



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

## U.S. will impose reciprocal tariffs from April 2: Trump

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### Trade in numbers

Tables show top exports and imports between the U.S. and India from April 2024 to Nov. 2024

India's total exports to the U.S.

**\$52.9** billion

#### TOP EXPORTS TO U.S.

Electrical machinery	\$7.6bn
Precious stones/metals	\$6.3bn
Pharmaceuticals	\$5.9bn



India's total imports from the U.S.

**\$29.6** billion

#### TOP IMPORTS FROM U.S.

Mineral fuels and oils	\$9.9bn
Precious stones/metals	\$3.2bn
Nuclear reactors & boilers	\$2.8bn

Former U.S. President Donald Trump criticized high tariffs imposed by India and other countries, calling them "very unfair." In his first address to Congress in his second term, he announced that from April 2, the U.S. would impose reciprocal tariffs on nations that levy high tariffs on American goods. Trump emphasized that countries like the EU, China, Brazil, India, Mexico, and Canada impose significantly higher tariffs on the U.S. than vice versa. He specifically pointed out India's auto tariffs

exceeding 100% and reiterated his plan to introduce reciprocal tariffs soon, a stance he had previously mentioned during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit.

### 'India won't be spared'

Former U.S. President Donald Trump reaffirmed that India would not be exempt from reciprocal tariffs, emphasizing that the U.S. has been unfairly treated in global trade. He pointed out that China's tariffs on American products are twice as high as U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods, while South Korea's are four times higher, despite receiving U.S. military support. Trump argued that the U.S. has been exploited by many countries for decades and vowed to end this imbalance. Starting April 2, the U.S. will impose reciprocal tariffs, matching those imposed by other nations. He also warned of non-monetary barriers against countries that restrict U.S. market access, predicting that these measures would generate trillions of dollars and boost job creation.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump announced additional tariffs of 25% on imports from Canada and Mexico and 10% on imports from China, citing unfair trade practices. In response, Canada will impose 25% tariffs on \$30 billion worth of U.S. goods starting March 4, 2025, while Mexico plans to announce its retaliatory measures soon. China also declared additional tariffs of up to 15% on key U.S. farm products. Trump defended the move, criticizing high tariffs imposed by other nations, including China and South Korea, and vowed that reciprocal tariffs would take effect from April 2 to protect U.S. interests and boost job creation.

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## No response from India on Trump tariffs so far

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Indian government did not respond to U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement of reciprocal tariffs against India. His speech followed Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's meeting with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and planned talks with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) set to be finalized later this year. India's inclusion in the tariff list was seen as a setback, as officials had hoped Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent Washington visit and trade discussions might delay Trump's decision. However, officials believe there is still time for negotiations with the U.S. administration.

#### Global responses

India remained silent on U.S. President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs, unlike China, Mexico, and Canada, which announced counter-tariffs and filed WTO complaints. Brazil has also not responded, but President Lula da Silva dismissed Trump's threats of further tariffs on BRICS nations, affirming their commitment to reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar. Attention is now on Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's meetings in Washington, where discussions on the first phase of the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) are ongoing, with a focus on potential tariff reductions. Before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit, India had already lowered tariffs on bourbon whiskey, wines, motorcycles, and electric vehicles.

#### 'Fair-trade terms'

India and the U.S. aim to increase bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, more than doubling the 2024 trade value of \$200 billion, with a focus on fairness, national security, and job creation. To achieve this, both countries plan to negotiate the first phase of a multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall 2025, with expectations of finalizing a deal by September 2025, according to a joint statement issued in February.

## Bofors case: CBI sends judicial request to U.S. seeking information from private investigator

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has sent a judicial request to the U.S. for information from private investigator Michael Hershman regarding the Bofors guns pay-off case. The CBI had informed a special court in December about its plan to approach him. Despite multiple letters and reminders sent to U.S. authorities between November 2023 and August 2024, no information has been received, with the U.S. requesting more time. In 2017, Hershman stated in a TV interview that he was willing to assist Indian agencies. He had previously been hired in 1986 by then-Finance Minister V.P. Singh to investigate suspected currency control violations by wealthy Indians through his firm, the Fairfax Group.

#### Bribery allegations

Michael Hershman claimed that during his inquiry, he found leads suggesting Bofors had paid bribes through banks for a defense deal with India. He alleged that he was offered bribes twice to halt the investigation and also received death threats. The CBI took note of his statements. The Bofors gun contract was signed on March 24, 1986, under then-Prime Minister and Defence Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The CBI registered the case in 1990 and later filed chargesheets, alleging ₹64 crore was paid as a commission. In 2004-05, the Delhi High Court dismissed charges against Rajiv Gandhi and others. The CBI's 2018 appeal to the Supreme Court against this decision was rejected due to delay.



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## Ropeway projects in Kedarnath, Hemkund Sahib get Centre nod

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved two ropeway projects in Uttarakhand under the National Ropeways Development Programme, Parvatmala Pariyojana. These projects, costing ₹7,000 crore, will connect Sonprayag to Kedarnath and Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib, significantly reducing travel time to the high-altitude pilgrimage sites. The 12.4-km Govindghat-Hemkund Sahib ropeway, costing ₹2,730.13 crore, will be built in a DBFOT mode, easing the current 21-km uphill trek. It will benefit 1.5 to 2 lakh annual pilgrims and also support tourism to the nearby Valley of Flowers, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

#### Passenger capacity

The Uttarakhand ropeway projects will be developed under a public-private partnership using advanced gondola technologies. The Govindghat-Hemkund Sahib ropeway will feature a Monocable Detachable Gondola for the 10.55-km Govindghat-Ghangaria stretch and a Tricable Detachable Gondola (3S) for the 1.85-km Ghangaria-Hemkund Sahib section, with a capacity of 11,000 passengers per day. The 12.9-km Sonprayag-Kedarnath ropeway, costing ₹4,081.28 crore, will carry 18,000 passengers daily and cut travel time from 8-9 hours to just 36 minutes. Currently, pilgrims use helicopters, ponies, or walk 16 km to reach Kedarnath.

## Jaishankar, British Foreign Secretary discuss Ukraine, Bangladesh, bilateral ties

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

During his official visit to the U.K., External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with British Foreign Secretary David Lammy for discussions on bilateral relations and key geopolitical issues, including Ukraine, Bangladesh, West Asia, and the Commonwealth. Jaishankar emphasized that India-U.K. ties contribute to global stability. The U.K. and France are leading Europe's evolving stance on the Russia-Ukraine war following a U.S. policy shift. Discussions also touched on trade negotiations, strategic cooperation, education, technology, and mobility. The meeting took place at Chevening House, with both Ministers' spouses also present.

#### Resetting ties

The Labour Party, under Keir Starmer, is working to rebuild its relationship with India and British Indians, which had strained over its stance on Modi government policies, including Jammu and Kashmir. Meanwhile, India and the U.K. have also been resetting their bilateral ties, a process that began during the latter years of Conservative rule (2010-2024). External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar last visited the U.K. in November 2023.

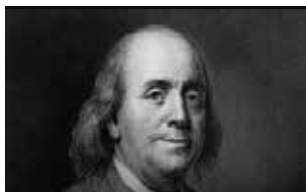
## Reserve Bank to buy ₹1 lakh crore G-Secs

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday announced open market purchases of government securities (G-Secs) of ₹1 lakh crore. The move followed a review of current and evolving liquidity conditions, the banking regulator said.

#### Two tranches

The RBI will inject liquidity in two phases: ₹50,000 crore on March 12 and the remainder on March 18. Additionally, it will conduct a \$10 billion rupee/U.S. dollar swap for a 36-month tenor on March 24. The RBI stated it will continue monitoring liquidity and market conditions, taking necessary measures to maintain stability.



*“If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it.”*

*–Benjamin Franklin*

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## Trump vows to stick with his plan to reshape America in Congress speech

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. President Donald Trump delivered a defiant address to Congress, vowing to continue his aggressive economic, immigration, and foreign policy reforms. His 99-minute speech reinforced his commitment to reshaping the federal government and America's global role, while Democratic lawmakers protested with silent dissent, placards, and one ejection. Trump reaffirmed his hardline trade policies, promising reciprocal tariffs and downplaying concerns over price increases. In response, Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin advocated for responsible change that preserves democracy. The speech underscored Trump's unyielding approach and the stark political divide in Washington.

## Zelenskyy is ready for peace talks, deal on minerals: Trump

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

President Donald Trump announced that Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy had written to him, expressing gratitude for U.S. support and readiness to negotiate a peace deal with Russia. Zelenskyy also indicated willingness to sign a critical minerals agreement with the U.S. to secure future American backing. Trump's remarks followed a tense White House meeting with Zelenskyy, exacerbated by Vice President J.D. Vance's skepticism about a proposed international security force for postwar Ukraine. Quoting Zelenskyy's letter, Trump emphasized Ukraine's eagerness to negotiate for lasting peace.

### 'Strong leadership'

President Trump quoted Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy as expressing readiness to work under Trump's leadership for a lasting peace and appreciation for U.S. support in maintaining Ukraine's sovereignty. Zelenskyy also indicated willingness to sign a minerals deal at Trump's convenience. While Trump acknowledged the letter, he did not specify if it would influence his Ukraine policy.

## Over-centralisation threatens federal health policy

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Dr. Tanvi Behl vs Shrey Goyal (2025)* struck down domicile-based reservations in post-graduate medical admissions, citing a violation of Article 14. While promoting meritocracy, the judgment overlooks the role of such reservations in State public health planning. By centralizing medical education policy, it may discourage State investment in government medical colleges, potentially harming competitive federalism.

### Domicile quotas in State health planning

Domicile-based reservations in post-graduate medical courses help States retain specialists by ensuring that locally trained doctors serve within their healthcare systems. The Supreme Court's recent ruling striking down these quotas disrupts this pipeline, making States reliant on external recruitment, which is inefficient and unpredictable. The decision may discourage State investment in medical education, weakening infrastructure and exacerbating regional healthcare disparities. Unlike premier central institutions that have selection autonomy, State medical colleges—critical to public health—are now denied this flexibility. Given that medical education is integral to public health, excessive centralization limits States' ability to formulate policies suited to their healthcare needs.

### The fallacy of absolute meritocracy

The Supreme Court's rigid meritocratic approach overlooks structural inequities in India's medical entrance system. NEET-PG results reveal flaws, such as candidates with negative marks qualifying due to percentile-based cutoffs. In 2023, the National Medical Commission reduced the qualifying percentile to zero to fill vacant seats, highlighting inconsistencies in merit assessment. While undergraduate admissions consider regional and socio-economic disparities, post-graduate admissions do not. Past judgments have emphasized that merit should align with societal outcomes, not just abstract scores. Domicile-based reservations support healthcare access by retaining specialists in their home States, reducing regional disparities, and promoting a more inclusive definition of merit.

## Need for a reconsideration

The Supreme Court's ruling against domicile-based reservations in post-graduate medical admissions warrants re-evaluation, as it was based on an outdated healthcare framework. Retaining specialists within State health systems is crucial, especially given challenges like COVID-19 and rising non-communicable diseases. Instead of eliminating quotas, a balanced approach—such as Tamil Nadu's model linking quotas to public service mandates—should be considered. The ruling's rigid meritocratic approach overlooks public health realities, weakens State investment, and risks worsening regional disparities. A reconsideration is necessary to uphold competitive federalism and ensure medical education aligns with State healthcare priorities. Judicial doctrine must evolve to balance federalism, medical education, and public health needs.

## DeepSeek's market disruption must awaken India

### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

DeepSeek, a Chinese financial trading company, has disrupted the global tech industry and stock markets with its low-cost AI model, challenging U.S. dominance in AI. Its generative AI models rival OpenAI's ChatGPT while being significantly cheaper to develop and operate. This breakthrough has drawn attention from policymakers and business leaders, including Mark Zuckerberg, who mobilized engineers to analyze DeepSeek's success. The development has reshaped perceptions of China's AI capabilities and intensified competition in the field.

### Placing China at an advantage

DeepSeek's cost-efficient AI innovation challenges India's dominance in the global IT sector by reducing reliance on skilled, English-speaking labor. Generative AI eliminates skill and language barriers, enabling cheaper and more efficient alternatives to traditional IT service providers. This disruption accelerates competition, posing a serious threat to India's long-standing advantage in cost-effective IT services.

DeepSeek's AI breakthrough enhances China's position in AI and IT services through automation, challenging India's labor-driven IT model. With AI replacing repetitive tasks, India's traditional cost advantage diminishes. DeepSeek's success highlights that Indian IT firms are lagging behind Chinese counterparts in technological innovation and competition.

DeepSeek demonstrates the importance of investing in R&D, even as a secondary focus. Its success shows that Indian IT firms should allocate surplus capital and idle resources toward innovation rather than just optimizing workforce efficiency.

Companies should encourage research, experimentation, and a tolerance for failure rather than focusing solely on immediate business goals. DeepSeek's success highlights the value of taking risks without guaranteed returns, fostering innovation through a culture that embraces failure as part of the process.

Indian IT firms should prioritize R&D, even as a secondary pursuit, to drive breakthrough innovations. Building an ecosystem that values long-term innovation over short-term efficiency is essential for sustained success.

### Future priorities for India

India's R&D investment is significantly low, with GERD below 1% of GDP, compared to China's 2.43%. This gap highlights the urgent need for policy intervention to boost domestic R&D, particularly in AI and advanced research. A major challenge is inadequate investment in top talent, such as PhDs, who are crucial for innovation.

India's policy debate between manufacturing and services is misguided, as both sectors complement each other. With IT dominance under threat, India must focus on integrating AI to enhance productivity rather than replace jobs. Traditional advantages like cheap labour and English proficiency are insufficient in an AI-driven economy. Retaining high-skilled talent is crucial to fostering domestic innovation.

### Focus on quantum technology

India must prioritize quantum computing to stay competitive in the next technological frontier. Increased R&D investment in quantum technology and AI, along with recruiting top researchers, is essential for maintaining technological leadership in the coming decades.



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## Warriors of hope

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) were introduced in 2005 under the National Rural Health Mission to serve as a crucial link between rural communities and the public healthcare system. Over a million ASHAs now play a key role in health monitoring, disease intervention, maternal and child health, and sanitation. Their trusted presence during the COVID-19 pandemic elevated their global recognition, earning them the WHO Director-General's Global Health Leaders Award in 2022. A study in PLOS Global Public Health found that women connected with ASHAs are 1.6 times more likely to access maternal services and have safer, institutional deliveries.

Despite their critical role in public health, ASHA workers continue to protest for fair wages and equitable treatment 20 years after their inception. The issue stems from their designation as volunteers, making them eligible only for a small fixed salary and incentive-based earnings, typically ranging from ₹5,000 to ₹15,000 per month. Though a benefit package was introduced in 2018, ASHAs endure long hours, extensive travel, and personal health neglect. The government must recognize their contributions by granting them permanent employee status with fair compensation and benefits comparable to other government workers.

## A brief history of the Russia-Ukraine war

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Recent developments in the Ukraine conflict have led to a major shift in U.S. policy under President Donald Trump. Disagreements between Kyiv and Washington resulted in a public spat between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Trump, prompting the U.S. to pause military aid. Zelenskyy later expressed regret and signalled Kyiv's willingness for a partial truce and cooperation with Trump for peace. Europe was caught off guard by these rapid geopolitical changes, while Russia remains watchful as the war continues.

#### How did the war begin?

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, President Vladimir Putin likely expected a swift victory, as did Western nations, which evacuated their embassies. However, Ukraine, backed by U.S. weapons, resisted, prompting the West to impose sanctions on Russia and heavily arm Ukraine. This strategy initially forced Russian retreats from Kharkiv (September 2022) and Kherson (November 2022). In response, Putin escalated the conflict by annexing four Ukrainian regions and announcing a partial mobilization, signaling a readiness for prolonged war. Economically, Russia pivoted to Asian markets, including China and India, to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions.

#### Where does the war stand today?

Since 2023, Russia has steadily gained ground in the Ukraine war, capturing key cities such as Soledar, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Krasnohorivka, and Vuhledar. Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive in the south failed against strong Russian defenses. In August 2024, Ukraine briefly seized 1,000 sq. km in Russia's Kursk region but could not stop Russia's eastern advances. By early 2025, Russian forces had taken Velyka Novosilka, parts of Toretsk, and were attempting to encircle Pokrovsk. While Ukraine has intensified drone and missile strikes on Russian territory and the Black Sea, it has remained on the defensive for over two years.

#### Why has Trump changed America's Ukraine policy?

After taking office in January, U.S. President Donald Trump moved quickly to shift America's Ukraine policy. His administration ruled out NATO membership and security guarantees for Ukraine. Soon after, Trump held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, leading to two rounds of direct negotiations between the U.S. and Russia. Trump's approach suggests a strategic reset, prioritizing China as the primary U.S. adversary rather than Russia. This mirrors Cold War-era diplomacy but in reverse—seeking better ties with Moscow to counter Beijing. Believing Ukraine cannot win, Trump is pushing Kyiv to accept a U.S.-brokered deal to end the war.

#### How does Europe look at the developments?

Europe is struggling to adapt to the shifting U.S. stance on Ukraine. While hesitant about Ukraine's NATO membership in 2008, Germany and France later mediated the Minsk accords to resolve the 2014 crisis, but the accords failed, leading to full-scale war. The conflict has imposed severe economic costs on Europe, including the loss of Russian gas, triggering recession and political instability, particularly in Germany. Now, with Trump engaging directly with Russia and side-lining both Ukraine and Europe, European nations are uncertain about their role. Divided and lacking independent security capabilities, Europe faces larger concerns, including NATO's future amid America's foreign policy shift.

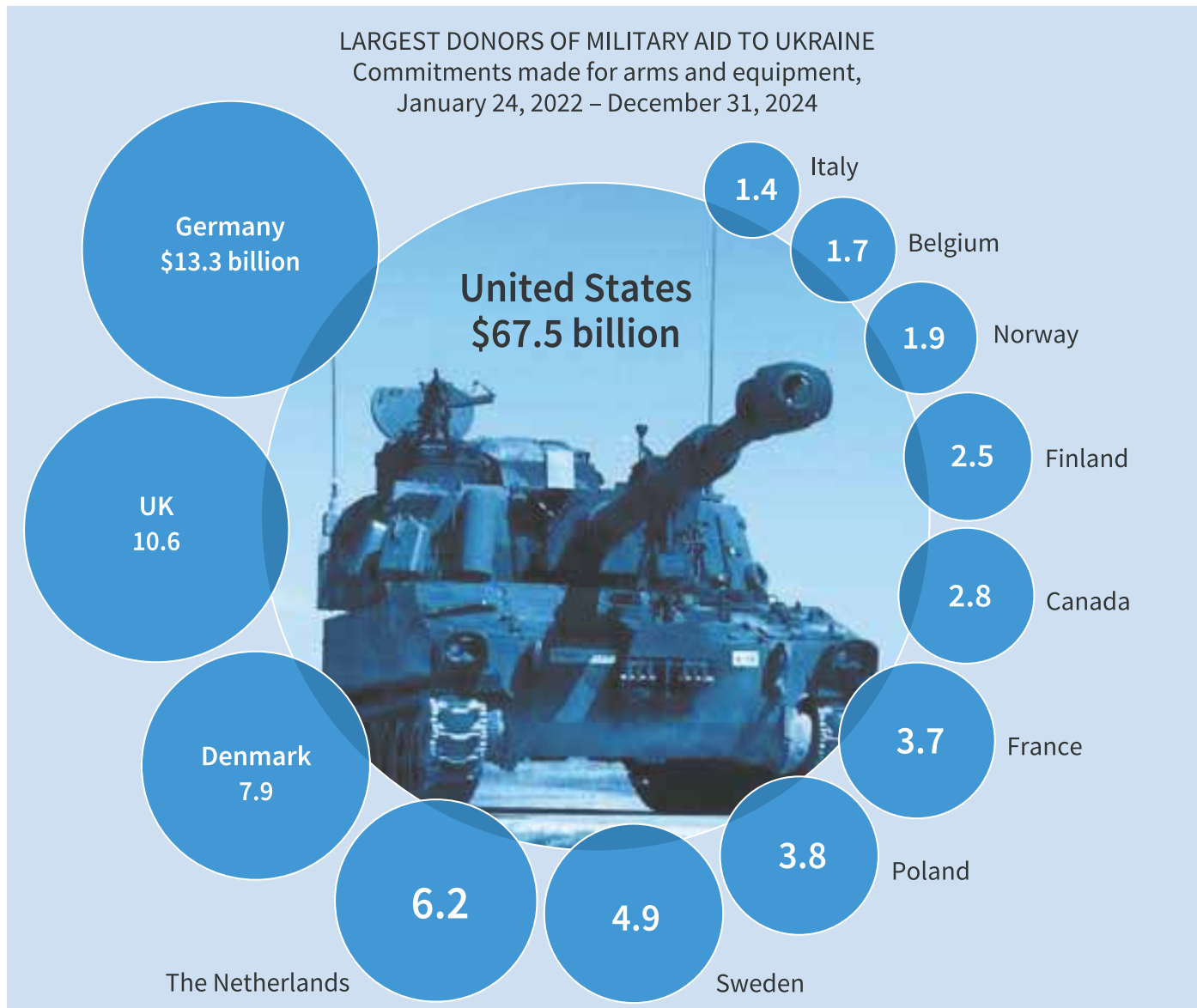
**Where does it leave Ukraine?**

Ukraine has lost over 20% of its territory, suffered heavy military and civilian losses, and faces a collapsing economy and energy crisis due to Russian attacks. It relies on external military aid but struggles with a manpower shortage. The U.S. no longer sees Ukraine reclaiming lost land and has withdrawn its NATO membership promise, leaving Ukraine without security guarantees. Continuing the war risks further losses, while stopping means accepting terms dictated by Russia and the U.S. Ultimately, Ukraine finds itself trapped in a great-power struggle, with limited options and no clear path forward.

## A shift in policy

Donald Trump's actions suggest a shifting U.S. worldview, according to which China is the systemic threat to its primacy. A Sino-Russian alliance could make that threat perilous.

The U.S. now wants Kyiv to take the deal the U.S. plans to make with Russia and end the war



TOTAL COMMITMENTS TO UKRAINE BY DONOR GROUP  
Humanitarian, financial and military aid from January 24, 2022 – December 31, 2024

Europe	\$139.3bn	United States	\$120.2bn
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Sources: AP, Kiel Institute

Picture: NARA & DVIDS Public Domain Archive

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# Germany 2025 poll results: a highly fractured verdict

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### No clear winner

The data for the tables were collected from the website of Federal Returning Officer, Germany



**Next in line:** Friedrich Merz, who is expected to become Germany's next chancellor, speaks at a campaign rally

**Table 1:** How major parties in Germany fared in the 2021 and 2025 parliamentary polls (Only second votes considered)

Party	Vote % 2021	Change from 2017 (% points)	Vote % 2025	Change from 2021 (% points)
CDU	19	-7.8	22.6	+3.6
CSU	5.2	-1	6	+0.8
SPD	25.7	+5.2	16.4	-9.3
AfD	10.4	-2.2	20.8	+10.4
FDP	11.4	+0.7	4.3	-7.1
The Left	4.9	-4.3	8.8	+3.9
Greens	14.7	+5.8	11.6	-3.1

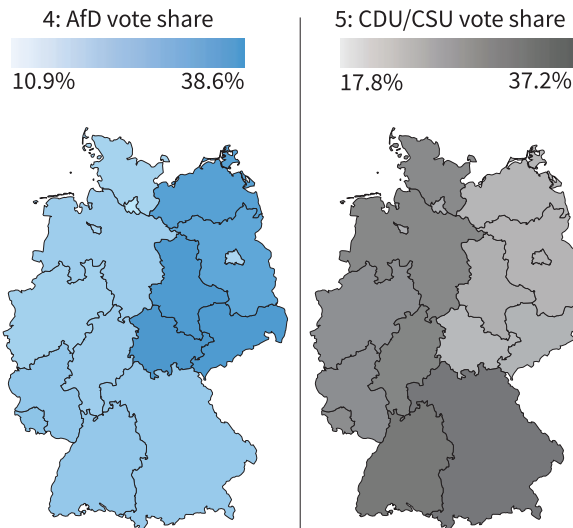
**Table 3:** Vote share in % and change in vote share (in brackets and in % points) in West Germany (Only second votes considered)

Federal States	2021		2025	
	CDU/CSU	AfD	CDU/CSU	AfD
Baden-Württemberg	24.8% (-9.6)	9.6% (-2.6)	31.6% (+6.8)	19.8% (+10.2)
Bavaria	31.7% (-7.1)	9% (-3.4)	37.2% (+5.4)	19% (+10)
Berlin	17.2% (-5.5)	9.4% (-2.6)	18.3% (+1.1)	15.2 (+5.8)
Bremen	17.2% (-7.9)	6.9% (-3.1)	20.5% (+3.3)	15.1% (+8.2)
Hamburg	15.4% (-11.8)	5% (-2.8)	20.7% (+5.3)	10.9% (+5.8)
Hesse	22.8% (-8)	8.8% (-3.1)	28.9% (+6)	17.8% (+9)
Lower Saxony	24.2% (-10.8)	7.4% (-1.7)	28.1% (+3.9)	17.8% (+10.4)
North Rhine-Westphalia	26% (-6.7)	7.3% (-2.2)	30.1% (+4.2)	16.8% (+9.6)
Rhineland-Palatinate	24.7% (-11.2)	9.2% (-2)	30.6% (+5.9)	20.1% (+10.9)
Saarland	23.6% (-8.8)	10% (0)	26.9% (+3.3)	21.6% (+11.5)
Schleswig-Holstein	22% (-12)	6.8% (-1.4)	27.6% (+5.5)	16.3% (+9.5)

**Table 2:** Vote share in % and change in vote share (in brackets and in % points) in East Germany (Only second votes considered)

Federal States	2021		2025	
	AfD	CDU/CSU	AfD	CDU/CSU
Brandenburg	18.1% (-2.1)	15.3% (-11.4)	32.5% (+14.4)	18.1% (+2.8)
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	18% (-0.6)	17.4% (-15.7)	35% (+17)	17.8% (+0.4)
Saxony	24.6% (-2.4)	17.2% (-9.7)	37.3% (+12.7)	19.7% (+2.6)
Saxony-Anhalt	19.6% (0)	21% (-9.3)	37.1% (+17.5)	19.2% (-1.8)
Thuringia	24% (+1.3)	16.9% (-11.9)	38.6% (+14.6)	18.6% (+1.7)

**Maps 4 and 5:** The maps show the vote share secured by CDU/CSU and AfD in 2025 elections



AfD - Alternative for Germany | CDU - Christian Democrats' Union  
 CSU - Christian Social Union | FDP - Free Democrats' Party  
 SPD - Social Democratic Party

The February 23 German parliamentary elections resulted in a highly fractured verdict, with no party crossing 30% of the vote share. The CDU-CSU emerged as the largest bloc with 28.6%, but its influence has waned since 2013. The election marked the rise of the far-right AfD, which gained 10.4 percentage points, securing dominance in eastern Germany and making strong inroads in western states. The ruling SPD suffered its worst-ever performance, dropping to third place with 16.4%. The FDP was eliminated from the Bundestag, while the Left saw an unexpected resurgence, nearly doubling its vote share to 8.8%. The newly formed Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) narrowly missed the 5% threshold for parliamentary entry.





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