**2024 Elections & the Fate of Populism**

**Populist leaders like Donald Trump and Narendra Modi gained popularity through their bombastic, chaotic, and disruptive style of leadership.**

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With around 40 countries scheduled to vote in 2024, including the world’s old­est and largest democracies: the United States and India, the globe is expected to witness a déjà vu. The political landscape is clouded by the possibility of Donald Trump’s return to power and PM Narendra Modi’s re-election which would further strengthen the hold of populist politics. India is gear­ing up for elections in April and May while the US has elections scheduled for November this year. Despite all the hype and confusion about these elections’ results, one question that keeps coming up is: what would be the fate of populism in the countries that are frequently praised as the epitome of democracy?

Populism has resurged in recent decades in many countries. The po­litical vacuum created by tradition­al political parties and their con­ventional style of politics paved the way for populist leaders like Don­ald Trump and Narendra Modi who gained popularity through their bombastic, chaotic and disruptive style of leadership. These leaders are adept at channelling and pack­aging the fears and concerns of the general public while presenting themselves as someone who comes from outside the existing politi­cal system. They act as both arson­ist and firefighters, who declare the country is in chaos and then offer themselves as the saviours.

[PM Shehbaz to chair federal cabinet meeting today](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2024/pm-shehbaz-to-chair-federal-cabinet-meeting-today)

With the defeat of Trump in the 2020 presidential election in the US there were assumptions that pop­ulism might not survive in future politics. However, recent trends for the 2024 elections are forecast­ing a favourable situation for popu­list leaders to re-emerge and seize power. According to the latest Re­uters/Ipsos polls, Trump is leading in the race for presidential nomina­tions from the Republican Party. It is astonishing that his hold on the Republican Party is unwavering, despite multiple criminal charges including his role in sparking the uprising of 6 January 2021. Many commentators also believe that he has a better chance to return to the White House since he left office.

Even though Donald Trump has offered only vague proposals, opin­ion polls show that voters by a large margin view Republicans as better stewards of the economy. Similar­ly, a sizable portion of the Ameri­can electorate remains receptive to Trump’s “America First” manifes­to, defined by protectionist trade policies and stringent immigra­tion laws. This is especially true for working-class voters fed up with globalisation and the idea that their country is becoming less American.

[COAS Asim Munir, Saudi Crown Prince vow to strengthen defence cooperation](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2024/coas-asim-munir-saudi-crown-prince-vow-to-strengthen-defence-cooperation)

If Donald Trump is elected, his ideas for government have already been made known to us. Domestically, he plans to use the Justice Department as a weapon to target his opponents in the administration and media, fill positions in government with staunch supporters, and eliminate any dissent from the civil service. Similarly, his foreign policy approach would fur­ther undermine the global peace ef­forts especially his confrontational policy towards China, and stance on issues like climate change. This sce­nario would prove his opponent’s criticism and warnings true that he is plotting an autocratic rule against democratic norms just on the basis of his widespread popularity.

Comparably, the Hindu national­ist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), un­der Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is anticipated to hold power for the consecutive third term. Recent find­ings from the “Mood of the Nation Poll”, a survey by a private media group, showed that voters contin­ue to see Modi as a popular nation­alist leader who can win 335 of 543 directly elected seats in the parlia­ment. PM Modi, in a bid to bolster his populist credentials and ral­ly support for his re-election cam­paign, ceremoniously inaugurated the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. This gesture represents the culmination of a nationalistic movement aimed at galvanising India’s Hindu major­ity across diverse castes and tribes, effectively leveraging populist tac­tics to solidify his support base.

[IHC rejects plea seeking immediate removal of Nawaz Sharif's picture from Ramazan ration bag](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2024/ihc-rejects-plea-seeking-immediate-removal-of-nawaz-sharif-s-picture-from-ramazan-ration-bag)

PM Modi’s popularity among his supporters has been solidified by his acceptance of Hindutva philos­ophy and his expansionist tenden­cies based on the idea of “Akhnad Bharat”. His populism, which ap­peals to ingrained feelings of pride in one’s country and cultural his­tory, continues to have a signifi­cant impact on India as it struggles with questions of religious and so­cial identity. With Modi winning, he will be free to carry out his objec­tive of converting the Indian state to a Hindu state, alienating Muslims and other minorities, and raising the possibility of violence against these communities.

The outcome of these elections will have far-reaching consequences for the future trajectory of populism in both US and India. A Donald Trump victory would signify a further en­trenchment of authoritarian popu­lism, with profound implications for democratic norms and institutions both domestically and internation­ally. In India, PM Modi’s re-election would consolidate his grip on power, entrenching populist narratives and exacerbating social divisions by mar­ginalising minorities, especially Mus­lims. It remains to be seen if voters give in to the temptation of populist rhetoric or decide to declare their al­legiance to democratic leaders.

[Donald Lu expresses concerns over election irregularities in Pakistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2024/donald-lu-expresses-concerns-over-election-irregularities-in-pakistan)

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