

## Exceptionally Divided: America's International Interests

About half of the world's population was able to participate in an election in 2024.<sup>1</sup> There have already been major rearrangements in global politics recently, and we have seen public responses ranging from relief to unrest. For example, in August, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was pressured to resign after an intense period of anti-government student protests.<sup>2</sup> In July, the British Labour Party won over the Tories, making the U.K. Parliament's conservative majority flip after 14 years.<sup>3</sup> One election in particular is at the forefront of international consciousness – the United States of America's.

In his 2012 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama claimed "America is back. Anyone who tells you otherwise, anyone who tells you that America is in decline or influence has waned, doesn't know what they're talking about."<sup>4</sup> Our foreign policies are shaped by American exceptionalism, the idea that America is fated to play a unique and important role in world history because of its youth relative to other countries that existed in the "Old World" before American democracy.<sup>5</sup> The foundations of American exceptionalism originate in the colonial period but solidified in domestic consciousness after the Cold War, when US President George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev reached an agreement that allowed the reunification of Germany and effectively dissolved the Soviet Union shortly after. This meeting, the Malta summit, cemented America as a new global superpower by confirming our nation's influence.<sup>6</sup> Our concept of national identity shifted and inflated at this point, as the U.S. grew in influence globally and feelings of nationalistic pride increased within the country.

U.S. foreign policy was conceived during World War II, expanded during the Cold War, and since maintained itself as fairly unchanging thanks to the conservative pace of bureaucracy.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, American exceptionalism has been revamped in a neocolonial context where every market is hyper-globalized, with the exchange of goods and cultures expanding rapidly around the world. In foreign affairs, the President must compromise with a variety of actors; the legislative branch, foreign governments, private lobbyists, and general public opinion all pursuing different interests. In this U.S. presidential election, for example, there are a few key issues which either candidate will likely tackle head-on with the spirit of American exceptionalism - "out-competing" China, bolstering domestic industry capacity, and coming out

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<sup>1</sup> Koh Ewe "The Ultimate Election Year: All the Elections Around the World in 2024" in *Times Magazine*, December 28, 2023

<sup>2</sup> Koh Ewe "The Ultimate Election Year: All the Elections Around the World in 2024" in *Times Magazine*, December 28, 2023

<sup>3</sup> Koh Ewe "The Ultimate Election Year: All the Elections Around the World in 2024" in *Times Magazine*, December 28, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Robert Kagan "The World America Made" in *American Diplomacy*, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Hilde Eliassen Restad "Old Paradigms in History Die Hard in Political Science: US Foreign Policy and American Exceptionalism," volume 1, edition 1, May 2012

<sup>6</sup> "End of the Cold War," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<https://coldwar.unc.edu/theme/end-of-the-cold-war/#:~:text=At%20the%20Malta%20summit%20in,up%20into%2015%20independent%20states>)

<sup>7</sup> Chivvis and Wertheim "America's Foreign Policy Inertia" in *Foreign Affairs*, October 14, 2024

on the “good side” of international humanitarian crises<sup>8</sup>. However, candidates often are diametrically opposed on other global issues pertinent to the younger generations such as climate change, which has caused fast and substantial environmental degradation to our entire planet. America produces over 3x more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than any other nation; thus, there is massive debate over the responsibility we have to combating climate change<sup>9</sup>. Harris claims climate change is an “existential threat,” whereas Trump is more skeptical and plans to withdraw once again from global climate efforts like the Paris Agreement if elected<sup>10</sup>. Presidential candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump have two very different visions of America’s ideal role in the world, but they both want exceptional changes.

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<sup>8</sup> “The 2024 Candidates on Foreign Policy,” Council on Foreign Relations, (<https://www.cfr.org/election2024/candidate-tracker>)

<sup>9</sup> Annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, Our World in Data (<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/annual-co2-emissions-per-country?country=QAT~ARE~BHR~KWT~USA~AUT~CAN~AUS~ZWE~ZMB~YEM~WLF~VNM~VEN~UZB~URY~GBR~UKR~UGA~TUV~TKM~TUR~TUN~THA~TWN>)

<sup>10</sup> “The 2024 Candidates on Foreign Policy,” Council on Foreign Relations, (<https://www.cfr.org/election2024/candidate-tracker>)