



IRS JOURNAL

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Editor's Note

Dear readers

As we reach the end of 2024, going back to revise the entire year is crucial. 2024 has been a busy year for international relations considering that so many debates surrounding the multipolar system, new economies emerging, and the elections in different countries almost every month of the year took place. Additionally, as the international community, we hopelessly witnessed an active genocide still being committed, allies supporting genocide, war crimes, rise of far right, and riots all over the world.

For the past four issues, we have covered news and contemporary discussions regarding the biggest conflicts taking place this year, and especially this fall season. With that being said, this issue will present you a recap of this extremely significant year for politics. We will analyze elections of various countries, Israel's aggression escalating to the entire Middle East, riots against governments, policies regarding environment and migration, which was heavily securitized this year, and specifically the situation in Sudan. Additionally, we will cover updates from South Korea, Syria and Georgia which all took place in the past two weeks.

This issue has a lot of content in it, and they are all heavy topics to comprehend and also write about as well. My writer peers put a lot of effort into this issue, and I am very grateful for their hard work. I would like to show my gratitude for IRS board members for their support as well. We hope you enjoy this issue, and get well- informed!

Aşlısu Furtana

Israeli Aggression Throughout 2024

As 2024 is coming to an end, the conflict in the Middle East due to Israeli aggression is still continuing. Israel's attempted genocide killed over 45.000 Palestinians at the beginning of December. UN confirmed that %70 of these deaths are women and children. The number approaches 4000 in Lebanon and at least 36 in Syria.

Throughout this year, approximately %90 of Gaza's population was forcefully displaced. Shelters are overcrowded, and aid is struggling to arrive. The biggest UN aid provider agency recently suspended its deliveries as a result of the dangers of crossing Kerem Shalom, which is the foremost route that is used for delivering aid to more than two million people. As Gaza is facing a risk of famine, winter conditions are also endangering the displaced Palestinians' health.

While Israel and Lebanon had a ceasefire deal in November, the ceasefire also faces the risk of ending as Israel is striking Lebanon again with the excuse of "hostility" from Hezbollah. Ten people were killed last week, marking the date as the most prominent air attack since the ceasefire. Israeli hypocrisy is once again risking the peace of the Middle East.

Selin Akpınar

2024: Year of Elections

Nearly half of the world's population went to the polls in 2024, marking one of the busiest years for elections. With Sunday's Romanian presidential election, this exhausting schedule is finally coming to an end. In this article, despite repeating myself many times I will highlight key global trends across continents and summarize electoral outcomes.

The dominant theme of 2024 was anti-incumbency, driven by global inflation worsened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For the first time since World War II, every developed democracy saw incumbent parties lose votes. Ideologically, left-wing parties made gains in South America and some parts of Europe, while right-wing forces triumphed in Asia, North America and generally in Europe.

Electoral integrity was another pressing issue, with fraudulent elections in Russia, Venezuela, Georgia, and Pakistan. Russia's Vladimir Putin had another coronation instead of election, while Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro manipulated results to defeat the united opposition and suppressed the protests. Similarly, Georgia's pro-Russia Georgian Dream party used violent measures to suppress dissent, and Pakistan's military establishment was accused of rigging elections in favor of Shehbaz Sharif while sidelining former prime minister Imran Khan. Elections in non-democratic states like Bangladesh, Iran, Algeria, Belarus, and Rwanda underscored that voting alone is insufficient for well-functioning democracy. Ensuring electoral integrity remains a key challenge for fragile and developing democracies.



In chronological order, here are some of the major elections and their outcomes: Indonesia, East Asia's largest democracy, elected Prabowo Subianto, a nationalist with human rights abuses accusations, as a soldier during the country's East Timor invasion between 1975-2002. South Korea's April election shifted legislative power to the opposition, creating a political deadlock resulting declaration of martial law from the president. In South Africa, the legendary former president Mandela's ANC lost its single-party majority for the first time in May elections, since the end of apartheid regime in 1992.

The world's largest democracy, India, held elections from April to June. Despite exit polls predicting a comfortable win, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationalist alliance narrowly retained its majority against a united opposition under the I.N.D.I.A. coalition. In Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum became the country's first Jewish and female president. Defying global trends, the MORENA party increased its majority. European Parliament elections favored far-right parties but saw Ursula von der Leyen's EPP bloc retain its position, while results in France prompted Emmanuel Macron to call snap legislative elections. Surprisingly, the left-wing Nouveau Front Populaire emerged first, despite expectations of a far-right RN victory.

In the United Kingdom, Labour ended 14 years of Conservative rule with a victory in July. Starmer's centrist policies were the key for success. Austria's far-right FPÖ which was founded by a former Nazi minister, rose to prominence, and Japan's ruling LDP lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since World War II, leaving Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba navigating in uncertain waters. The year's climactic event, the U.S. presidential election, saw Donald Trump return to the White House, triggering a global wave of election denialism and right-wing resurgence. Bulgaria had 7th consecutive elections and still has not figured out how to form a government. Finally, Ireland and Iceland saw sharp gains for liberal and social democratic parties at the end of year.

Although 2024 was marked by intense political activity and turbulence, 2025 will also feature consequential and closely watched elections in Germany, Canada, Argentina, and Norway.

End of Decades of Assad Rule in Syria

The Middle East has been a region full of conflict in 2024, which is a no shocker considering that the protests, insurgencies, and wars have unceasingly continued since the Arab Spring in 2010. Late 2023 and 2024 saw the Gaza genocide by Israel. The conflict also led to direct confrontations between Iran and Israel, as they bombed each other both in April and October. The Iran-Israel conflict also saw the heavy usage of proxy parties and assassinations of their leaders, including Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar of Hamas, along with Hasan Nasrallah and Fuad Shukur of Hezbollah.

In October 2024, Israel started the invasion of Lebanon, targeting Hezbollah. Despite Israel not being able to penetrate into Lebanese lands, they killed 3000 civilians nearly in 2 months before the ceasefire on 26 November. 1 day after the ceasefire in the south, the world saw the rekindling of the Syrian Civil War, which turned into a frozen conflict in 2020, as the joint Syrian opposition, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Syrian National Army, and other factions, started an offensive in Aleppo. Within 3 days Aleppo was captured, which marked the beginning of the end of the Assad regime. As of 8 December, Syrian opposition groups are controlling Damascus, the capital of Syria, toppling Assad's government.

Russia and Iran, the allies of the Assad regime, watched the regime die in 10 days. Traditionally, Russia would support the regime with conducting airstrikes in opposition-held areas, whereas Iran's Revolutionary Forces and Iranian-backed paramilitary forces such as Hezbollah and PMF of Iraq engaged in clashes with opposition forces. This time neither Russian nor Iranian political and military support were with Assad. Israel's bombings in Aleppo Governorate throughout 2024 forced the Iran backed paramilitaries to flee the region, with most of them going to Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kamal in Eastern Syria. According to Serhat Erkmen, a Turkish professor whose research area is the Middle East argues that the Russian invasion of Ukraine also directly and indirectly affected the trajectory of the Syrian Civil War. Wagner's elimination and increasing communication channels between the Syrian opposition and the Ukrainian front had an impact.

There is no doubt that the shift in the Syrian theatre will have some consequences for the regional actors in the Middle East. The Iranian corridor to Lebanon from Syria is now closed as they lost their ally, the Syrian government. Israel is now benefiting from Iran being pushed from their borders. "Shia Crescent"s Syrian part is now dominated by majority-Sunni opposition and SDF, the US backed Kurdish group.

Aral Çağan Yurtseven



For the time being, Israel is the biggest beneficiary of the current situation. The Iranian militias are pushed away, resulting in the supply for Hamas and Hezbollah over Syria to be interrupted. Furthermore, the Ba'athist regime, which previously engaged in conflict with Israel, has now been removed from power. The new Syrian government, that will include HTS and its leader al-Julani, will probably engage in an anti-Israel discourse too. However, the new government will have many domestic issues to address, including a new constitution, economy, confiscation of weapons and the relation between SDF and Damascus. According to recent news, Israel and Kurdish militias had initial talks after the fall of the Assad regime.

It is not entirely clear whether Turkey is benefiting from the change in the region. The overthrow of Assad was a key objective for Turkey. Despite this becoming a reality with the Turkish-backed rebels, the SDF has also increased its influence in the country, gaining more territory since 27 November. Turkey has designated the SDF as a terrorist group due to its direct links to the PKK. One Turkish foreign policy goal has been achieved, however another is still to be realised, with a possession of great danger.

Turkish Foreign Policy in 2024

Turkish foreign policy had a good amount of agenda items to handle this year from BRICS to Sweden's NATO membership and to Palestine and Israel. Turkish diplomacy went through a busy year with topics from every corner of the world, and new directions to take in foreign policy.

At the first quarter of the year, there was an agreement to start formal negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council. This implies that Turkey's foreign policy incentives have shifted to investment and trade. In terms of energy and investment capital, GCC countries make attractive markets available for Turkish exports.

Turkey has made it clear that they support the Palestinian cause, which caused the Turkish government to gradually strengthen their legitimacy among Arab-Muslim populations by positioning themselves as defenders of Palestinian rights. Backing the Palestinian cause implies that Turkey has an independent foreign policy. As Turkey and Israel have been distant in diplomatic regard, it is possible to observe an increase in Turkey's trade, tourism, and diplomatic relations with the Arab world since the Palestinian cause is a sensitive matter mostly for the Arab nations. Turkey becomes a more independent regional power as it continues to support the Palestinian cause.

The negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia are following the path of peace in a quick matter with Turkey's role considering Turkey is a close ally to Azerbaijan. This situation is also important as this process can allow for the normalization of Ankara-Yerevan relations.



Considering Sweden's NATO membership, Turkey was one of the countries that stalled the process. Turkish leaders argued that terrorists were harboured by Sweden and demanded Sweden to consider their anti-terrorism laws. This caused some analysts to suggest Turkey to get expelled from NATO, which was almost impossible according to NATO charter. During that period, Turkey's foreign policy was referred to as "transactional", implying that NATO's common values stayed below Turkey's national interests. After closed-door negotiations, Turkey agreed to allow Sweden's membership of NATO.

Mentioning NATO, Turkey managed to benefit from its position in the Ukraine-Russia Conflict and take control of its deteriorating relations with NATO allies. Considering the sanctions on Russia, Turkey has been pushed to become a major gas supplier to southeastern Europe. This allowed Turkey to achieve a dominant and autonomous position for nuclear-generated electricity generation in Turkey. Although Turkey's role in the Ukraine-Russia conflict seems beneficial at first, it's up to debate whether it will push Turkey into a political antagonism with other NATO allies.



Apart from its relations with NATO, Turkey showed interest in becoming a BRICS member this year. Although the president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been invited to the summit by Putin, Turkey's application for BRICS membership has not been approved. However, BRICS announced that they decided to give "partner state" status to 13 countries, one of them being Turkey.

Major Anti-Government Protests Around the World in 2024

The year 2024 was marked by widespread anti-government protests and public movements worldwide. People took to the streets to fight against economic inequality, oppressive regimes, and violations of fundamental rights.

Georgia

Georgia became a key center of civic unrest. Citizens protested against corruption allegations and the government's close ties with Russia. Initially sparked by demands for democracy, the protests quickly evolved into a broader social movement calling for European integration and more transparent governance.



France experienced mass protests against pension reforms. Citizens organized large-scale strikes and demonstrations opposing the increased retirement age and harsher working conditions. Similarly, *Chile* saw uprisings against economic inequality and inequities in the education system.

The common thread in these protests was the demand for fair governance, respect for human rights, and environmental sustainability. These movements highlighted a global call for change, as people united to make their voices heard.

Iran

In Iran, women continued their courageous fight for rights. Protests against mandatory hijab laws and gender inequality persisted, showing the growing momentum of women's demands for social freedom and equality since Mahsa Amini's death in 2022. Their struggle inspired solidarity movements around the globe.



In Brazil, environmental activists demanded stronger actions to protect the Amazon rainforest, while in India, farmers staged prolonged protests against controversial agricultural policies.

6-Hour Democracy Break in Korea

On the evening of December 3, 2024, South Korea was rocked by a "martial law" declaration issued under "swift intervention" by President Yoon Suk-Yeol, citing the threat to constitutional order and national security. The opposition and civil society countries described the decision as an authoritarian and democracy-damaging step, and it was swiftly revoked. The state of emergency was kept for 6 hours but was widely broadcast in domestic and foreign broadcasts.

The long-standing political conflict between the ruling wing of the rival political parties in South Korea, the 국민의힘 (People's Power Party - PPP), and the main opposition party, the 더불어민주당 (Democratic Party - DP), has emerged from the crisis in the parties' ideological, political and economic relations. There is an apparent rift between the opposition's more nonviolent strategy and the ruling party's uncompromising attitude toward North Korea, which led to President Yoon's decision to declare martial law. However, within six hours, the public, civil society organizations, and the opposition strongly opposed the martial law protocol, notwithstanding that The parliament annulled it because it threatened democratic values. Following the cancellation and the decision, criticisms were made towards President Yoon worldwide regarding the decision's purpose to suppress political rivalries and enhance his authority (authoritarian power show) rather than national security.



However, the incident continued in the international arena in the form of criticism of the decision made by Western countries and the US. The US, in particular, condemned the decision, emphasizing that it undermined South Korea's democratic values and that the people should embrace democracy. The European Union has a similar stance to that of the US. The incident was widely selected by many national and international publications such as *The Diplomat*, *The New Statesman*, and *Reuters*.

Although the outcome of the incident did not cause any damage to democracy, it should not be ignored that it constitutes a warning for South Korea. Yoon will face significant criticism and loss of support if the decision taken and attempted to be implemented is treated as an example of an authoritarian power shown by the opposition. In addition, it may also retain the image of South Korea as questioning its attitude towards democracy and human rights in international criticism. Whether this short-term change, which South Korea will present in its domestic and foreign policies, will become a long-term change depends on what President Yoon and political politicians will show. Until then, we will treat this as a "wait and see" situation.

“Green” Policies in 2024

The year 2024 has been a year in which the progress of environmental policies overall has been in question. Multilateral diplomacy and International cooperation have seemed to be inept, and the overall commitment has provoked further suspicion about the future of green policies. Multilateralism seems to be in its weakest form, and Trump winning the election may not be the best thing for the planet's future.



Regarding the multilateral diplomacy concerning green policies, COP29 was held in Baku, Azerbaijan on November 11. This organization, in which several stakeholders from both so-called “developed” and “developing” states participated, is the annual international meeting for deciding on the future of cooperation on ecological issues. Reportedly, the COP29 could not suffice to contribute to the needed progress on solutions to environmental problems, which requires the utmost urgency (the UN’s environment chief himself stated that it’s “crunch time for real”).

For example, the COP28 held in Dubai, UAE, resulted in agreements about the “transition away from fossil fuels”. This was considered to be an important breakthrough in terms of preventing the root causes of environmental degradation. However, the COP29 failed to keep this significant consensus alive, as it did not even repeat the pledge in its official draft text. Supposedly, Saudi Arabia and the LMDC (Like-Minded Developing Countries) advocated against this vital measure. Even though it is not a big surprise that Saudi Arabia would argue against the reduction of the use of fossil fuels as an oil-based economy, This exemplifies the lack of cooperation that is essential to tackling environmental problems (which are problems that overarch national territories in essence).

Another example of the diminishing progress and collaboration was the problematic climate finance discussions. The climate finance discussions at the COP29 ended with a \$300 billion annual pledge by the developed countries - to the developing countries to fund their decarbonization without the depletion of their economies. This may seem like a large amount, as it is for the majority of human beings on this planet. Nonetheless, it was indicated by IHLEG, a group of economists convened by Cop presidencies since 2021, that the developing world needs at least \$1 trillion dollars from developed countries to cover the expenses for ameliorating their economy and reducing CO₂ emissions simultaneously.

How will the Trump administration affect the landscape of environmental policies, is another significant concern. Trump, who withdrew from the Paris Convention during his first office, appears to be totally against the environmental policies implemented under the name of IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) under Joe Biden’s term. His own words: “I will immediately terminate the green new scam... That will be such an honor. The greatest scam in the history of any country.”

While environmental politics and the challenge to tackle environmental degradation is quite complex, it can be seen from an overall standpoint that things aren’t going as they should be for the planet, when we consider the erosion of multilateral diplomacy, the absence of cooperation, and the necessary dedication that international actors display.



Migration and Elections

As 2024 ends, migration remains a concerning issue and a question that needs answers in world politics. Ongoing wars, the brutal reality of post-pandemic economic crisis all around the world and political reasons pushed many people to leave their homes behind and migrate to different countries. In addition to political factors, climate change, and natural disasters were and will continue to be a significant factor in migration.

In 2024, -the year of important elections- it is possible to observe a similarity in many polls, voters are unhappy with two things in general: economy and migration. Right-wing parties and politicians gained popularity thus, votes because of their anti-immigrant and nationalist rhetoric.

Following Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's "fight against illegal immigration", Trump's re-election to the office will be a game-changer in migration and asylum policies all around the world. Trump's vows to deport all illegal immigrants seem bold and a goal that is very hard to attain. Although he accuses immigrants of stealing the real Americans' jobs and poisoning the nation's blood, immigrants' contribution to the American economy is greater than what Trump assumes. Considering the destructive economic effects of deporting millions of irregular workers that contribute to the American economy, Trump's future actions about immigrants will directly affect the American economy.



Europe is struggling with issues tied to immigration as well. Illegal activities such as human trafficking increased and criminal gangs tried to make profit out of people's miseries in 2024. This increased illegal activity is not a surprise considering that the general rhetoric is that immigrants should seek refuge in the first safe country they reach rather than keep moving until they find a rich country. "Rich" European countries do not want immigrants to poison their richness as Trump said. Many horrifying headlines from the UK such as secretly deported Brazilians -most of them were children- and gruesome conditions of the asylum system which is reported as retraumatizing for people especially women who had experienced abuse perpetuates the idea that European countries deliberately keep their conditions as inhumane as possible to discourage immigrants.

Sudan is another important location regarding the future of migration in 2025. For much of 2024, Sudan was under siege and the conflict intensified. As a result, famine is a threat that can consume the remaining of Sudan. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have already fled, joining the more than 20% of the country's pre-war population of 50m who have been forced to flee their homes since the war began in April 2023. It is most likely that the conflict will soon spread beyond the borders and combined with the famine, we will face yet another massive wave of immigrants all across the world.

According to the current state of our world, it looks impossible to say that immigration will no longer be a problem in 2025. Indeed, immigration will reinforce its place in world politics. Sustainable immigration and asylum policies will be essential to countries in order to create a balanced economy and social order.

International Powers and the Sudanese Conflict

The situation in Sudan is significantly worsening as escalating conflict between the Sudanese Armed Force (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since April 2023 has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the area prominently. The RSF's capture of the farming centre of Jazirah and the trading centre of Sennar, which they have persistently been looting and destroying, has put the country on the brink of a famine and economic collapse. Their simultaneous attacks on hospitals, medical centres and aid trucks have further left the people destitute. As of now, the RSF is actively ethnically cleansing Darfur and committing massacres in Khartoum, Jazira, and Sennar. Yet, there has been little international attention and effort to curb the crisis despite the disastrous implications for the Sudanese populations and land.



Prominent reasons for these delays can be traced back to major superpowers such as the UK, US, UAE and Russia facilitating the conflict in Sudan, the latter two of which are actively engaged in supporting the RSF, the principle paramilitary group wreaking havoc in the nation. The UAE's vested interest in the region, however, makes it the key perpetrator within the conflict. The UAE's involvement in Sudan is primarily a reflection of their intention to use Sudan as a stepping stone towards political and economic hegemony and leverage in east Africa and the Middle East.

It had previously even sourced fighters in 2015 from both the SAF and RSF for its war in Yemen and formed the principle importer of Sudan's ample gold reserves and agricultural richness. In 2022 alone, the UAE imported Sudanese precious metals that were valued at about US\$2.3 billion. The UAE also plans to make use of Sudan's Red Sea coast to develop profitable trade routes, which can only be done by their negation of the democratic spirit that overtook the Sudanese nation post-2019's ousting of the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir.

Specifically, the United Nations Security Council's prominent fails in addressing documented violations of Darfur's arms embargo by the UAE as they continue to supply arms and ammunitions to the RSF. UNSC's failure in addressing such vital international transgressions speaks loudly of international apathy in resolving the Sudanese crisis and stems largely from, as *The Guardian* reports, the deliberate efforts of the UK and the US in impeding significant progress made towards addressing the issue in the Council.

The continuity of the crisis can thus be traced back to the lack of accountability for UAE's unchecked support for the RSF and further support for them in the key players of the UNSC. The Sudanese government itself boycotted the Geneva Talks, which were held to "resolve" the conflict, after the UAE was added as a mediator for the negotiations despite their demonstrated interest in maintaining the Sudanese conflict; however, their boycott was to little effect in the face of strong support from superpowers such as the US and UK.

This web of suppression of the Sudanese conflict belies international aid efforts and emphasizes the prospects of resolution to be slim. Without prominent boycott from the international community towards the UAE specifically to hold them to account, the conflict is unlikely to be note any mitigation. Only with sufficient pressure on international governments, can they be expected to take formal action against UAE's unimpeded violations in Sudan, which is why a boycott of the Emirates and electoral pressure is a pertinent course of action that individuals must enact to assuage the Sudanese conflict.

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Discussion With
Robert O. Keohane



Expansion of BRICS
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