prince system: Andorra is governed by both the French President Emmanuel Macron and the Bishop of Urgell Joan Enric Vives Sicilia

**KEY ISSUES**

- Unemployment
- Taxation
- Economic Development
- Relations with the EU
The Israeli population voted on 9 April to determine the members of the 21st Knesset, the national legislative body that has the prerogative to determine the next Prime Minister. The election was a fundamental test in popularity for longstanding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in power since 2009, and now in the process of forming his fifth governing coalition. While historically enjoying a solid majority, Netanyahu and his hard-line policies have seen a fall in popularity in recent years, fuelled by the threat of indictment for bribery, corruption, and breach of trust faced by the Prime Minister.

The extent of the divide in the political spectrum was highlighted by the close race between the Likud Party and the Blue and White coalition, supporting candidate Benny Gantz, who represented the first realistic threat to Netanyahu’s leadership. Issues related to the secular and religious nature of the Israeli national entity seems to be key polarising factors in the debate, and the following attempts to form a stable coalition: the elections revealed an underlying shift in a support ratio increasingly favouring the ultra-Orthodox and Zionist parties, with a combined block gaining a total of 16 seats in the Knesset.

The right-wing block supporting Netanyahu, which has only a 10-seat advantage over the opposing coalition, has promoted a more hawkish policy-line, with a tough stance towards Iran, Syria and the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and has stated during his campaign his intention to annex the West Bank settlements.

**TURNOUT** 68%

**RESULTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likud Party</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue &amp; White alliance</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shas</td>
<td>6% of the votes</td>
<td>6.5% of the seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Way</td>
<td>5% of the votes</td>
<td>6.5% of the seats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**IN POWER**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is currently in the process of forming a coalition.
The conclusion of the legislative elections in Finland revealed a country deeply divided, with no party reaching the 20 percent mark for the first time in Finnish history, despite an overall leftist shift. The Social Democrats achieved a narrow victory over the right-leaning opposition Finns Party, while the ruling coalition of Centre Party and National Coalition party scored a grand total of 30 percent.

As revealed by the 2017 government crisis, during which the Finns attempted to fatally compromise the government's stability by shifting to the opposition, wide-reaching coalitions are often fragile in nature, especially with a parliament divided over immigration, welfare and environmental policy. Thus, the coalition-building process is expected to be lengthy and difficult due to the number of parties, and their differing political views needed to form a parliamentary majority and assign cabinet members.

Particularly worrying is the ideological rivalry between the first two highest scoring parties on a left-right basis, with the Finns Party endorsing radical Euro-sceptic and anti-immigration policies. Social Democratic party leader Antti Rinne could become the leader of the first left-leaning government since 2003, while the Centre Party of the incumbent Prime Minister Juha Sipilä suffered heavy losses, which led to his resignation.

At the time of writing, the Prime Minister in the process of initiating negotiations with the Centre, the Green League and the Swedish People's Party in order to achieve a majority and form a coalition.
Indonesia, the third largest democracy in the world, successfully held combined presidential and legislative elections on 17 April, in the biggest single day election worldwide. As the voters are spread over 17,000 different islands, it has been reported by the National Elections Commission that over 300 election workers died for fatigue and heart attack in order to complete the process, marking the largest number of fatalities yet.

The early election results are showing a victory by incumbent President Joko Widodo, or Jokowi, against historical rival from the previous 2014 election, former General Prabowo Subianto; but the authorities officially have until 22 May to complete the count. Like in 2014, Subianto has contested the projected results and questioned the legitimacy of the government, causing the authorities to warn against any retaliation or unrest by his supporters. Economic and religious concerns are the main issues faced by the two candidates, with growing worries over economic stability, inflation and, most dangerously, the rising populist sentiments along religious lines. Indonesia has, in fact, seen a rise in religious intolerance and terror-related incidents in recent times, culminating with a series of suicide attacks against Christian churches in May 2018 that prompted the introduction of a comprehensive anti-terrorism law. President Jokowi might initiate a cabinet reshuffle before focusing on the promises of infrastructural development, creation of transport lines and investments that are expected to be delivered to the population before the end of its term.

The legislative election will select 575 members for the People’s Representative Council (DPR) and 136 for the Regional People’s Representative Council (DPRD) through the open-list system. The attribution of the parliamentary seats will determine which of the parties will be able to put forward a candidate for the next presidential elections in 2024, as coalitions need to have at least 20 percent of the seats or 25 percent of the popular votes in order to do so. To date, only the ruling party is nearing the required threshold, but generally, multi-party coalitions continue to be a necessity in order to nominate a candidate.
North Macedonia held the second round of its 6th presidential election on 5 May, after a first round ending in a draw between the two main candidates: Stevo Pendarovski and Gordana Siljanovska. In the runoff, the former secured a victory with about 52 percent of the votes.

For many, the North Macedonian elections were considered a test on the popularity of the name change agreement with Greece; a de facto trade-off between the official name change and the country’s accession to NATO. In fact, Greece, who has a northern territory also called Macedonia, had longstanding fears of an attempt to claim it or induce separatists’ movements. However, the extremely low turnout is a clear signal of the populations’ discontent with the political establishment, barely reaching the 40 percent necessary for the legitimacy of the electoral process.

This ambivalence is reflected in the polling and the two leading presidential candidates: Pendarovski, representing the governing party, supports the deal and runs on a reformist and pro-European political platform, while his main opponent, right-leaning university professor Siljanovska is very critical of the name change. During her speeches, Siljanovska referred to the agreement as being against international law and an effort to improve neighbourhood relations at the cost of national dignity.

February and March saw numerous protests staged across North Macedonia over the name change and police resorted to the use of tear gas in order to disperse crowds.

Additionally, in the past few years North Macedonia has been experiencing heightened politically driven unrest, triggered by severe allegations against former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski over a wiretapping and corruption scandal. In 2016, President Ivanov’s attempt to stop investigations against the wiretapping allegations sparked nationwide protests, initiating a de facto political crisis. Unrest is likely in the run-up to the elections and possible in its aftermath.
Benin held highly controversial elections where the voting population had to choose between two parties, none of whom were representative of the opposition and both supported the sitting President Patrice Talon.

This is due to changes introduced to the electoral code in 2018, which set forth higher qualifying criteria for parties to be admitted to the electoral race. While the electoral code introduced by the National Assembly had the aim of addressing the extreme political fragmentation that characterises the multiparty system, it had the effect of excluding all parties except for two, the Bloc Républicain and the Union Progressiste, both of whom back the sitting President. President Talon has described the exclusion of the opposition in the election as “unfortunate”, but the declaration has led to several of the President’s critics to accuse him of being disingenuous, as the rule changes are having their intended effect of allowing him to consolidate power while undermining his rivals.

In the months prior to the polling and during the election day, Benin experienced outbursts in civil unrest, with opposition supporters and former Presidents Thomas Boni Yayi demanding the inclusion of the opposition in the political race and, ultimately, the resignation of the sitting head of state. The tensions escalated into violence, with protesters clashing with law enforcement after the security forces opened fire on individuals gathered outside the presidential palace in what has been defined as the worst political crisis since the end of the dictatorship in 1990. Internet access was restricted, and armed forces have been patrolling the streets.

Since Talon took office in 2016, his reputation as a successful businessman that would revitalise the economy and cure unemployment quickly deteriorated, especially due to its use of policy-making to crack down on business competitors and opposition figures. As the Supreme Court has officially validated the election results, the new MPs are expected to be sworn in on 15 May. While this will likely guarantee the necessary legislative support for President Talon to pursue his political agenda, the unrest and low turnout rate highlights the extent of the political step-back experienced by one of Africa’s most praised democracies.
The Spanish population voted with an exceptionally high turnout in the snap general elections, called by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in February due to the repeated rejections of the yearly budget by the Parliament. These were called after less than a year since Sanchez took power and were the third in four years, highlighting the apparently unsolvable political crisis currently faced by Spain and its deeply polarised political scene. All 350 seats in the Congress of Deputies were up for election, as well as 208 of 266 seats in the Senate.

The incumbent Socialists achieved a significant victory, increasing their voting share from 23 percent in 2016 to 29 percent, but were short of reaching a decisive majority. Having secured 123 out of the 350 Congressional seats, the Prime Minister will need to rely on other political factions, as well as regional parties, in order to form a coalition, virtually leaving Spain in the same political conundrum that brought the elections in the first place. In fact, the Socialists and their traditional left-wing coalition partners, Unidos Podemos, with a grand total of 165 seats in the Parliament, do not have a decisive majority, leaving them, again, in need of additional support. However, the possibility of including the Catalan parties has been opposed by many, as it was their political blockade to the 2019 budget that resulted in the collapse of the previous government and leading to the snap elections. Reaching out right ways towards Alberto Rivera’s party Ciudadanos, or “citizens”, is being opposed by socialist supporters, who were chanting against him during Sanchez’s celebratory speech.

Overall, it seems that these elections only brought a minor re-shuffle in the power distribution and that the coalition building process will be long and most likely volatile; the political factions are likely waiting for the local, regional and European elections that will take place in May. It is also possible that Sanchez will attempt to lead with a minority government. One important development is, however, that the far-right populist party Vox gained 24 seats in a Parliament, the first time a far-right party has a relevant political presence since the death of the dictator Francisco Franco.