

US Elections Unveiled: A Media Roundup



A Periodic Overview of Major US Newspapers

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The written brief below provides an update on the U.S. political landscape, as of late September through early October. This brief focuses on recent polling, legal developments and international influence on the election. In terms of polling Donald Trump has gained ground in key battleground states like Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina, though the race remains tight overall, with Vice President Kamala Harris holding a narrow national lead. The election remains highly competitive, with economic concerns and immigration policy influencing undecided voters. Meanwhile Trump's federal election case continues to develop, with new evidence detailing his efforts to overturn the 2020 election. On the international front, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky's most recent visit to a U.S. munitions factory in Pennsylvania underscores the influence of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the election. Trump and Harris have adopted starkly contrasting positions on U.S. support for Ukraine, with Trump advocating for immediate negotiations with Russia and Harris maintaining a strong stance in favor of continued aid. For an Italian audience, this brief provides a comprehensive look at how U.S. domestic and foreign policy debates may influence the upcoming election.

Current US election polling

As of early October 2024, the U.S. presidential race is highly competitive. Recent polls from the New York Times and Siena College reveal Donald Trump gaining momentum in pivotal battleground states like Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina. In Arizona, Trump commands a 50% to 45% lead, flipping a previous Harris advantage. In Georgia, Trump leads 49% to 45% and North Carolina, Trump leads 49% to 47%. Despite mixed sentiments about Trump's character, many voters believe his policies positively impacted their lives. Harris, despite rallying Democratic support, struggles to resonate with undecided voters especially when it comes to the economy, inflation, and immigration. As of late September, Vice President Kamala Harris leads Donald Trump by two points nationally and maintains leads in three of the seven key battleground states. Polls indicate a tight race overall with many states within a margin error of 3.5 points which suggests potential volatility. Harris's support remains strong in states like Michigan and Pennsylvania, while Nevada is a statistical tie. The evolving political landscape highlights the competitive nature of the upcoming election.

Judge Unseals New Evidence in Federal Election Case against Trump

In a key development of Donald Trump's federal election case, Judge Tanya Chutkan unsealed parts of Special Counsel Jack Smith's legal brief, revealing new evidence against the former president. Smith argued that Trump is not immune from prosecution, despite a recent Supreme Court ruling that grants broad immunity to sitting presidents for official actions. The brief focuses on Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, framing his actions as those of a private citizen clinging to power. One detail from the brief includes Trump's reaction on January 6, 2021, when he was informed that an enraged mob was targeting Vice President Mike Pence after Trump's

tweet suggested Pence had let his supporters down. Trump allegedly responded saying “*So what*”. The filing also shows that Trump was repeatedly warned by his advisors that his claims of election fraud were baseless, yet he continued to press forward with his plans. The 165-page brief paints a detailed picture of Trump's efforts to pressure state officials, push false electors, and convince Pence to overturn the election results. Trump’s lawyers to state officials—repeatedly told him there was no proof of a stolen election. Trump’s own attorney called the claims “*bulls---*” and predicted they would fail in court. Despite this, Trump persisted in pressuring officials, such as Georgia’s governor and Arizona’s RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, to promote baseless fraud claims. McDaniel reportedly rejected Trump’s request, calling the fraud report “*f---king nuts.*”. One striking revelation includes Trump’s alleged ambivalence toward whether he won or lost the election, overheard by a staffer telling his family, “*it doesn’t matter if you won or lost... you still have to fight like hell.*” The document also paints a vivid picture of Trump’s actions on January 6, showing how he refused to calm the rioters until he was left alone watching Fox News in the White House. It was only then, as rioters breached the Capitol, that Trump tweeted an attack on Pence, leading to the Secret Service evacuating the vice president. Trump’s campaign dismissed the filing as a “*partisan witch hunt,*” while the case continues to develop.

Vance vs Walz

Vance was better prepared, confidently controlling the discussion for most of the event, while Walz seemed unprepared at times, particularly when addressing tough issues like his absence during the Tiananmen Square protests and failing to fully capitalize on criticism of Vance and Trump.

Walz had some strong moments, especially when he cornered Vance about whether Trump lost the 2020 election, with Vance dodging the question—a “damning non-answer” that gained significant attention. Walz also delivered effective arguments on topics like gun control and health care, using his political experience to challenge Vance’s claims about Trump saving the Affordable Care Act. However, Walz missed opportunities to drive home critical points, such as the numerous conservatives and Republicans endorsing Harris and warning of the dangers posed by Trump.

Ukraine\Russia

Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky on Sunday September 22, 2024 visited a munitions factory in Scranton, Pennsylvania, a critical swing state in the US presidential election in November. This visit, which was part of a tour to shore up support for Kyiv’s resistance against Russia’s war, aimed to provide a boost to the Harris campaign which riled Trump. The Harris campaign has sought to use Zelensky’s visit to Pennsylvania to appeal to the state’s 750,000-strong Polish American community. President Biden beat former President Trump in Pennsylvania in 2020 by about 80,000 votes. Trump responded by labeling Zelensky as “the greatest salesman in history” and expressed resentment towards funding Ukraine. “*Every time he comes into the country, he walks*

away with \$60 billion ... He wants them [the Democrats] to win this election so badly, but I would do it differently, I will work out peace.”

In a public letter addressed to Volodymyr Zelensky on September 25, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson publicly called for Ukraine to fire its U.S. ambassador, Oksana Markarova, accusing her of meddling in American election affairs. Johnson criticized a visit by Ukraine's President Zelensky to a key battleground state's ammunition factory with Democratic Governor Josh Shapiro, calling it a partisan campaign event designed to benefit Democrats. The Ukrainian authorities have long tried to remain neutral in the American presidential campaign, although they have built bridges in both camps to advance their interests. Republicans have been skeptical about providing support to Ukraine, and Donald J. Trump's vice-presidential choice, JD Vance, has been deeply critical of previous United States aid packages to Kyiv. Vance has been one of Congress's most vocal opponents of U.S. aid for Ukraine, admonishing the Biden administration for its continued monetary and material support and leading an unsuccessful campaign in the U.S. Senate to block a \$60 billion package. In a podcast interview in 2022, he told Steve Bannon, a longtime Trump adviser now serving a four-month prison term for contempt of Congress, *“I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or the other.”*

Trump has repeatedly vowed to negotiate an end to the conflict, though he has declined to give further details and wouldn't say whether he wanted Ukraine to defeat Russia when pressed at the presidential debate with Harris earlier this month. When ABC anchor David Muir asked Trump to clarify whether he believed it was in the U.S. best interest for Ukraine to win the war, Trump responded, *“I think it's in the U.S. best interest to get this war finished and just get it done. All right. Negotiate a deal. Because we have to stop all of these human lives from being destroyed”*. Trump emphasized his belief that he could facilitate a deal between Ukraine and Russia immediately after the election, portraying himself as a skilled negotiator who could bring both sides together. His comments sparked criticism from opponents, including Vice President Kamala Harris, who portrayed Trump as sympathetic to authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, at the most recent UN meeting, President Biden faced growing pressure to ease restrictions on Ukraine's military capabilities. Key figures, including Finland's President Alexander Stubb and outgoing NATO secretary General Jens Stoltenberg advocated hard for Ukraine to use longer-range weapons against Russian military bases. The argument being that Ukraine's ability to strike deeper in Russia is essential for its self-defense, especially as it faces intensified assaults in the Donbas region. Ukraine's president Zelensky is also advocating for permission to use these longer-range munitions highlighting frustrations over past U.S. refusals. Many European allies support Ukraine's request. Despite the UN calls, Biden has been cautious, aiming to avoid escalating tensions with Russia. Furthermore, the Biden administration remains cautious given that Russia could respond to deep missile strikes by aiding Iran in targeting American forces in the Middle East.

The U.S. is also poised to send a significant \$375 million military aid package to Ukraine making its largest shipment since May. This package likely includes medium-range missiles for Ukraine's

F-16s, enhancing their ability to target Russian forces while maintaining a safer distance from front lines and air defenses. Although the missiles won't have the extensive range Ukraine has requested, they will provide a valuable asset as Ukrainian troops face increasing pressure in the east. As fiscal deadlines approach, the Pentagon is also negotiating to carry over remaining funds for military aid into the next fiscal year amid concerns of a government shutdown.

On September 26, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the U.S. where he presented his "victory plan" to President Joe Biden. While not much information has been released regarding the specifics of the plan, the plan was described as over 90% complete. It aims to detail military, political, diplomatic, and economic strategies to strengthen Ukraine's position in the ongoing conflict with Russia. Zelensky also met with Donald Trump on September 27 in which Trump articulated he could easily broker a peace deal with Russia while Zelensky emphasized the need to stop Russian aggression and highlighted the importance of U.S. support.

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