

Populism and Protests – Elections Outlook for 2017

Passions are high around the world when it comes to elections

Elections are always important, but the impact of some surprising recent results at the ballot box is being felt around the world, and is leading to political violence, principally in the form of demonstrations and protests. According to the Winter/ Spring 2017 edition of the Clements Worldwide Risk Index, organizations stating that they had experienced a political violence event in the last year has increased 90%.

Last year saw the United Kingdom's "Brexit" vote to leave the European Union. The world watched as people took to the streets in protest of the Brexit vote, and thousands of demonstrators participated in a "March for Europe" in London.

President Donald Trump's win also created discord in America with becoming a regular occurrence after Trump's victory. The inauguration saw some violence and property destruction in the nation's capital. The day after the inauguration, hundreds of thousands of women protested peacefully in the Women's March in Washington, and other marches took place around the country. Meanwhile, President Trump's executive order calling for a travel ban of people from certain predominately Muslim countries resulted in demonstrations at airports around the country.

Brexit and Trump's victory are the two most prominent elections in the "populist" movement, which focuses on nationalism, small government, and immigration restrictions. The first test of 2017 came with the Dutch election in March, which saw Prime Minister Mark Rutte defeat Geert Wilders, who became known as the Donald Trump of the Netherlands during the campaign.

But the real tests will come with elections scheduled to take place throughout Europe this year. And elections taking place in other parts of the world could make things volatile for travelers.

Keeping an eye on France

France is set to hold the first round of its presidential election in April, and it is being perceived as the biggest indicator of where the populist movement is going. Last year, incumbent Francois Hollande of the socialist party announced he wouldn't run for election.

Marine Le Pen of the National Front is the populist candidate, and is one of the main contenders, along with Emmanuel Macron. Their highly watched debate in March focused largely on immigration and France's place in international relations. Le Pen warned of the dangers France faces because of Islam and immigration, while Macron took on a more moderate tone. Other candidates include socialist Benoit Hamon,

republican Francois Fillon, and leftist candidate Jean-Luc Lelenchon, but all eyes have been on Le Pen and Macron.

Waiting for Italy

Things are so uncertain in Italy that it isn't known for sure whether or not elections will be held this year. In January, the country's constitutional court approved a law that allowed elections to take place this year. Italy's Democratic Party and the conservative 5-Star Movement both wanted voters to head to the voting booths in the summer, a year before scheduled elections.

Former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, of the ruling Democratic Party, resigned after his signature reform legislation wasn't passed. Among Renzi's actions was legislation recognizing same-sex marriage.

He has been succeeded by Paola Gentiloni. While Renzi wanted elections this summer, the party announced that its leadership contest would be held in late April, making a summer election virtually impossible.

The 5-Star Movement describes itself as just that, a movement, not a political party, but it has quickly become a force in Italian, and European, politics since its founding in 2008. It takes populist stands on immigration, globalism, and the European Union. However, it also is strongly environmentalist, making it stand out from the populist movement in the U.S.

Elections in Germany

What do Germany and the United States have in common? Both governments have accused Russia of attempting to interfere with their elections.

Reports of hacking and fake news have been a big part of the coverage of the election to the point the government has taken steps to take fake news reports off social media platforms.

Chancellor Angela Merkel faces a significant challenge from Martin Schulz, the leader of the country Social Democratic Party. Prior to September's national elections, Germany will hold three state elections that are being seen as tests of the Social Democratic Party and how much of a threat Schulz is to challenge Merkel from being elected to a fourth term.

Beyond Europe

It's not just Europe that is holding important elections this year. In Iran, six candidates have announced their intention to run, including incumbent Hassan Rouhani, who has been criticized by many in the country, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who blame Rouhani for Iran's economic struggles. Rouhani pledged to engage with the

world, and that the country's nuclear agreement would help the economy. Critics say that hasn't happened, which could result in a more conservative candidate defeating him.

South Korea: elections in the wake of a scandal

2017 wasn't supposed to be an election year for South Korea but the impeachment of Park Geun-hye, the country's first female president, has changed that. Park Geun-hye's ouster came amid accusations of corruption, which she has denied. In March, it was announced elections would take place May 9. Hwang Kyo-ahn, acting president, has announced he will not run.

The scandal surrounding Park, a conservative, could mean voters go in a more left direction, which could create an opportunity for Moon Jae-in, a liberal who Park defeated in 2012.

Democracy delayed in Thailand

Thailand has been run by a military government, the National Council for Peace and Order, since 2014 after parliament was dissolved by King Bhumobol Adulyadej, and the ensuing elections were boycotted by the democrat party and protests disrupted voting.

An election to replace that government, and bring democracy back to Thailand, was scheduled for this year, but in January, Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam announced elections were being delayed until early 2018.

Kenya seeks election reform

Kenya's 2007 election was followed by months of unrest and conflict as doubts were cast as to the legitimacy of Mwai Kibaki re-election. Kibaki of the Party of National Unity, was declared the winner over Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement, but the results were widely disputed.

A commission concluded the election was hampered by double voter registration, people posing as someone else at the polls, and ballot stuffing, but that the true result could not be known.

As the nation prepares for this year's vote in August, there is hope things will go smoother. The country's 2011 Elections Act has called for the use of technology in registration and voting, and Kenya now has some of the world's most advanced voter technology.

Elections in Rwanda

On Aug. 4, Rwanda will hold its third democratic elections (following elections in 2003 and 2010), with President Paul Kagame running for the third time. Kagame was allowed



to run following a constitutional amendment allowing him to do so. The amendment also calls for shortening the term from seven to five years, though that will not go in effect until the 2024 elections. He is being challenged by independent Phillipe Mpayimana, a writer and activist who has been living outside the nation since 1994.

Monitoring Political Violence – an Organizational Responsibility

Organizations must stay abreast of risks facing staff abroad, and monitoring elections and domestic protests is a critical part of that. Risk managers should use news monitoring services to track events in countries where staff operate or travel. They should also review their insurance coverage as most property or auto coverage for organizations does not include [political violence](#) protection, and a separate policy is required. [Emergency evacuation](#) coverage that can be triggered by security threats, natural disasters, or epidemics also helps ensure duty of care for employee safety if a country becomes unsafe for employees.

For more information about the threat of political violence contact Clements today at +1.202.872.0060 or 1.800.872.0067 or via requests@clements.com.