

ZeroFox Intelligence Geopolitical Brief for October 2023



TLP: CLEAR

B-2023-09-29b

Executive Summary

During the onset of Russia's war in Ukraine, ZeroFox warned the conflict would, among other things, have the unintended consequence of re-igniting hostilities across Russia's sphere of influence. At the start of the war, Ukraine's neighbors were among the most generous when it came to providing aid to Ukraine and accepting refugees from the conflict. A shared fear that an expansionist Russia would come after them next fostered a sense of brotherhood that temporarily suspended what had been widening nationalism across eastern Europe. Nearly two years into the war, the status quo is returning. Both Poland and Slovakia will hold elections in October 2023 and look set to elect politicians opposed to aiding Ukraine. This follows months of strained relations between Ukraine and its neighbors over the impacts the war is having on their economies. The politicians gaining ground in eastern Europe are largely opposed to sharing resources, which presents a problem for Western solidarity with Ukraine and demonstrates the utility of Russia's efforts to reduce support for Ukraine by targeting the economic interests of Ukraine's allies.

Divisions in Europe amongst countries seeking to join the European Union (EU), like the Balkan states of Kosovo and Serbia, or within the already-existing EU members of Poland and Hungary look set to remain challenges for years to come. This is in addition to the more obvious consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine, like severed energy and food supply chains and global inflation.

However, the biggest war-related conflict occurred in the small disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is claimed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war has left Russia unable to project power southward the way it has for decades, and its southern neighbors, like Azerbaijan, see an opportunity to gain ground, while weaker Russian protectorates, like Armenia, are seeing their more powerful neighbors take advantage of a distracted Russia. The complicated and ethnically diverse regions of central Asia and eastern Europe have countless similar moribund conflicts that could be revitalized because of the war.

This year is also ending with a series of consequential elections. The Latin American nations of Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela all have important elections in October 2023. Latin America is in the midst of an anti-incumbency wave, whereby the party in power loses the next election or is thrown out early. Such a political environment can quickly change the operating environment for businesses within a given country. Multinationals should be concerned that their investments could be upended by the policies of whoever assumes power. This has likely reduced the amount of business moving to these countries, while also increasing the number of industries who move abroad. Unfortunately, the late 2023 surge in elections will only continue in 2024, with Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), the entire EU, the United States, and India all having elections. Some of the trends seen in the 2023 Latin American and European elections are likely to feature prominently in these political races as well.

Key Findings

- China is expecting a surge in domestic and international travel to coincide with the Golden Week holiday.
- New Zealand will likely see a change of government, as the once-powerful Labour party is expected to lose the October elections.
- Ecuador's presidential election is unlikely to solve its crime and economic problems, with new elections coming shortly afterwards.
- The UK will experience another series of railway workers strikes in early October.
- Far-right parties in Poland and Slovakia look set to gain ground during October elections. However both elections could lead to lengthy coalition talks to form a government.
- Armenia could seek closer ties with the United States after Russia failed to again offer protection in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the presence of other growing U.S. adversaries in the region means the ties will be limited.
- Neighboring Venezuela and Colombia both hold local elections in October.
- The prospect of a foreign intervention in Niger has diminished, with coup leaders likely to further consolidate power in the coming months.
- Domestic politicians in Poland, Slovakia, and other European countries have expressed the desire to limit aid to Ukraine.
- India's extensive trade ties with Western nations are unlikely to be impacted by its geopolitical dispute with Canada over the killing of a dual national in Canada.
- The EU increased efforts to protect its leading industries by launching a far-reaching subsidies investigation against Chinese vehicle makers.
- Violence could continue between Israelis and Palestinians in early October during key religious holidays.
- Kenya looks likely to lead a foreign intervention to fight gang power in Haiti before the end of 2023.
- Sudanese rulers are reportedly considering moving the seat of power which could divide the country in two again.

Key Threats and Developments



Indian-Canadian relations reached a nadir that is unlikely to impact Indian-Western relations.



The growth of far-right and nationalist governments usually coincides with less international cooperation.



Russia's dominance of central Asia looks set to weaken.



Ukraine's counteroffensive should slow in October, despite vows to fight through the winter.



A foreign intervention in Haiti looks likely before 2024.



Peru is the latest LATAM country to impose harsh security measures in response to an uptick in



EU leaders' concern with economic competitiveness is likely to prompt a wave of protectionism.



Coup leaders in West Africa look safe after waiting out the threat of an unlikely foreign intervention.

SCOPE NOTE ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular intelligence product were identified prior to 3:00 PM (EDT) on September 28, 2023; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.



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Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict

On September 19, Azerbaijan launched a military operation to reclaim control of the disputed territory Nagorno-Karabakh (NKR). Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought two wars over the region, which is internationally recognized as Azerbaijani territory but was de facto self-ruled by its ethnic Armenian majority population. Azerbaijan agreed to halt its military campaign 24 hours later after Karabakh forces agreed to a ceasefire.[1]

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Armenia will withdraw any military contingencies in the region, while the Karabakh separatist forces will disarm and disband. Azerbaijan also committed to treat NKR's majority Armenian population as equal Azeri citizens; many residents and leaders in the region are concerned Azerbaijan could commit ethnic cleansing operations against the Armenian population. Azeri and Karabakh officials are still working out the final details of a surrender agreement; however, NKR forces have started to hand over their weapons.[2]

Forward Look:

- Armenia is preparing accommodations for refugees from the conflict. As of this writing, 40,000 NKR residents have fled to Armenia (over 30 percent of the NKR's 120,000 population).[3] More refugees can be expected over the next several weeks.
- After Azerbaijan's swift victory, it may look to reassert its demands for a transport route via the Zangezour Corridor.[4] Such a route would connect Azerbaijan to its landlocked enclave Nakhchivan, which is located within Armenia. Demands for the Zangezour Corridor could lead to renewed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- Azerbaijan controls several key oil and gas pipelines that deliver fuel to the Caucasus and Europe. Future conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan could disrupt oil and gas flows to these regions.

Eastern Europe Elections

- Slovakia:** General election on September 30, 2023
- Poland:** Parliamentary election on October 15, 2023

Forward Look:

- On December 15, 2022, the Slovak government lost a no-confidence vote, resulting in a snap election to be held on September 30, 2023. The current front runners are Robert Fico of the populist Smer Party and Michal Simecka of the liberal Progressive Slovakia Party. Mr. Fico is strongly opposed to sending more aid to Ukraine and, if elected, could have a significant impact on broader EU policy concerning the ongoing conflict.[5]
- On October 15, 2023, Poland will hold a parliamentary election. According to most recent polls, the two largest parties, right-wing Justice Party (PiS) and the centrist Civic Coalition (KO), will not win enough votes to gain a majority in the legislature. Therefore, either party will likely need the backing of the Confederation alliance in order to form a government. The Confederation is a coalition of smaller, right-wing parties with a history of ultranationalist, anti-Semitic rhetoric and radical policy proposals. If the Confederation alliance succeeds in playing this "kingmaker" role, Poland faces the threat of a further rightward drift, with an even greater erosion of democratic freedoms and institutions.[6]

European Politics

- UK:** Nationwide rail strikes on September 30 and October 4, 2023
- EU** launches inquiry into Chinese electric vehicle (EV) subsidies and other EU priorities for 2024
- Hostilities re-escalate between **Serbia** and **Kosovo**[7]
- Spain:** Political instability and protests over government formation and likely new elections until 2024

Forward Look:

- On September 30 and October 4, 2023, UK rail drivers from the ASLEF union will go on strike, which means an effective shutdown of the entire UK rail network. The strike over pay and working conditions is designed to coincide with the ruling Conservative Party Congress in the northwestern city of Manchester. Further strikes are likely, as neither the workers nor the UK government look willing to budge. The UK government says the pay rise the train workers are asking for would worsen inflation; having already agreed to smaller pay increases across the UK public sector, it is unlikely to give train drivers a bigger pay increase. Drivers have been striking periodically for over a year and are unlikely to stop without a significant pay raise. The ASLEF strike could be especially impactful as it coincides with a separate strike by workers on the London Underground network on October 4 and 6.
- On September 13, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a surprise investigation into the subsidies China provides to its EV producers. The EU will be investigating whether the price of Chinese EVs is kept artificially low, which is bankrupting European competitors. China has been accused of similar practices in other industries, mainly solar panels. Europe is especially sensitive to the issue because it is coming up against a slew of other economic issues. Costs of production are a major issue, and the EU is facing a problem where countless industries are finding it cheaper to operate outside the EU due to wages, energy costs, and regulation. This investigation could help save the EU clean energy industry and will likely end with additional tariffs on Chinese EV imports; expect it to conclude before 2025. Regardless of the outcome, this investigation marks a major geopolitical escalation from the EU against China and could lead to retaliation from China against EU producers.
- A recent incident in northern Kosovo raises further concerns about stability in the region. Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vucic, has requested that the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) take over security matters in northern Kosovo, in spite of Serbia's historic objections to NATO. Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti accuses the Serbian government of supporting "the professional unit" that attacked Kosovo Police and seized a monastery in late September. This incident has exacerbated already-elevated tensions in the Balkan region, posing challenges for ongoing efforts by EU and U.S. mediators to normalize ties between Serbia and Kosovo. The violent confrontation might derail recent negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, which had seen some progress with the approval of a 10-point EU plan for normalizing relations. Russia, traditionally allied with Serbia, might see the situation as an opportunity to reinforce its influence in the region against EU expansion for both states, particularly given President Vucic's pro-Russian stance.
- The winners of the July general elections, the conservative Popular Party (PP), failed to form a new government. The second-place finisher, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, has a more realistic chance of forming a new government and avoiding repeat elections in December. However, he would have to grant unpopular concessions to sessionist Catalan parties to do so. Expect the PP to stage widespread protests to poison Sanchez's chances of forming a new government.

FOOTNOTES

- [hXXps://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-declares-victory-as-surrender-talks-begin-with-karabakh-armenians](https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-declares-victory-as-surrender-talks-begin-with-karabakh-armenians)
- [hXXps://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-karabakh-armenian-fighters-start-giving-up-arms-2023-09-23/](https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-karabakh-armenian-fighters-start-giving-up-arms-2023-09-23/)
- [hXXps://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66931178](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66931178)
- [hXXps://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-armenia-negotiations-zangezour-corridor/32613002.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-armenia-negotiations-zangezour-corridor/32613002.html)
- [hXXps://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/25/slovakian-elections-qa-country-votes-after-four-pms-in-five-years](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/25/slovakian-elections-qa-country-votes-after-four-pms-in-five-years)
- [hXXps://www.euronews.com/2023/09/15/poland-is-one-month-away-from-an-election-that-could-shake-up-its-national-politics](https://www.euronews.com/2023/09/15/poland-is-one-month-away-from-an-election-that-could-shake-up-its-national-politics)
- [hXXps://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/25/violence-leaves-kosovo-serbs-in-fear-and-disbelief-over-attack/](https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/25/violence-leaves-kosovo-serbs-in-fear-and-disbelief-over-attack/)



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Latin America Updates

- **Peru:** President declares state of emergency in Lima over criminal activity until November 2023
- **Haiti:** Powerful criminal gangs call for government overthrow ahead of possible foreign intervention by December 2023[8]
- **Guatemala:** President elect Arévalo suspends transition after government raids

> Forward Look:

- On September 18, 2023, Peruvian President Dina Boluarte announced a state of emergency in the San Juan de Lurigancho and San Martín de Porras districts in the capital of Lima and in the Sullana district in Piura due to a spike in criminal activity. The announcement follows a grenade attack in a nightclub and an overall increase in organized crime-related violence. As part of this state of emergency, military forces will work in coordination with civilian police, and some civil rights, such as the privacy of a person, will be suspended. Most of the region is experiencing a crime wave linked to the drug trade. Peru is a major drug-producing nation, but criminal networks linked to trafficking are a growing problem, led by neighboring Ecuador. Violence in Ecuador has worsened the more confrontational security forces have become with the drug traffickers, which could be replicated in Peru. Tough-on-crime policies are proving politically popular, however. The emergency order is likely to be extended beyond November, as the crime situation is likely to continue.
- Haitian gang leader Jimmy Chérizier has called for the armed overthrow of the government of Prime Minister Ariel Henry after progress was reportedly made on securing a foreign intervention in the country. Kenya is reportedly set to lead a foreign military intervention of between 1,000 and 2,000 troops into Haiti by November or December 2023. Gangs have been gaining more territory in Haiti since Henry assumed power after the assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse. Moïse, who had been ruling by decree after failing to organize elections and firing several PMs, hired Henry just days before his killing. With most other elected offices vacant, Haiti has a crisis of leadership, and the security situation has been deteriorating since. Kidnappings and gangs outgunning the remaining security forces are common. Previous foreign military interventions have proven unpopular and had little impact on alleviating rampant crime and poverty. The gang response will likely be violent, and the crisis could spread elsewhere. However, the neighboring Dominican Republic has closed its borders with Haiti. A major refugee crisis in other parts of the region is therefore likely.
- On September 13, 2023, President-elect Bernardo Arévalo suspended his cooperation with the transition process with the government of outgoing President Alejandro Giammattei. Arévalo suspended cooperation a day after the Attorney General's office raided the headquarters of the electoral tribunal and investigated the ballots from the first round of the election on June 25. Arévalo emerged as the surprise winner of those elections and then won the second round easily in late August. However, between the first and second rounds of the election, fraud accusations were leveled against Arévalo.[9]
- Arévalo was the surprise winner, mainly because all of the other anti-corruption candidates with higher name recognition were disqualified on dubious grounds by the Giammattei government. Arévalo was likely only allowed to run because he was not viewed as a threat. Continued efforts to overturn the election suggest the political status quo may not permit Arévalo to assume office in January 2024. Even if he does assume power, Arévalo has little support in Congress, where incumbent parties did well in the elections; the likelihood he could institute major reforms is low. Nevertheless, further efforts to restrict Arévalo could result in widespread protests and social unrest.

Elections

- **Argentina:** First-round general elections on October 22, 2023
- **Ecuador:** Presidential elections on October 15, 2023
- **Venezuela:** Important primary elections on October 22, 2023[10]
- **Colombia:** Local elections on October 29, 2023

> Forward Look:

- On October 22, Argentina will hold general elections for members of Congress and the first round of presidential elections ahead of a likely second-round vote between the two leading candidates on November 19. Outsider candidate Javier Milei is the most likely presidential candidate, ahead of center-left candidate Sergio Massa and tough-on-crime conservative Patricia Bullrich. Milei is likely benefiting from the anti-status quo sentiment across the region, where incumbent political parties perform poorly regardless of their political affiliation. Milei's primary campaign issue has been dollarizing the Argentine economy to reduce inflation and end currency fluctuations with the peso. Milei has other controversial positions against abortion, increasing gun ownership, and drastically reducing public spending, but the lack of support for his candidates in general elections means he will have trouble passing reforms—and his efforts to dollarize the economy will take years. Massa is the ruling party's economy minister, making him vulnerable to accusations of economic mismanagement. In the coming weeks, expect street protests and efforts by the ruling government to regain lost ground. In the last few weeks, the government has announced plans to have only the rich pay income taxes and eliminate export taxes.
- On October 15, Ecuador will hold its final round of presidential elections between upset candidate Daniel Noboa of the centrist Acción Democrática alliance and Luisa González of the left-wing Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana party. Insecurity is the primary campaign issue, with the emergence of powerful criminal networks changing Ecuador from one of the region's safest countries to its most dangerous in two years. This campaign is also about former President Rafael Correa, living in exile in Belgium, whose candidates—led by González—have performed well in recent elections. However, none of the issues surrounding Ecuador's crime rate or a return to Correa-style left wing economics will be settled since this election is about finishing the last 18 months of the term of outgoing President Guillermo Lasso. Whoever wins the presidency will only have a matter of months before campaigning for the 2025 election.
- On October 22, Venezuela's opposition will be holding primary elections to determine their presidential candidate for the 2024 general elections against President Nicolás Maduro of the ruling Socialist Party (PSUV). The presidential elections are due in late 2024 but will likely be moved to fit Maduro's timeline.
- Maduro is unlikely to countenance anything that risks his hold on power, and the leading opposition candidate, María Corina Machado, is currently banned from running. This does not affect her participation in the primaries, which are being run by the opposition, but she will be barred from participating in the 2024 elections as they stand. In the near term, expect outreach from the United States about permitting the resumption of some Venezuelan oil exports in exchange for political concessions like allowing Machado to run. Candidates will continue to experience threats of physical violence, and Maduro may interfere in the primary elections to electorally harm candidates that pose a risk.
- On October 29, Colombia will hold local elections for governors, state representatives, mayors, and city council members. These will be a referendum on the politics of President Gustavo Petro, Colombia's first leftist president, who assumed office in 2022. While there is a lack of reliable polling, candidates affiliated with Petro will likely perform poorly.[11]

FOOTNOTES

- [8] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/21/haiti-jimmy-barbecue-cherizier-overthrow-prime-minister-ariel-henry>
- [9] <https://aristeguinoticias.com/1209/mundo/bernardo-arevalo-presidente-electo-de-guatemala-suspende-proceso-de-transicion/>
- [10] <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-08-22/as-primaries-near-venezuelas-opposition-warns-of-rising-attacks-its-a-policy-of-terror.html>
- [11] <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/27/world/latin-america/colombia-elections-2023.html>



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Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Ukrainian forces continue to make slow but steady gains across all axes of the front line. Ukraine has achieved notable recent successes in western Zaporizhzhia Oblast in the Orikhiv area. Troops broke through the main Russian line of defense near Verbove and have moved armored vehicles beyond Russia's defensive lines in the past several days. The advance of armored vehicles will allow Ukraine to widen its breach and threaten other key cities in the region.[12]

Western military officials have warned fall and winter weather will likely halt the counteroffensive in October; however, Ukrainian officials have vowed to stay on the offensive through the winter.[13] While it is unclear if Ukraine has the manpower or supplies necessary for such a protracted effort, Ukrainian commanders will likely attempt to maintain the offensive for as long as possible.

Forward Look:

- Russia has again begun targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure—reminiscent of its tactics during the fall and winter of last year. Further strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure can be expected ahead of the cold months.[14]
- Domestic politicians in Poland, Slovakia, and other European countries have expressed the desire to limit aid to Ukraine ahead of key elections.[15] Depending on the election results, these sentiments may threaten Western resolve to support Ukraine in the long term.

African Political Developments

- **DRC:** East Africa Community (EAC) extends military mission despite deadly protests until December 8, 2023
- **Nigeria:** Large nationwide strike starting on October 3, 2023
- On September 5, 2023, the EAC announced it was extending its military mission in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) until December 8. The DRC is a new member of the EAC, which is led by Kenya but also includes other powerful economies like Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda. The extension comes after DRC security forces killed 43 people and injured hundreds during protests calling on EAC and UN troops to leave the country. The EAC force was first deployed in late 2022 to the mineral-rich northeast, where dozens of rebel groups are present. However, rebel groups have continued to gain and hold territory, prompting allegations that neighboring Rwanda is aiding them. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is planning its own military mission to the DRC in September ahead of key DRC elections in December 2023. The DRC's mineral riches, led by cobalt, and growing population make it one of Africa's most attractive investment opportunities.
- Nigeria's largest workers group, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), alongside the Trade Union Congress (TUC), has called for an indefinite nationwide strike starting on October 3, 2023. The NLC has proposed and postponed numerous strikes over the economic policies of new President Bola Tinubu. After Tinubu assumed office in June 2023, he quickly removed a key fuel subsidy that is blamed for sapping Nigeria's budget. However, the removal caused a sudden escalation in inflation and the collapse of the Nigerian naira against the U.S. dollar. While economists agree the financial reforms were necessary, the quickness with which they were instituted has caused a major cost-of-living crisis, which could lead to social unrest or see the government backtrack on the necessary reforms. NLC has the capacity to stage disruptive protests that could escalate into violent protests and has urged locals to stock up on supplies ahead of the strike.

Niger and Gabon Coup

- **Gabon:** Transitional government made up of political status quo and continued French ties unveiled
- **Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso** sign mutual defense pact[16]

Forward Look:

- On September 16, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger signed a mutual defense pact called the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) that obligates them to come to one another's aid in the event of an attack. AES highlights shared economic and military cooperation, especially against the increasing jihadist attacks along the tri-border zone called the Liptako-Gourma region. However, all three militaries have been battling insurgencies in that zone for years, which have only worsened since coups in Mali and Burkina Faso between 2020 and 2022. Niger recently had a coup in July 2023, and violence has been escalating since. The main purpose of the AES is likely to dissuade the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which includes all three states as suspended members, from launching a military intervention. ECOWAS threatened a military intervention in Niger, specifically if the coup leaders did not return power to the democratically-elected government. While some assistance is likely in the event of an ECOWAS intervention, it is unlikely to be significant. Both Mali and Burkina Faso are overwhelmed by their own insurgencies; were they to send significant military support to Niger, their own governments would likely collapse.
- The prospect of an ECOWAS intervention in the short term is low, however, especially now that France has confirmed its military will leave Niger by 2024. Expect insecurity in the region to worsen and spread further south—especially into Benin and Togo and potentially into Ghana and Ivory Coast, which share similar demographics to southern Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.
- On September 13, General Brice Oligui Nguema announced the membership of the transitional government. Nguema led a coup against his cousin and longtime President Ali Bongo Ondimba in late August, days after Bongo won another term in office in elections that were likely fraudulent. The cabinet will be led by interim Prime Minister Raymond Ndong Sima, who held the same position under Bongo before running against him in previously. The cabinet is filled with other former vice presidents and members of parliament who served for Bongo, as well as some moderate political opponents. However, the cabinet does not include the main opposition parties led by Albert Ondo Ossa, who many believe was the actual winner of the August elections. While the choice of cabinet is intended to demonstrate that Nguema is committed to democracy after the coup, the inclusion of Bongo allies and only moderate opposition members shows that the coup is more about maintaining the political status quo revolving around the Bongo family. The coup leaders likely felt the aging Bongo was losing his grip on power after the clearly fraudulent August elections.
- Nguema also announced there would be a two-year transition period before new elections. Nguema is also expected to appoint 70 members of the assembly and 50 members of the senate, as well as propose a new constitution and electoral code. France will likely be able to work with Nguema, who is leading a much safer and wealthier country than the other former French colonies that have seen coups in recent years. However, Nguema has also made it clear that he intends to compete for power in the long term and that relations with France will remain largely unchanged, which could destabilize the relatively steady country. The new elections will likely only feature established political players linked to the Bongo family and their Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG).

FOOTNOTES

- [12] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-updates>
- [13] <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/4215092-clock-ticks-in-ukraines-offensive-as-bad-weather-approaches/>
- [14] <https://www.voanews.com/a/slovakia-s-election-threatens-to-impede-western-unity-on-ukraine/7286950.html>
- [15] <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russia-resumes-bombing-campaign-of-ukraines-civilian-energy-infrastructure/>
- [16] <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20230916-mali-niger-burkina-sign-mutual-defence-pact>



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Asia-Pacific Updates

- **Bangladesh:** Election-related opposition protests in September and October 2023
- **Indian and Canadian** dispute over Sikh separatists killing [17]
- **Malaysia** to ban exports of rare-earth metals
- **Maldives:** Second-round presidential election on September 30
- **China:** Extended Golden Week holiday from September 29-October 6

Forward Look:

- On September 19, India expelled a top Canadian diplomat, days after Canada did the same. Canada ordered the expulsion after revealing it believed the Indian government orchestrated the killing of a dual Canadian-Indian national, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who advocated for Sikh independence in India. This is the latest geopolitical dispute between the two sides, mainly related to Canadian criticism of India's human rights record. Canada has a large Indian population, and 2 percent of its population is Sikh. The dispute may cost Canada economically, since countless nations are looking to increase trade ties with India as its population becomes the world's largest and it improves its technology and manufacturing sectors to serve as a key alternative to China. The UK, EU, Australia, and the United States are all progressing well in trade talks with India, while Canada's has now been suspended. Canadian-Indian trade is largely inconsequential, unlike U.S.-Indian trade, for example. Therefore, do not expect widespread support for the Canadian side.
- Prime Minister Anwar announced that Malaysia would ban exports of rare-earth raw materials. Many countries are proposing similar bans, because the mining is done in their country but the processing—which is often more lucrative—is done elsewhere. The metal-producing countries are seeking to grow their share of metal processing via bans. Other rare-earth metals producers, including Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Argentina, and Chile, will likely announce similar projects.
- On September 30, the Maldives will hold the second and final round of its presidential elections between Mohamed Muizzu, the mayor of the capital Male who won the first round with 46 percent of the vote, and President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who won 39 percent. [18] The key geopolitical concerns for the election are relations between India, the closest global power to the Maldives, and China. Incumbent President Solih is more closely tied to India, and his victory in 2018 was seen as a blow to China, which forged closer ties under the previous administration using infrastructure spending tied to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Muizzu has the endorsement of imprisoned former president Abdullah Yameen, who has been banned from participating and campaigned on an "India Out" strategy. There will be heightened security around election infrastructure, which could see violence linked to criminal or militant groups. Islamic State-linked lone wolf attackers have injured presidential candidates in the past, but the risk of a terror attack is low during this election cycle. However, acts of violence linked to the election and political protests linked to perceived electoral interference are possible.
- China will hold its annual Golden Week holiday from September 29 to October 6. [19] The extra-long holiday is combined with the mid-autumn festival and should coincide with a surge in travel since this is the first Golden Week holiday since COVID-19 travel restrictions were eased. Although more than six months have passed since China fully removed its strict COVID-19 travel restrictions, it has not seen a tourism boom. This is largely because China suffered a sizeable COVID-19 outbreak after lifting restrictions, and Chinese consumers, fearful over the state of the Chinese economy, are saving money. Travel disruptions and road closures are likely, and most manufacturing factories will be closed to observe the holiday. South Korea will be holding its own travel-focused holiday during the same time called Chuseok.

Middle East Updates

- Opposition protests cooled while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to the United States for the United Nations General Assembly in late September 2023.
- The days leading up to, during, and after Rosh Hashanah (September 15-17, 2023) and Yom Kippur (September 24-25, 2023) saw intense clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli military near the border fence in the Gaza Strip, leading to at least seven Palestinian deaths and dozens of injuries. [20] Violent demonstrations were also reported in the West Bank. [21]
- Recovery operations are ongoing following an earthquake in **Morocco** and floods in eastern **Libya**.
- **Sudan:** There are plans to move seat of government to the Port of Sudan by October 2023.

Forward Look:

- Tensions in the Palestinian territories often escalate surrounding major Jewish holidays.
- Unrest should be expected to continue through at least Sukkot (September 29 - October 6, 2023), especially in the West Bank, as the celebration typically draws large crowds of religious Jews to contested holy sites in Jerusalem.
- To address the security situation, Israeli forces will likely deploy extra troops to the city, as well as put in place road closures and additional checkpoints.
- Recovery efforts are ongoing two weeks following a devastating flood in eastern Libya, which primarily impacted the city of Derna and left an estimated 20,000 people dead. While some aid workers have begun to leave the area because of the low likelihood of survival for rescuees, search and rescue operations will continue due to the level of widespread damage and casualties in Derna. Approximately 10,000 people remain missing in Derna, while 16,000 people were displaced due to the floods. [22]
- Moroccan officials allocated nearly USD 12 billion for recovery and reconstruction efforts in the Al-Haouz province near Marrakech following a devastating 6.8 magnitude earthquake. The effects of the quake killed nearly 3,000 people, and injured and displaced thousands more. Numerous towns were also flattened or severely damaged in the Atlas mountains, and the reconstruction of residences and infrastructure and rehousing efforts are expected to be a long-term effort. [23]
- Army commander General Abdel-Fattah El Burhan, who is effectively the President of Sudan, is reportedly set to move the seat of government from the capital Khartoum to the eastern city of Port of Sudan. Burhan assumed power in late 2021 after staging a coup just ahead of the full transition to civilian government. Since April 2023, the army has been engaged in an armed conflict with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia. The conflict has decimated the capital, Khartoum, and surrounding areas, where the RSF has increased its territory. [24]
- The conflict has touched most of the country and led to a massive refugee crisis. However, Port of Sudan has remained largely immune, and most embassies and international missions have moved operations there. The prospect of a new government in Port Sudan could further divide the country, with RSF seeking its own government in areas it controls.

FOOTNOTES

[17] [hXXps://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/sep/21/india-temporarily-suspends-visa-services-for-canadians-amid-rising-diplomatic-tensions-2616975.html](https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/sep/21/india-temporarily-suspends-visa-services-for-canadians-amid-rising-diplomatic-tensions-2616975.html)

[18] [hXXps://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/9/pro-china-muiz-leads-closely-watched-maldives-election-early-results](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/9/pro-china-muiz-leads-closely-watched-maldives-election-early-results)

[19] [hXXps://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1298874.shtml](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1298874.shtml)

[20] [hXXps://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-strikes-hamas-posts-in-gaza-amid-violent-rioting-on-border/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-strikes-hamas-posts-in-gaza-amid-violent-rioting-on-border/)

[21] [hXXps://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-759399](https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-759399)

[22] [hXXps://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-floods-derna-sense-abandonment-aid-workers-leave](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-floods-derna-sense-abandonment-aid-workers-leave)

[23] [hXXps://www.arabnews.com/node/2378246/middle-east](https://www.arabnews.com/node/2378246/middle-east)

[24] [hXXps://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-caretaker-govt-to-be-announced-end-of-this-month](https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-caretaker-govt-to-be-announced-end-of-this-month)



ZeroFox Intelligence Geopolitical Brief for October 2023

TLP: CLEAR

B-2023-09-29b



Australia and New Zealand Elections

- Australia is set to go to the polls on October 14 for a referendum on the “Indigenous Voice to Parliament,” which would create a formal process for sending non-voting representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Parliament on subjects related to those groups. In order to pass, the Voice must achieve a majority of votes nationwide, as well as local majorities in at least four of the country’s six states.
- The popularity of the referendum has slipped dramatically in the last month, with polls now suggesting it is heading for a major defeat.[25] This is driven by two major factors. One is the influence of major conservative donations to anti-Voice groups. Some of these have attacked the Voice from the right, arguing that it would be racially divisive, while others have targeted the progressive vote with allegations that the Voice does not go far enough. The other factor is increased focus on costs of living and housing, which have skyrocketed in Australia due to inflation.
- New Zealand will also vote on October 14 for its new national government. Former Labor PM Jacinda Ardern stepped down earlier this year so that Chris Hipkins could salvage the party’s popularity, but polls suggest his efforts have not been sufficient.[26] The conservative bloc of National plus ACT has seen a steady increase in popularity throughout the year and looks poised to capture a majority.

Forward Look:

- A failure of Australia’s Voice Referendum is unlikely to cause mass protest or disruption. It could prompt an uptick in discriminatory behavior against Aboriginal people, as some campaign rhetoric has veered into overt racism against them.
- A victory for New Zealand’s conservatives would see a revitalized conservative base calling for actions against both “identity politics” (vis-a-vis the Maori) and the strong government controls that were exercised during the Covid-19 pandemic. Expect protests by groups that emerged against pandemic lockdowns that have since become opponents of the Labour government.

ABOUT ZEROFOX

ZeroFox (Nasdaq: ZFOX), an enterprise software-as-a-service leader in external cybersecurity, has redefined security outside the corporate perimeter on the internet, where businesses operate and threat actors thrive. The ZeroFox platform combines advanced AI analytics, digital risk and privacy protection, full-spectrum threat intelligence, and a robust portfolio of breach, incident, and takedown response capabilities to expose and disrupt phishing and fraud campaigns, botnet exposures, credential theft, impersonations, data breaches, and physical threats that target your brands, domains, people, and assets. Join thousands of customers—including some of the largest public-sector organizations as well as finance, media, technology, and retail companies—to stay ahead of adversaries and address the entire lifecycle of external cyber risks.

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Get in touch with us today

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APPENDIX A: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox Intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of the occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

APPENDIX B: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

TLP: RED

HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party’s privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.

HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may NOT share TLP: RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.

TLP: AMBER

HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.

HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may ONLY share TLP: AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm.

Note that TLP: AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.

TLP: GREEN

HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.

HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may share TLP: GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.

TLP: CLEAR

HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.

HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may share TLP: CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

FOOTNOTES

[25] <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/polls-show-australia-indigenous-referendum-support-slipping-likely-fail-2023-09-24/>

[26] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/13/guardian-essential-new-zealand-poll-winston-peters-in-position-to-become-election-kingmaker>

