

U.S. politics

Introduction

The politics of the United States rarely stays contained within its borders. Because of the U.S.'s geopolitical, economic, and military weight, shifts inside Washington whether in domestic policy, trade, foreign-policy orientation or election outcomes often ripple outward to shape global alliances, economic flows and political stability abroad.

As of 2025, with the return to power of Donald J. Trump for a second non-consecutive presidential term, U.S. political dynamics have again taken center stage globally. Trump's administration along with the posture of Congress, partisan polarization at home and evolving U.S. policy priorities has already begun to reshape how other nations, developed and developing alike, view and interact with America.

This article explores: (1) the major features of current U.S. politics in 2025; (2) how those features affect global politics, trade and security; (3) reactions from allies and partners; and (4) longer-term implications for global order, alliances and non-developed countries.

Key features of current U.S. politics include:

1.1 Domestic issues still dominate voting behaviour

Despite the global significance of U.S. foreign policy, many Americans remain most focused on immediate domestic issues when voting. A 2024 survey from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that voters prioritized the economy, inflation, immigration, crime and the protection of democracy ahead of foreign conflicts or international crises.

Specifically:

- A majority of voters listed economics/inflation and immigration among their top concerns.
- Many also said issues such as democracy and domestic policies (e.g. abortion, crime) would shape their vote more than foreign wars.

In practice, this means U.S. elections and political priorities tend to oscillate between domestic-policy battles sometimes at the expense of long-term foreign-policy consistency.

1.2 A shift toward transactional, nationalist foreign policy

Under Trump's revived presidency, U.S. foreign policy appears less driven by ideology or global-leadership ambitions and more by transactional interests and "America First" priorities. Scholars argue the U.S. is increasingly departing from the framework of the traditional "liberal international order" (LIO), favoring material primacy and transactional dealings.

Some consequences of this shift are:

- Trade policy is being wielded as leverage, rather than purely as commerce: aggressive tariffs, threats or use of protectionist measures and a tendency to prioritize short-term domestic economic gains. For example, the U.S. recent tariff moves have caused friction with traditional allies and trading partners.
- Foreign aid programs and international assistance have been curtailed: the administration has frozen vast swathes of foreign-aid disbursements, including a near shutdown of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) staffing worldwide.
- International institutions and global cooperation are being down-prioritized: the U.S. re-disengaged from certain global commitments, including health-governance institutions.

In short: U.S. politics in 2025 combines strong domestic pressure for protectionism and immigration control with foreign policy that is more transactional, less multilateral, a recipe that reshapes global expectations and alliances.

1.3 Increased uncertainty and volatility in foreign policy

Because U.S. domestic politics exerts so much influence on foreign policy and because political polarization at home remains intense, international observers and other governments find U.S. behaviour harder to predict. A recent analysis argues this “age of uncertainty” in U.S. foreign policy threatens transatlantic ties and undermines long-standing alliances.

Part of this volatility arises from the interplay between domestic politics (economy, immigration, elections) and foreign-policy decisions meaning foreign policy may swing dramatically depending on electoral cycles, internal pressure groups or shifting priorities.

1.4 Domestic polarization, culture-war politics and institutional mistrust

Partisan polarization not only over policy but over identity, social values, race, immigration and national direction remains a major feature of contemporary U.S. politics. Political discourse has become harsh, with increased toxicity in elite rhetoric and public debate across parties.

At the same time, institutional trust (in government, courts, media, bureaucracy) has declined for many. The domestic focus on “who gets to come in or stay out” (immigration), economic insecurity, inflation and crime continues to dominate the political mood.

This internal turbulence shapes not only domestic policy but also external relations: international partners often find U.S. commitments uncertain, contingent on the prevailing internal political winds.

1.5 Trade shocks and economic ripple effects

One of the most immediate global impacts of U.S. politics in 2025 comes through trade and tariffs. The U.S. has imposed or threatened tariffs on Canada, Mexico and other trading partners, moves that have escalated tensions, disrupted supply chains and undermined confidence in global trade stability.

For allied economies, developed and developing, this translates into uncertainty: businesses face higher costs, international trade flows are disrupted and countries that depended on stable U.S. demand or predictable trade rules must rethink their economic strategies.

Moreover, by weaponizing trade policy (tariffs, import restrictions) as leverage for immigration or security demands, the U.S. introduces uncertainty that goes beyond commerce making trade relationships politically conditional.

1.6 Decline in U.S. soft power and global legitimacy

Because U.S. foreign policy is now often seen as transactional rather than principle-based, its soft power and moral leadership have eroded in many parts of the world. Recent polling shows a sharp decline in confidence in U.S. leadership across multiple countries.

Former partners and allies who once counted on U.S. as a reliable pillar of global institutions, multilateral cooperation and collective security now eye the U.S. with skepticism. This decline in soft-power legitimacy undermines long-standing alliances and reduces America's ability to sway outcomes diplomatically.

1.7 Realignment of global alliances and hedging by other nations

As U.S. reliability becomes more uncertain, many countries developed and developing are hedging their bets. They are diversifying trade partnerships, strengthening regional cooperation and exploring new alliances beyond U.S.-centered blocs. Analysts note that some nations are becoming less reliant on U.S. financial and military backing, especially in trade, climate and development arenas.

For example, the rollback of U.S. engagement in global climate initiatives and foreign aid reduces motivation for smaller or developing nations to align with American-led global efforts.

1.8 Increased global instability, security, conflict and humanitarian risks

Because shifting U.S. policy affects global trade, aid, diplomacy and security, there is a growing risk of instability especially in regions dependent on U.S. support or market access. The fast pace of change, inconsistent commitments and transactional diplomacy raise the odds of economic shocks, political uncertainty and even conflict in vulnerable regions.

For instance, sudden freezes in foreign aid or abrupt policy shifts can destabilize humanitarian programs, development initiatives and fragile state structures.

1.9 Erosion of global cooperation on transnational challenges (climate change, health, governance)

The U.S.'s retreat from global cooperation particularly on climate and global health poses serious challenges for international efforts to tackle shared problems. Recent research warns that U.S. withdrawal from international climate commitments, paired with fossil-fuel friendly domestic policy, jeopardizes global climate goals and undermines trust in global environmental governance.

Similarly, disinvestment from global health institutions and foreign-aid agencies reduces capacity for coordinated responses to pandemics, health crises and humanitarian emergencies with serious knock-on effects for vulnerable populations worldwide.

2.0 Growing skepticism and declining trust in U.S. leadership

International polling confirms a trend: in many countries including long-standing U.S. allies, confidence in American leadership has dropped significantly since 2025.

This shift reflects disenchantment not only with specific policies (e.g. tariffs, aid freezes, climate rollback) but with the perceived reliability and values-based commitment of the U.S.

2.1 Diversification of alliances and strategic hedging

Faced with uncertainty about U.S. commitment, many nations are increasingly pursuing diversified partnerships regionally, economically and politically. Some are deepening ties with other powers, regional blocs or emerging economies; others are strengthening intra-regional cooperation to reduce dependency on U.S.-dominated initiatives.

For developing countries especially, this means rethinking long-term strategies around trade, aid, development, security and diplomacy no longer assuming U.S. involvement will remain consistent or favourable.

2.2 Pressure on global institutions and multilateral cooperation

As the U.S. scales back on foreign aid, participation in global institutions (climate bodies, health frameworks, development agencies) and multilateral commitments, the burden on international bodies grows often beyond capacity. This strains global cooperation on key transnational issues: climate change, public health, humanitarian aid and collective security.

Smaller nations that previously depended on U.S. funding or diplomatic weight now face tough choices: either step up internally, seek alternate backers or risk being left out of global initiatives.

2.3 Fracturing of global order and resurgence of multipolarity

The retreat of the U.S. from consistent global leadership raises the possibility of a fragmented international order one where power is more diffused, alliances more transactional and stability more fragile. As U.S. soft power wanes, other powers (states or regional blocs) may attempt to fill the vacuum.

This shift could lead to a more multipolar world but also to more regional instability, arms races, shifting alliances and competitive geopolitics.

2.4 Diminished global capacity to address collective challenges

Global threats, climate change, pandemics, refugee flows, economic inequality do not respect borders. With U.S. stepping back from leadership roles in key global institutions and programs, the world may struggle to coordinate adequately on these challenges.

For vulnerable or developing countries, the consequences may be especially severe: less aid, fewer resources for development or health and reduced leverage in global decision-making.

2.5 Rise of new coalitions and diversified global leadership

On the flip side, the decline of U.S.-centric leadership could pave the way for new coalitions, regional alliances and diversified global governance. Countries particularly in the Global South may gain greater agency to chart independent courses, form South-South cooperation or build regional institutions better aligned with their needs.

Likewise, non-U.S. powers (economic, diplomatic, technological) may assume leadership roles on climate, development, trade and security which could reshape global norms and diversify influence.

2.6 Re-examination of U.S. role and increased global negotiation space

As global actors hedge and realign, there's an opportunity for more balanced negotiation less U.S. dominance, more shared leadership, more space for emerging powers. For the U.S. itself, this could be a moment to rethink its role: to rebuild alliances around mutual interest rather than dominance, to re-engage multilaterally and to adapt its foreign-policy priorities to better align with global needs and changing realities.

For countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and other developing regions, U.S. political shifts in 2025 carry both risks and potential openings:

- **Unpredictability of aid and assistance**-nations that counted on U.S. foreign aid or development support may find themselves cut off, forced to scramble for alternate funding or partners.
- **Trade disruption and economic uncertainty**-tariff wars, protectionism and shifting supply chains may hurt export-dependent economies.
- **Opportunity for diversified partnerships**-these countries might increasingly turn to regional cooperation, South-South ties or emerging global powers, reducing dependency on the U.S.

- **Need for greater self-reliance and resilient institutions**-with global support less reliable, governments must strengthen domestic institutions, diversify economic bases and build regional alliances.
- **Space for new diplomatic alignments and influence**-nations may leverage geopolitical shifts to negotiate better terms, seek equitable partnerships and assert their interests more boldly on the global stage.

In effect, U.S. political currents in 2025 are prompting a recalibration of global power dynamics. For many developing nations, it's a moment of uncertainty but also one of possibility.

Conclusion

In 2025, U.S. politics remains a central force shaping the world. But the nature of that influence is changing. As domestic concerns, protectionism and nationalism gain primacy and as the U.S. increasingly adopts transactional foreign-policy approaches the old patterns of stable American global leadership are fraying.

What emerges is not necessarily chaos but disruption, a world in flux, where old alliances, trade patterns and global institutions are being re-examined. For global stability, cooperation and development, this is a risky period. For countries seeking to assert independence or diversifying partnerships, it may also be a moment of opportunity.

Whether this shift leads to a more equitable, multipolar global order or to instability and fragmentation will depend heavily on how countries, including the U.S., respond in the coming years.