

Political Data in 2018: Introducing the 2018 Political Data Yearbook

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Issues in national politics in 2018

The overviews in the yearbook for the past two years have highlighted instability at both the domestic and international levels (Bågenholm and Weeks, 2017; Bågenholm and Clark, 2018). By 2018, it is worth observing that the key continuity from what had gone before is, and is likely to remain for the foreseeable future, uncertainty in many, if not most, countries. Indeed, given the political and cultural conflicts playing themselves out in many advanced democracies, the unpredictability of events appears to be both a short-term feature, and arguably crucial to the ultimate resolution of these conflicts in the longer term.

Politically, in Germany, another Grand Coalition between the CDU/CSU-SPD was agreed, but the year saw power begin to slip away from Chancellor Angela Merkel. A beacon of European stability to many, Merkel was replaced as party secretary by Annegret Kamp-Karrenbauer. Merkel announced that she would stand down as Chancellor at the end of the parliamentary term. In Italy, Matteo Salvini's *Lega* and the inexperienced *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) formed a populist government led by a little-known law professor, Giuseppe Conte. The coalition was riven by internal conflicts from the start, with Salvini's effectively permanent campaigning mode easily overshadowing both Conte and M5S's Luigi Di Maio. Australia continued a remarkable run with the Liberal Party's Scott Morrison becoming its fifth Prime Minister in as many years. The results of 2016's so-called populist revolts in America and the UK continued to make themselves felt, with the Trump Presidency continuing on its uncertain and unconventional way, and stalemate between parliament and the May-led government over Brexit.

There were mixed performances economically. Israel performed well, growing at 3.3%, and with a low unemployment rate of 4%. Spain grew at 2.9% while Portugal grew by 2.6%. Unemployment on the Iberian peninsula remained high however, at 15.6% in Spain, and down from 9.6 to 7.6% in Portugal. Sweden grew at 2.3%, albeit with a slowing economy predicted in the short to medium-term for the country, and unemployment at 7%. Greece grew at 1.9% and exited its bailout agreement with its international 'troika' of creditors. Portugal also exited international financial supervision. Yet in numerous countries, there were signs that not all was well. Ireland, for example, highlighted last year as being on the road to recovery after the financial crisis, experienced a major problem of homelessness during 2018 which looked far from being resolved at year's end.

Immigration, asylum and integration continued to be salient and controversial issues in many countries, leading to policy disagreements and electoral upsets. By the end of the year the anti-immigrant *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) had won representation

in every regional parliament across Germany. Migration and refugee policy consequently remained an issue of contention between the parties in Germany's Grand Coalition. In Italy, the prominence of Matteo Salvini both during and after the election meant that immigration was seldom out of the headlines. Cross party agreement was found for a ban on face-masking, in a so-called 'Burqa Ban', in Denmark, while a similar law was passed in Luxembourg. The Danish People's Party also gained restrictions on housing convicted and rejected asylum seekers. Immigrants were linked to a spate of sexual assaults in Finland, which were investigated by police. The Hungarian government initiated anti-immigration amendments to its Basic Law and introduced a broader package of legislative measures to combat immigration. The 'Trump Wall' between Mexico and the USA to keep out migrants remained a high-profile issue. Conditions for refugees in Greece and elsewhere remained harsh. Immigration was a focus in the UK, with the Home Office implicated in the so-called 'Windrush scandal' where Caribbean citizens who moved to the country from the 1950s had been wrongly deported despite being British citizens. Race also became an issue for the UK Labour Party with widespread and repeated accusations of anti-semitism in the party under its left-wing leader Jeremy Corbyn.

In recent years, political violence has come largely to be associated with often suicidal Islamist terrorist attacks on urban centres in France, Britain, Sweden and elsewhere. Fortunately, this seemed to have subsided. In 2018 political violence clearly had other sources. In France, the 'Yellow Vest' movement began initially as the result of the introduction of fuel price rises. Its Saturday protests, evident across a number of cities, quickly turned violent not least in Paris. Claimed to be the worst political violence on the streets since 1968's uprising, the world saw central Paris blockaded and shops on the Champs Elysee burning. Violence began to abate after concessions on the fuel price rise, but the movement also crossed the border into Wallonia in Belgium, leading to protests there.

The far right were also responsible for political violence. In Germany, days of riots by right-wing extremists took place in Chemnitz, in the eastern part of Germany, with foreign-looking people attacked on the streets. The cause sparking this violence was the death of a German allegedly at the hands of asylum seekers. Greece equally saw a wave of far-right attacks against migrants and minorities, while a far-right extremist was arrested after injuring a number of migrants in a shooting incident in Southern Italy.

2018 however also saw the stirring of environmental consciousness in various countries. While populist parties continued to fascinate the press, less often commented on was the fact that Greens also made significant gains in some countries. In German Land elections, Greens became the second largest party in Bavaria, and in Hesse equalled the SPD's vote and seat share. Belgium saw large environmental protests towards the end of the year. Protests against specific measures were evident in a number of countries covered by the yearbook. For example, Canada saw controversy over the extension of pipelines towards its Pacific coast, with opposition not only from environmental activists but also indigenous communities.

Journalists continued to work under considerable pressure in a number of countries. Slovakian politics was dominated by the contract murder of an investigative journalist, Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, sparking widespread protests and ministerial resignations, including that of Prime Minister Fico. The fallout from the 2017 murder of Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia continued throughout 2018. In Greece, a newspaper

publisher and some of their editors were detained at the behest of the Defence Minister after pursuing a story which alleged Ministerial linkage to misuse of EU funds. The European Parliament instigated its Article 7 sanctions procedure on democratic rights against Hungary citing attacks on independent media as one important reason.

Other issues

The malign influence of corruption continued to be felt in numerous countries covered by the yearbook. One issue was party financing. Several Hungarian political parties were fined by the State Audit Office for illegal financing offences. The *Legas* in Italy were also fined 49m Euros for party financing offences committed in 2008–10. Other issues also made an impact. The Spanish Rajoy-led government fell as the result of a no confidence vote related to corruption. Czech Prime Minister Babiš was charged, with other politicians, with involvement in EU subsidy fraud. Financial services appeared particularly problematic. In Denmark, a money laundering scandal affected an important financial institution, Danske Bank. An Australian Royal Commission revealed assorted malpractices up to and including criminal behavior in the country's financial services sector. The President of the Bank of Latvia was charged with extortion and bribery which, with other linked issues including a shooting, led to calls for tightening money-laundering rules. The chair of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority was also linked to financial misdemeanours. The Speaker of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies was sentenced to 3 ½ year in prison for abuse of office.

More positively, a number of liberalizing measures were evident in several countries throughout the year. There were significant female appointments to high level courts, with women becoming Presidents of the Constitutional Court in Austria, and of the Council of State in Greece. In a milestone for drug policy, Canada saw legislation legalizing marijuana passed. Ireland repealed its anti-abortion constitutional provision by 66.4% to 33.6% in a referendum during the year. New Zealand's new Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern made international headlines when she announced she was pregnant in January, shortly after taking office. She gave birth in June. Pushing back against sexual harassment became an issue in several countries, for instance in Norway, New Zealand and Canada, with the prominence of the international #MeToo movement.

Conservative opposition to several measures nonetheless remained evident. Hungary has already been mentioned in relation to democratic backsliding. Poland was also in a similar situation, with the issue of judicial independence, among other problems, prominent during the course of 2018. The Istanbul convention, a legally binding Council of Europe instrument aimed at combating domestic violence and violence against women, proved controversial in some countries. In Bulgaria eight ministers voted against its ratification, while the Constitutional Court ruled the convention unconstitutional. In Croatia, ratification of the convention also led to votes against, and to one coalition partner party leaving government as a consequence.

Events in Spain are worth a special mention. 2018 saw the 40th anniversary of the country's post-Franco constitution. Yet, the issue of Catalanian secession and the fallout from the 2017 referendum remained arguably the most serious constitutional issue the country had faced since the adoption of that constitution. Catalan politicians were charged, after having been in jail for the best part of a year, with rebellion and misuse of public funds

having held an illegal referendum and declared secession. The affair threatened the new PSOE government's stability when the Catalan President threatened to withdraw support. It had international ramifications too, with several of the Catalan leaders charged, but residing elsewhere in Europe out of reach of Spanish prosecutors.

International affairs remained unstable. On a positive note, Canada and the USA managed to agree a renegotiated NAFTA deal after President Trump withdrew shortly after taking office. In Southern Europe, Greek Prime Minister Tsipras reached agreement with his Macedonian counterpart over the long-running border and naming dispute between the two countries, with the latter adopting the name Republic of North Macedonia. Russia continued to project itself on the international stage, leading to consequences both within countries covered by the yearbook, and internationally. The UK saw the poisoning of a former Russian agent and his daughter by the use of a chemical agent. This was traced back to Russia, with many countries acting in concert with the UK to expel Russian diplomats as punishment. There were diplomatic incidents between Russia and Greece, while the ongoing Mueller investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential election continued to draw headlines across the world, and saw numerous Trump aides indicted.

American government appeared particularly unstable under Trump's presidency, with regular high-profile resignations including some impacting upon international affairs and diplomacy. The Trump administration withdrew from important international arms control agreements. These included the Iran nuclear deal negotiated by the Obama presidency, and the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement. Trump also embarked upon a trade war with China, imposing a range of tariffs and sparking uncertainty around the world economy. The ongoing Brexit saga led to continued governmental chaos in the UK, with ten ministerial resignations during the year and a further eight among lower government ranks. This was also a major issue in Ireland, given its land border with the UK and Northern Ireland. A resolution to the dilemmas thrown up by that and Brexit more generally appeared nowhere in sight.

Elections and Referendums in 2018

Among the countries included in the yearbook, the year 2018 brought us eight lower house elections, three upper house elections, and four presidential elections. In seven countries regional elections took place. National referendums were conducted in five countries. Table 1 shows an overview of the elections that have taken place.

In many countries, the parliamentary elections were characterized by electoral gains by parties commonly characterised as populist parties (van Kessel, 2015). In the Hungarian parliamentary elections, prime-minister Viktor Orbán succeeded in winning close to 50 per cent of the vote – garnering support for his self-proclaimed ‘illiberal’ course (Meijers and van der Veer, 2019). In Italy, voters flocked to the two populist parties, M5S and Lega. In both the lower and upper house elections, the two parties secured almost 50 per cent of the vote. Also in Latvia coalition parties were challenged as populist KPV LV and the New Conservative Party each won 16 seats. In Sweden, the populist radical right Sweden Democrats (SD) was able to increase their vote share by the highest margin – becoming the third largest party behind the Social Democrats and Moderates, whose vote shares dipped slightly. In Slovenia,

Table 1. List of elections and referendums in 2018

Country	Lower house elections	Upper house elections	Presidential elections	Regional elections ^a	National referendums
Australia				3	
Austria				4	
Canada				3	
Cyprus	Yes ^b		Yes ^c		
Czech Republic		Yes	Yes		
Finland			Yes		
Germany				2	
Hungary	Yes				
Ireland			Yes		2
Italy	Yes	Yes			
Latvia	Yes				
Luxembourg	Yes				
Netherlands					1
Poland				16	
Romania					1
Slovenia	Yes				1
Spain				1	
Sweden	Yes			20	
Switzerland					10
USA	Yes	Yes			

^aLocal and municipal elections are not shown

^bParliamentary elections took place in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

^cPresidential elections took place in the Republic of Cyprus.

a centrist newcomer List of Marjan Šarec (LMŠ) shook up the electoral scene considerably as the former governing Party of the Modern Centre (SMC) lost around 25 per cent of the vote. In contrast, in Luxembourg coalition parties, on average, gained seats, despite the loss of long-standing governing party Christian Social People's Party (CSV).

In the United States, the Democrats secured control over the House of Representatives shifting the balance of power considerably in the United States. On the other hand, the Democrats failed to take control of the Senate – meaning that the Republicans held control over the Senate for the third consecutive term.

Presidential elections in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, and Ireland produced relatively comfortable victories for the incumbents. Also in these elections, nativist and populist rhetoric came to the vote (Rooduijn, 2019). In the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman secured his re-election after a campaign marked by nativist undertones. In Ireland, where the president has a largely ceremonial role, incumbent Michael D. Higgins won the election with considerable margin. Yet, an Irish-born businessman residing in the United States, Peter Casey, drew attention with strong nativist claims against the native ethnic group of Travellers. By contrast, in Cyprus, President Nikos Anastasiades won the election with a comfortable margin keeping more radical forces such as hardliner Nikos Papa-dopoulos at bay. The Finnish presidential election resulted in a landslide victory for incumbent Sauli Niinistö, running as an independent candidate, as he won over 60 per cent of the vote in the

first round. All the other candidates endorsed by the Finnish parties were not able to garner significant shares of the vote.

As is often the case, regional elections in 2018 have been indicative for broader political trends. And again here populist and nativist political parties have characterized the elections. In Germany, the electoral gains of AfD in two *Bundesländer* solidified the foothold of the populist radical right party in German politics. In Austria the populist radical right made headway in regional elections as it was able to increase its vote share in all four regional elections. In Sweden, the regional elections were contemporaneous with parliamentary elections and also saw significant gains for the Sweden Democrats. In the regional elections in Quebec, Canada, the *Coalition Avenir Québec* (CAQ) secured a plurality of the vote on a nationalist and conservative platform. In Ontario, nativist politics were an important factor in the win of Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives (PCs). Also in (predominately) Anglophone New Brunswick, the Progressive Conservatives topped the bill. In Poland, the regional elections were indicative of deep rifts in the Polish political landscape. The ruling party PiS, regularly accused of democratic backsliding (Meijers and van der Veer, 2019), won the plurality of the vote and won control over a total of eight provinces. Yet, while it did well in rural areas and small towns and municipalities, in the bigger cities the elections were won by parties in the opposition. In Spain, the neophyte populist radical right party VOX made its first electoral headway in the Andalusian regional elections by securing 11 per cent of the vote, which heralded its entry into national politics as a serious competitor.

National referendums were held on a wide-ranging number of topics. In Ireland, two referendum liberalizing policies in terms of 'social lifestyle' were held. Both the referendum on the abolition of restrictions on abortion and the referendum 'to repeal the offence of publication or utterance of blasphemous matter' were won with approximately two-thirds of the vote. Switzerland, with its rich tradition of referendums, held 10 referendums in 2018. The most controversial referendum was on the initiative to abolish the radio-television fee ("Billag fee") and received exceptionally high turnout as over 70 per cent of the people rejected the initiative. In the Netherlands, just before the advisory referendum was abolished four years after its introduction, a last advisory referendum was held on the Dutch Intelligence and Security Services Act on government surveillance powers. The government failed to garner support for their law and promised to make changes to the bill. In Slovenia, a referendum was held again on the same issue – pertaining to a law on the construction of a railway track – after a ruling of the Slovenian supreme court. The law remained in effect as the necessary threshold of no-votes was not achieved.

Changes in the Composition of Parliaments and Cabinets

Table 2 lists the changes in government and parliamentary composition during 2018 with particular emphasis on female representation.¹ Among the countries included, 13 new governments were formed. In some cases these were continuations of previous governments, in other cases, new cabinets were spearheaded by a newly appointed prime-minister or president. Hence in some countries the coalition parties remained in power, as was the case in Australia, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, and Slovakia. By contrast, we have seen government turnover in Italy, Spain, and Slovenia. These

Table 2. Cabinet and gender composition in government and parliament on 31 December (or last day in office for cabinets ending during 2018)

Country	Cabinet name	Start date of cabinet	No. of parties in cabinet	Type of cabinet ^a	Number of members in cabinet	Number of women in cabinet	% of women in cabinet	Number of women in the lower house ^a	% of women in lower house ^b
Australia	Turnbull II	19 July 2016	2	MWC	23	5	21.7	44	29.3↑
	Morrison I	28 Aug 2018	2	MWC	23	6	26.0↑		
Austria	Kurz I	18 Dec 2017	2	MWC	14	4	28.6↓	69	37.7↑
Belgium	Michel I	11 Oct 2014	4	MWC	18	4	22.2	56	37.3↓
	Michel I	9 Dec 2018	3	MC	13	3	23.1↑		
Bulgaria	Borissov III	4 May 2017	2	MWC	20	6	30.0↑	62	26.3↑
Canada	J. Trudeau I	4 Nov 2015	1	SPMA	35	16	45.7↓	91	27.0
Croatia	Plenković I	19 Oct 2016	2	MC	21	5	23.8↓	30	19.9↑
Cyprus ^c	Anastasiades I	28 Feb 2013	1	SPMI	12	1	8.3	10	18.1↑
	Anastasiades II	1 Mar 2018	1	SPMI	12	2	16.6		
Czech Republic	Babiš I	13 Dec 2017	1	SPMI	15	4	26.7	46	23.0↑
	Babiš II	27 June 2019	2	MC	15	4	26.7		
Denmark	Løkke	28 Nov 2016	3	MC	22	9	40.9	64	36.6↓
	Rasmussen III								
Estonia	Ratas I	23 Nov 2016	3	MWC	15	5	33.3↑	29	28.7↑
Finland	Sipilä I	29 May 2015	3	MWC	17	6	35.3	83	41.5↓
France	Philippe II	19 June 2017	5	OC	21	10	47.6↓	230	39.9↑
Germany	Merkel III	17 Dec 2013	3	MWC	13	6	46.2	219	30.9
	Merkel IV	14 Mar 2018	3	MWC	16	7	43.7↓	221	31.2↑
Greece	Tsipras II	23 Sep 2015	2	MWC	24	6	25.0↑	55	18.3
Hungary	Orban III	6 June 2014	2	OC	13	0	0.0	23	11.6↑
	Orban IV	18 May 2018	2	OC	13	0	0.0		
Iceland	Jakobsdóttir I	30 Nov 2017	3	MWC	11	5	45.5	24	38.1
Ireland	Varadkar I	14 June 2017	2	MC	15	4	26.7	35	22.2
Israel	Netanyahu IV	14 May 2015	5	OC	19	3	15.8	34	28.3↑
Italy	Gentiloni I	12 Dec 2016	2	OC	19	5	26.3	221	35.1↑
	Conte I	1 June 2018	2	MWC	19	5	26.3		
Japan	Abe IV	1 Nov 2017	2	OC	20	1	5.0↓	47	10.1
Latvia	Kučinskis I	11 Feb 2016	3	MWC	13	3	23.1↑	31	31.0↑
Lithuania	Skvernelis I	13 Dec 2016	2	MC	13	0	0.0↓	31	22.0↑
Luxembourg	Bettel I	4 Dec 2013	3	MWC	18	4	22.2	15	25.0
	Bettel II	5 Dec 2018	3	MWC	17	5	29.4↑		
Malta	Muscat II	9 June 2017	1	SPMA	15	2	13.3	10	14.9
The Netherlands	Rutte III	26 Oct 2017	4	MWC	16	6	37.5	47	31.3↓
New Zealand	Ardern I	26 Oct 2017	2	MC	19	6	31.6↓	49	40.8↑
Norway	Solberg II	11 Sept 2017	2	MC	19	9	47.4	70	41.2↓
Poland	Morawiecki I	11 Dec 2017	1	SPMA	23	6	26.1↓	133	28.9↑
Portugal	Costa I	26 Nov 2015	1	SPMI	18	5	27.8↑	82	34.8↓
Romania	Tudose I	29 June 2017	2	MWC	27	5	18.5	71	21.6↑
	Dăncilă I	29 Jan 2018	2	MWC	28	10	35.7↑		
	Dăncilă II	20 Nov 2018	2	MWC	26	8	30.8↓		
Slovakia	Fico III	23 Mar 2016	3	MWC	15	2	13.3↓	31	20.7
	Pellegrini I	22 Mar 2018	3	MWC	15	5	33.3↑		
Slovenia	Cerar I	18 Sep 2014	3	OC	17	8	47.1	25	27.8↓
	Šarec I	13 Sep 2018	5	MC	17	4	23.5↓		
Spain	Rajoy II	4 Nov 2016	1	SPMI	14	5	35.7	140	40.0↑
	Sánchez I	7 June 2018	1	SPMI	18	11	61.1↑		
Sweden	Löfven I	3 Oct 2014	2	MC	23	12	52.2	163	46.7↑
Switzerland	Berset	1 Jan 2018	4	OC	7	2	28.6	64	32.0↓
United Kingdom	May II	11 June 2017	1	SPMI	23	6	26.0↓	219	33.7↑
United States	Trump I	20 Jan 2017	1	^b	25	6	24.0↑	86	19.8↑

Legend: SPMA-single-party majority; SPMI-single-party minority; MWC-minimum winning coalition; MC-minority coalition; OC-oversized coalition; NP-non-partisan. The arrows indicate lower (down) and higher(up) percentage of women in government and parliament respectively compared to 31 December 2017.

Footnotes: ^aCalculated data listed here may deviate slightly from those presented in the country reports.

^bNot applicable. The President had majority support in both houses throughout 2018.

^cTRNC not shown

changes produced governments with a new ideological direction. In Italy, populist parties took control of government. In Spain, executive power changed hands from the centre right to the centre left. In Slovenia, the first Šarec government came forth from a highly diverse coalition of five parties.

Female representation in government and parliament overall remained rather similar at low average rates of 28.1 per cent female ministers in government and 29.0 percent female legislators. As was the case in 2017, we have seen a further reduction of the number of female ministers in 2018 from 28.4 to 28.1 per cent (Bågenholm and Clark, 2018). In parliament we see that the slight upward trend of the previous year continues as female representation increased from 28.5 to 29.1 per cent. Overall, however, these changes are very marginal indicating that equal representation remains a challenge for virtually all modern democracies.

The format of the Yearbook

The Yearbook includes 37 countries and covers the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018. The country reports follow the same structure as in the earlier editions. Each country report consists of a number of sections, with an emphasis on the inclusion of comparable, systematic data. The country reports broadly follow the following framework:

- Introduction
- Election report
 - Parliamentary elections
 - Presidential elections
 - Regional elections
 - National initiatives and referendums
- Cabinet report
- Parliament report
- Political party report
- Institutional change report
- Issues in national politics

The election reports discusses the relevant parliamentary, presidential elections, regional elections and/or referendums that have taken place that year. Each country report consists of a cabinet report and a parliament report. If a country has seen multiple cabinets in office or multiple parliaments, for instance after a general election, multiple cabinet/parliamentary reports are included. Significant changes to political parties are discussed in the political party report. Changes to the institutional design of a country's political system are addressed in the institutional change report. If an heading is not included, the theme in question was not relevant for the annual country report. Not all countries will have held a general election or will have seen significant institutional changes, for instance.

Note

1. Please note that the calculations of percentages shown may deviate slightly from the authors' own calculations in their country reports.

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