

## EUROPE AND THE 2012 AMERICAN ELECTIONS

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**Abstract.** *European elections in 2012 could bode significant change across the continent. Yet on 6 November 2012, the United States will hold national elections that could have a major impact upon Europe. This article describes the current state of American politics and what the 2012 elections signal for that country's future. Two claims are made. First, regardless of the election results, there will be significant continuity in American foreign policy, but different election scenarios could produce important changes in domestic policy that have international consequences. Second, regardless of the election, the United States faces certain long term challenges that will impact it internationally.*

**Keywords:** *United States, elections, President, Congress, Europe, foreign policy.*

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### Introduction

European elections in 2012 could bode significant change across the continent. Parliamentary or presidential elections in the Russian Federation, Lithuania, Ukraine, France, Greece, Slovakia, Finland, and a host of other countries will test domestic policy in these countries and others as well as chart new direction or challenge the solidarity of

the European Union. These elections could impact issues such as the financial rescue of troubled economies, the Euro, and the pursuit of common security measures or concerns such as Syria, Iran, and perhaps even the future of NATO.

But Europe and its individual states do not live in isolation. They exist in a global political economic system where they have to react and interact with other international actors such as other states. These states can have a significant impact upon both the international behaviour of Europe and upon domestic politics. For example, a renewed global recession, a decision by Israel to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities, or a fluctuation in global energy prices would affect European governments in many ways.

Yet, the 2012 European elections are not the only ones the authorities should be concerned about. On 6 November 2012 the United States will be holding national elections. In that election voters will select a new president as well as members of the national legislature or Congress. The results of these elections could have a significant impact upon Europe. But the American elections are perplexing to Europeans who see a protected election cycle, the primaries, Electoral College, and the separate votes for selection of president versus Congress and wonder what it all means for the future direction of the United States and its relationship with them.

This article briefly describes the current state of American politics and what the 2012 elections may signal for the future of the United States. It seeks to explain the way the American elections operate, the political and economic factors affecting party politics and the elections, and to describe possible electoral scenarios and what this might mean for the United States and Europe in 2013 and beyond. The basic thesis is twofold. First, regardless of the election results in November 2012 there will be significant continuity in American foreign policy, but different election scenarios could produce important changes in American domestic policy that have international consequences. Second, regardless of the election, the United States faces certain long term challenges that will impact it internationally.

## 1. The American Political System

The government and election system of the United States is unique when compared to European parliamentary systems as well as the rest of the world. Much of the formal structure of the government is outlined in the United States Constitution, with additional national, state, and local laws articulating both the structural and electoral systems for the country.

The first two defining characteristics of the United States are that it is a separation of powers government, not parliamentary, and it is also a federal and not a unitary government. Both of these factors mean that political power in the United States is divided up among three national branches of government and between a national government and 50 states. The purpose of this division of power is to protect minority rights, to respect local decision making, and also to ensure that no one institution has too much political power. This type of the governing system also means that it is difficult

to achieve significant political change in a short period of time, thereby encouraging the likelihood that elections will not produce dramatic changes in policy or political direction.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike a parliamentary system, separation of powers means that the president of the United States is elected separately from Congress. The president serves both as head of state and head of the government. Yet in America the president presides only over the executive branch of the government, with the legislative branch (Congress) headed by its own officers. Because of the separate elections, it is entirely possible for the president to be of one political party, with Congress having a majority controlled by a different party or parties. This is called divided government in the United States, and such a governing arrangement is not uncommon in the United States.

Being a federal system means that there is in reality no national election for Congress. The lower chamber of Congress is the House of Representatives, consisting of 435 members who represent districts spread across the 50 states. Each district is on the same population. There are 100 members of the Senate, with each of the states allocated two senators. House terms are for two years and Senate for six. In 2012, the entire 435 members of the House of Representatives are up for re-election, while only 33 of the Senators are up for re-election. Because of the structure of Congress, effectively all of the elections for Congress are really local elections. Thus, think of 2012 as a situation where there is one national election for president and 468 local elections for Congress.

There is no proportional representation in Congress. The United States has a Westminster type of elections—whoever receives the most votes in a congressional election is declared the winner. Additionally, because of this type of system, third parties generally are not strong and, therefore, the United States is a two party system where at present Republicans and Democrats are in competition with one another. Whichever party has the most members in the House or Senate controls that chamber.

The reason why all this is important is that it is possible to have several variations of party control in the United States. One could have a situation where the president and both houses of Congress are controlled by the same party. This was the case when George Bush was president from 2003 to 2007. This occurred again in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected president. But it is also possible to have the president be from one party and Congress controlled by another. This again occurred under George Bush from 2007 until 2009. Another scenario is when the president and one legislative chamber are controlled by one party and the other chamber is controlled by another. This is currently the case in the United States.

There are major differences between the two houses of Congress in terms of their constitutional authority. The Senate, for example, has a more important function in foreign affairs. The Senate is required to approve treaties and confirm United States' ambassadors to other countries, and it must also approve major presidential appointments. The House of Representatives has more authority over fiscal or budgetary

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1 Dahl, R. A. *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

matters. Ascent of both chambers is required for declarations of war. Control of different chambers of Congress thus is important.

The presidential election is unique in the United States. Presidential terms are for four years, with there being a two term limit. Unlike other countries, the winner of the presidential race is not based on a simple popular vote. According to the American Constitution, to be elected president of the United States one has to win a majority of what is called the electoral votes. The electoral vote and the Electoral College are perhaps the most complex phenomena in the United States, and both Americans and foreign observers are perplexed by it.

Simply put, to be elected president one has to receive a majority (270) of the 538 electoral votes in the country. These 538 electoral votes are allocated to the 50 states based on the number of members they have in Congress. Thus, in Minnesota, which has ten members in Congress, it has ten electoral votes. Members of Congress are not presidential electors. In 48 of the 50 states, the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in that state's presidential election receives all of the electoral votes in it. In the other two states (Maine and Nebraska), electoral votes are awarded proportionally. What all this means is that the national election for president really is 50 separate elections across the different states. In rare cases where no candidate receives 270 electoral votes, the House of Representatives picks the president, but that has not happened since 1824. It is unlikely that Congress will select the president in 2012.

Presidential selection is also affected by one last institutional variable—the party selection process. Selection of a major political party presidential candidate (in 2012 a member of the Republican Party) is an open process that takes places across all 50 states over the course of several months. The process officially began in 2012 on 3 January in Iowa and it will continue until an official nominee is selected at the party nation convention that begins on 27 August, 2012. Unofficially, the presidential race began months before that.

## 2. Political Issues in the 2012 Elections

Generally two types of issues are important in American presidential and congressional elections: foreign policy and international politics, and then domestic issues. In 2012 domestic issues are predominant, which stands in contrast to 2004 and 2008 when international events, such as the War on Terrorism, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran were major issues.

In 2012 the economy is the most important issue. The United States is slowly recovering from the global economic recession that began in 2008. That recession produced an unemployment rate in the United States that reached 10% in October 2009, and has since fallen to 8.3% in January 2012.<sup>2</sup> Estimates are that the underemployment rate reached 21%.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Government, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey [interactive]. [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <<http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>>.

3 Gallup Economy, Underemployment 21% or Higher in Five States in 2011 [interactive]. [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/152588/Underemployment-Higher-Five-States-2011.aspx>>.

The Federal Reserve Board projects slow economic growth next year—2-2.5%—with the unemployment rate settling in at about 8.5% by election time.<sup>4</sup> Of course, these numbers are bad for all those looking for jobs or businesses hoping to grow, yet, for Obama it is a real problem.

Since 1932 only two presidents have ever won re-election when the unemployment rate was above 6%. In 1936 and 1940 Franklin Roosevelt won re-election with unemployment rates of 17% and 14.6%, but both of these elections should be treated as outliers or oddities. In 1936 the unemployment rate had dropped from nearly 24% to 17% and the economy was growing at an annual rate of 14%. In 1940 World War II was upon America and with patriotism high, support for Roosevelt was strong. More importantly, the economy was growing at 10% annual GDP and the perception was that the president had the country going in the right direction.

In 1984 Ronald Reagan won re-election with an unemployment rate of 7.5%. Yet, his victory occurred when the economy was growing at more than 11% and gas prices were tumbling from then record highs. Reagan definitely benefited from the perception that it truly was morning in America, especially after the unemployment rate tumbled from around 10% in 1982 and 1983.

But FDR and Reagan aside, high unemployment—6% or more—is the death knell for a presidential re-election bid. In 1976 Gerald Ford ran for re-election when the unemployment rate was 7.7%—he lost to Jimmy Carter. Four years later the unemployment rate was 7.1% when Carter ran for a second term against Reagan. He lost to the tune of Reagan asking Americans if they were better off now than they were four years ago. In 1992 George Bush sought a second term with an unemployment rate of 7.5%—he lost to a Bill Clinton reminding the voters that it was “the economy stupid.” Conversely, Nixon won with an unemployment rate of 5.6% in 1972, Clinton 5.4% in 1996, Bush in 2004 with 5.5%, Eisenhower 4.1% in 1956, and Truman in 1948 with 3.8%.

Key to a presidential re-election is the actual unemployment rate. But the reality or perception that it is moving in the right direction is also important. If there are no significant declines in unemployment along with economic growth and a perception that the economy is moving in the right direction, presidents are not given a second term.

Obama faces an economy where the best projection is of high unemployment and low economic growth. But there is more. Home values remain about 25% or more below what they were in 2008,<sup>5</sup> consumer and now student debt is high,<sup>6</sup> and many people have already blown through their unemployment benefits and face an uncertain future. Consumer confidence remains near historic lows, suggesting little chance that retail sales and spending for the coming holidays and into next year will revive the economy.

4 Censky, A. Bernanke: Fed will protect U.S. economy from Europe [interactive]. [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <[http://money.cnn.com/2012/02/02/news/economy/bernanke\\_congress\\_europe/index.html](http://money.cnn.com/2012/02/02/news/economy/bernanke_congress_europe/index.html)>.

5 Department of Housing and Urban Development, United States Government. *U.S. Housing Market Conditions*. February, 2012.

6 Lewin, T. Burden of College Loans on Graduates Grows [interactive]. *New York Times* [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/education/12college.html>>.

The public just does not believe the country is headed in the right direction (61% say in the wrong direction) and few think we are better off now than four years ago.<sup>7</sup>

However, in recent months the American economy appears to be recovering. The unemployment rate is steadily decreasing, the stock market is at pre 2008 levels, and the housing market appears to be stabilizing. This has brought a shift to three other domestic issues—gas prices, debt, and social issues. In 1980 rising energy prices due to two embargoes by oil producing countries had an impact on President Jimmy Carter's election loss to Ronald Reagan. In 2012 projections are that gas prices may increase from approximately \$3.00 per gallon to perhaps \$5 by July. These rising prices are already causing a potential worry in terms of their impact on the US economy, and they are the subject of political criticism by Republican presidential candidates who are blaming Barack Obama for the increases.

A second domestic issue is the American budget deficit. The current budget deficit for fiscal year 2013 is projected to be nearly \$980 billion (750,982,913,259 Euros), with overall nation debt estimated at \$15.6 trillion (11,952,300,000,000 Euros). This debt is a concern for many reasons, some of which is over worry that the United States cannot continue to finance its budget deficits by borrowing. Continued long term US debt affects its credit rating and ability to borrow money from sources, some of which are international. Efforts to reduce the debt and budget deficit potentially have an impact on defence spending and there are some discussions regarding how this might affect US military might. Paul Kennedy describes how one threat to the United States may be that its declining economic strength may compromise its ability to maintain its international military supremacy or standing in the world as it loses its capacity to maintain both hard (military) and soft (economic) hegemony.<sup>8</sup>

Former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski writes in his new book *America and the Crisis of Global Power* that the budget deficit, an unstable financial system, decaying infrastructure, growing economic inequalities, and partisan politics threaten America's national security and international standing.<sup>9</sup> In many ways his arguments echo what Paul Kennedy had asserted 25 years ago in his influential 1987 *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* that the declining economic stature of the United States could have a significant impact upon its geo-global standing. Both books powerfully connect domestic politics to national security and assert that the country must confront certain realities. Yet, unlike when Kennedy wrote, it appeared America had bipartisan capacity to act, Brzezinski sees the very polarization of our political system as a strategic liability, standing as impediment to solving the other problems that exist.

This polarization affects the capacity to govern. Samuel Huntington and others were roundly criticized over a generation ago for asserting that America faced a governability crisis.<sup>10</sup> Yet now he seems prescient. The list of problems confronting the American

7 Rasmussen Reports, "Right Direction or Wrong Track" [interactive]. [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <[http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public\\_content/politics/mood\\_of\\_america/right\\_direction\\_or\\_wrong\\_track](http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/mood_of_america/right_direction_or_wrong_track)>.

8 Kennedy, P. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Vintage, 1987.

9 Brzezinski Z. *America and the Crisis of Global Power*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.

10 Crozier, M.; Huntington, S.; Watanuki, J. *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. New York: NYU Press, 1975.

political system is endless. There is the growing polarization of the political parties that makes compromise near impossible. Add to that the personalization of political attacks that render compromise after election difficult. But there is also the growing disaffection of the public from the two major parties, the inability of the Democrats and Republicans to escape capture by special interests, the impossibility of the an opportunity for minor parties to emerge. Polls increasingly point to large majorities of the American public expressing dissatisfaction or distrust with Congress and the government overall, and while money in politics has always been a problem, the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens' United v Federal Election Commission*<sup>11</sup> has exacerbated the impact that wealthy donors and corporations have on the political process. Political scientist E.E. Schattschneider wrote more than 50 years ago that America was in danger of becoming the largest aristocracy in world where political power was stratified by wealth, race, and gender, and that has largely come to be.<sup>12</sup>

But the political divisions are a consequence of another real problem America must confront—the growing gap between the have and have-nots. Mounting evidence demonstrates that the United States has the largest gap between the rich and poor this country has experienced since the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> Since the 1970s repeated studies document declining social mobility for the poor and middle class and a nation where the rich have done well and the rest have not.<sup>14</sup> The United States fares poorly in comparative statistics on equality and mobility compared to other developed countries. The reality is that there is a significant class divide in this country, affecting political engagement, life prospects, health, and a host of other issues.

Another issue is America's crumbling infrastructure. It now seems a distant memory that in 2007 a bridge collapsed in Minneapolis. For a few days infrastructure was the word of the day. "Infrastructure" is not a sexy word. Nor is it the type of word that most of us use in everyday conversation, until the Minnesota bridge collapsed. Yet, infrastructure—a short hand way of referring to America's bridges, roads, highways and sewer and water pipes is important to our everyday lives. Without the basic infrastructure of roads we would never get to work, to school, or go shopping. Without it we could not cross rivers, drink water, or flush our toilets. In 2007 the American Civil Engineering Society estimated a need of at least \$2.2 trillion (1,686,000,000,000 Euros) to revitalize America's aging infrastructure. While no additional bridges have fallen, the aging American infrastructure costs the economy billions in lost competitiveness.

The American health care system is a mess. The United States currently spends nearly 18% of its GDP on health care, far greater than the 10-12% spent by other

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11 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 130 S.Ct. 876 (2010).

12 Schattschneider, E. E. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. Independence, KY: Wadsworth, 1975.

13 Congressional Budget Office, *Effective Federal Tax Rates: 1979–2007* [interactive]. [accessed on 16-04-2012]. <<http://www.cbo.gov/publications/collections/collections.cfm?collect=13>>.

14 Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "A Family Affair: Intergenerational Social Mobility Across OECD Countries" [interactive]. [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <[www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/7/45002641.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/7/45002641.pdf)>.

developed countries.<sup>15</sup> Spending will only grow as the Baby Boomers age. The United States does not have universal coverage and 44 million plus lack basic coverage. Health indices such as infant mortality, life expectancy, and obesity rates compare unfavourably to other nations. Obama's health care act may not have been an ideal solution but it tried to do something. Republican Party repeal or Supreme Court invalidation of the health care act and return to a free market solution will fail to address the problem.

Short term rising gas prices are a problem but the longer term issue is that this country remains wedded to a low cost hydrocarbon economy that is not sustainable. Demands to frack or drill more will do little to depress long term energy prices as worldwide demand increases. In fact, statistical evidence demonstrates that America's increased production over the years has had little impact on decreasing energy prices.<sup>16</sup> Unlike Germany which is moving rapidly into alternative energy sources, or Europe in general which has adjusted to higher prices, the American economy is not prepared for a new energy future.

Finally, there are significant educational and demographic changes that America needs to face. Educationally, America's students underperform compared to those in most other developed countries. It is not that teachers are not teaching but that our school system represents a horse and buggy era far too slack on math, science, and other standards. Americans still think that second languages are unnecessary, and ignore the ways that poverty and racism affect learning and outcomes. Demographically, we face a more diverse yet aging society. Future workers will have to support an aging population and these new employees confront a high-tech world where they may not have the skills to compete on a global scale.

All of the above described problems are dire and require money to fix them. But the last problem America faces—its budget deficit, as noted—may make that impossible. Continued long term US debt affects its credit rating and ability to borrow money from sources, some of which are international. Efforts to reduce the debt and budget deficit potentially have an impact on defence spending and there are some discussions regarding how this might affect US military might. Both Paul Kennedy and Brzezinski, as noted, describe how one threat to the United States may be that its declining economic strength may compromise its ability to maintain its international military supremacy or standing in the world as it loses its capacity to maintain both hard (military) and soft (economic) hegemony. Together they and others see a need to address the long term fiscal health of the country but alas, the growing political polarization of the United States places a solution beyond immediate grasp.

Finally, the last major set of domestic issues surround what are called "social issues" in the United States. These are issues surrounding abortion policy, reproductive

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15 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, "National Health Expenditure Data" [interactive]. [accessed on 16-03-2012]. <<https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/NationalHealthAccountsHistorical.html>>.

16 Associated Press, "There's No Correlation Between More Domestic Drilling And Lower Gas Prices" [interactive]. [accessed on 22-04-2012]. <[http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-03-22/markets/31223448\\_1\\_oil-production-chief-energy-economist-anwr](http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-03-22/markets/31223448_1_oil-production-chief-energy-economist-anwr)>.

freedoms, and the rights of gays and lesbians. There is significant opposition from parts of the Republican Party to endorse these three issues and increasing many of the presidential candidates are focusing on these three domestic issues, as well as those dealing with health care access.

So far in 2012 foreign policy issues have been secondary concerns this year. The United States formally withdrew from Iraq in 2011, leaving this issue as a minor concern for most. However, the United States still has troops in Afghanistan and there are some who criticize President Obama's intention to phase out the military commitment there.

The Middle East in general is perhaps the primary foreign policy concern for the United States. There is concern over Iran's nuclear ambitions, defence of Israel, and the latter's potential bombing of Iran to prevent its access to nuclear weapons. The Obama administration does not presently support military action against Iran but some of the Republican presidential candidates do. The notable exception is Ron Paul who does not see Iran as a security threat to the United States. The United States supports the opposition in Syria but so far official US policy has not endorsement arming them or taking more aggressive military action. Again, some of the Republicans endorse this action.

In addition to the Middle East, North Korea's stability and nuclear ambitions are of concern. Recently the United States secured some agreements regarding the North Korean nuclear program. Regardless of who is elected president, steps will continue to be taken to address this issue. It is unlikely that the US will return to the rhetoric of George Bush who labelled North Korea one of the "axes of evil."

Finally, Europe does not seem to factor large in terms of issues dominating the 2012 American elections. This is perplexing given the historical close alliances with Europe and how financial instability across the continent could impact the American economy. Furthermore, Russia does not factor very high in the 2012 presidential debates, although Mitt Romney, the likely Republican Party presidential nominee, has described that country as one of the main competitors and security threats to the United States. China is perceived as more of a rival or threat to US interests than is Russia. Barack Obama shortly after assuming the presidency cancelled the missile shield proposal in Europe that his predecessor George Bush was advocating. Were a Republican elected as president it is possible that the missile defence shield proposal might again be resurrected.

### 3. Party Politics in the 2012 Elections

Barack Obama is the incumbent president of the United States seeking re-election. His Democratic Party has a narrow majority control in the Senate and the Republican Party controls the House of Representatives. There are four main Republican candidates seeking the endorsement of that party. They include former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, former Senator Rick Santorum, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and current House of Representatives member Ron Paul. While each of the candidates has slightly different political positions, they agree on far more

than they disagree and their real differences among this are slight. After a contested party primary, Mitt Romney secured the party nomination to challenge Barack Obama for president. Yet the Republicans remain divided.

Since 2008 the Republican Party has been affected by internal political factions. The three most important ones are referred to as the Tea Party (advocating free market fundamentalism and significant reduction of the size of the federal government and taxes), the social conservatives (mostly concerned with issues such as abortion, gay rights, and religion), and the more moderate wing of the party which supports cutting back some taxes and federal government spending. Currently the Republican House of Representatives is dominated by Tea Party members and its political positions have become very unpopular, with barely 10% of those surveyed approving of their performance. The Republican presidential primaries have been dominated by the participation of the Tea Party and social conservatives, drawing the presidential candidates further to the political rights. The current struggle over selection of a Republican presidential candidate involves finding a person who can appeal to these different factions of the party while at the same time then having a viable candidate who can challenge Barack Obama.

Barack Obama has an approval rating flirting with 50%. It has recently vacillated, in part due to the apparent growth in the US economy, rising oil prices, and also due to the unpopularity of the Republican presidential candidates and members of the House of Representatives. Moreover, until recently surveys suggested that the Republican Party had the opportunity to hold or gain majorities in both chambers of Congress, although some polls question that now.

The two parties seem divided over social and economic issues, and there are clear demographic differences in who is a member of which party. At the presidential level, undecided voters in about 12 of the 50 states really will decide who wins the presidency, since in about 38 states there is no serious competition among voters regarding which party has a majority. Issues that are important are the economy, gas prices, the federal budget deficit, social issues, and health care.

#### 4. Forecasting the 2012 American Elections

Barack Obama will not have an easy election. However, polls again suggest that in a run against the current Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, he would win. But because the economy or gas prices could change quickly, these factors could affect his re-election. The same is true were Israel to bomb Iran. The best prediction right now is the Obama wins re-election.

It seems unlikely at this time that the Democrats will be able to win enough seats to regain control of the House of Representatives. It will probably remain Republican.

The partisan or party control of the Senate could rest with either the Republicans or Democrats.

The most likely prediction is that Obama remains president of the United States with Republicans controlling both houses of Congress. This would be divided government.

Other scenarios are that Obama wins and the Democrats control one house of Congress and the Republicans the other. The third scenario is Republicans win the presidency and take control of one or both houses of Congress. The least likely scenario is that the Democrats control the presidency and both houses of Congress.

Regardless of whichever of these scenarios occurs, there will be minimal changes in U.S. foreign policy toward Europe. Moreover, unless Republicans win the presidency and both houses of Congress, there will be minimal change in defence and international policy. If Republicans did take control of Congress and the presidency, there might be more willingness to use military options against Syria or to support Israel. It is unclear how electoral outcomes will impact issues such as financial bailouts of troubled European economies. Most of the major changes that might occur after the 2012 elections have an impact more on domestic as opposed to foreign policy. However, failure to agree on budget reductions might also impact the US military budget.

## Conclusion: America After 2012

It is impossible to predict the outcome of the 2012 American elections. Yet regardless of the results, there will be more continuity than change in American foreign policy. There is no expectation that the United States will change its commitments to Israel or Europe. Relations with Europe will not experience a significant change, although with both the Russian and American elections over and campaign rhetoric done, those two countries may be able to work more constructively on common interests, perhaps including Syria and missile defence in Europe.<sup>17</sup> However, if the Republicans do take control of the presidency and Congress, the United States might increase its military budget and take a more militaristic stand on terrorism and reaffirm military commitments in Afghanistan and take a tougher line against Iran's nuclear ambitions. The United States might also take a more aggressive stance on missile defence in Europe.

But the biggest challenges facing the United States are economic. As noted, the country has a very large national debt and budget deficit that needs to be addressed. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (the highest ranking military officer in the United States, describes the national debt of the United States as its "biggest security threat."<sup>18</sup> Reaching agreement on solutions to address this problem may lead to significant budget and spending cuts, including to the military budget. Moreover, America's relative economic decline in the world and the potential for China to outpace it as the largest economy in the world may compromise the country's hegemonic political, military and economic status. In short, whoever takes political power in the United States after the 2012 elections; they will face many challenges to the ability of the country in the long term maintaining its military and political status.

17 Herszenhorn, D. M.; Myers, S. L. Despite Kremlin's Signals, US Ties Remain Strained After Russian Election. *New York Times*. 2012, March 7.

18 Bassett, L. Adm. Mike Mullen: 'National Debt Is Our Biggest Security Threat' [interactive]. [accessed on 26-03-2012]. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/24/adm-mike-mullen-national\\_n\\_624096.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/24/adm-mike-mullen-national_n_624096.html)>.

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## EUROPA IR 2012 METŲ AMERIKOS RINKIMAI

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**Santrauka.** Valdžia ir jos rinkimų sistema Jungtinėse Valstijose lyginant su Europos parlamentinėmis sistemomis ir su kitu pasauliu – unikali.

Du ryškūs Jungtinių Valstijų bruožai – tai kad valdžia suformuota iš atskirų jėgų šakų, o ne parlamentiška, taip pat kad tai federalinė, o ne unitarinė valdžia. Šie du veiksniai reiškia, kad Jungtinių Valstijų politinės jėgos suskaidytos tarp trijų nacionalinių valdžios atšakų ir tarp nacionalinės vyriausybės ir 50-ies valstijų. Tokia valdžios formavimo sistema reiškia, kad greitu laiku vargu ar tikėtini politiniai pokyčiai ir kad dėl šių priežasčių rinkimai, matyt, nesukels dramatiškų politikos ar politinių orientyrų pokyčių.

Tai žinotina, nes Jungtinėse Valstijose galima numatyti kelių rūšių politinių partijų kontrolę. Gali įvykti, kad ir prezidentas, ir abeji Kongreso rūmai yra kontroliuojami vienos partijos. Tai įvyko George'o Busho prezidentavimo metu nuo 2003 m. iki 2007 m. Tai ir vėl pasikartojo 2008 m., kai prezidentu tapo Barackas Obama. Tačiau galimas ir toks atvejis, kai prezidentas atstovauja vienai partijai, o Kongresas – kiti. Dar kitas scenarijus, kai prezidentas ir vieni įstatymų leidimo rūmai kontroliuojami vienos partijos, o kiti – kitos. Būtent taip šiuo metu yra Jungtinėse Valstijose.

Kokie bebūtų rinkimų rezultatai, Amerikos užsienio politika išliks veikiau nuosekli, nei patirs pokyčių. Mažai tikėtina, kad Jungtinės Valstijos keis savo išsipareigojimus Izraeliui ar Europai. Su Europa santykiai neišgyvens reikšmingos kaitos, nors, ir Rusijos, ir Amerikos rinkimams praūžus ir kampanijų retorikai nutilus, šios dvi šalys gali žymiai konstruktyviau bendradarbiauti sprendamos svarbius klausimus, ypač susijusius su Sirija ir su priešraketinėmis gynybos sistemomis Europoje. Jei prezidentinius ir Kongreso įgaliojimus kontroliuos Respublikonai, Jungtinės Valstijos didins karinį biudžetą, imsis karinesnių priemonių prieš terorizmą, sustiprins karinę veiklą Afganistane, kategoriškiau vertins Irano branduolines ambicijas. Jungtinės Valstijos ims agresyviau kurti priešraketinę gynybą Europoje.

Tačiau svarbiausi Jungtinių Valstijų iššūkiai – ekonomikoje. Kaip minėta, šalis neša didelės nacionalinės skolos ir biudžeto deficito našta, ir ją reikia mažinti. Michael Mullen, Jungtinių štabų vadų komiteto pirmininkas, aukščiausias karinis rangas Jungtinėse Valstijose, kalba apie Jungtinių Valstijų nacionalinę skolą kaip apie didžiausią grėsmę saugumui. Siekiant sutarimo dėl šios problemos sprendimo gali tekti ženkliai apkarpyti biudžetą, taip pat ir karinį.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Jungtinės Valstijos, rinkimai, prezidentas, Kongresas, Europa, užsienio politika.

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