

## WEEKLY POLITICAL COMPASS

Welcome to this edition of the Weekly Political Compass from Teneo's political risk advisory team.

This week, we are taking a closer look at **Colombia's** response to Donald Trump's weekend actions. Meanwhile, Trump's policies are also causing issues across **Africa** and in **Brazil**, while the **US** is working on a deal for TikTok, and **the EU** has extended its sanctions on **Russia**. Elsewhere, three **ECOWAS** members are set to split from the West African regional grouping, **South Korea's** president faces unprecedented criminal charges, and migration is becoming a central issue in Germany's election campaign.

Should you have questions or wish to discuss any of these stories in greater detail, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

### GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

With the US announcing punitive tariffs and financial sanctions against Colombia, only to drop them after a climbdown from the Colombian government, we ask our Latin America analyst [Nicholas Watson](#) to examine the short-lived crisis.

#### Why did the storm over tariffs erupt?

President Gustavo Petro triggered a political whirlwind on 26 January when he issued a middle-of-the-night order to deny entry to two US military deportation flights. US President Donald Trump's response was swift, ordering an immediate 25% tariff on Colombian imports to the US (rising to 50% after a week), travel restrictions on Colombian government officials, and other penalties. Petro retaliated by ordering reciprocal tariffs on US imports.

#### Why such a quick de-escalation?

By late-evening, Colombian Foreign Minister Luis Gilberto Murillo announced that the crisis was over since Colombia would accept deportation flights once again. The government thus avoided the potentially disastrous economic consequences of tariff hikes impacting 29% of its exports and 25% of its imports (via retaliatory action), such as inflation and currency depreciation.

#### What happens now?

Murillo will this week travel to the US to repair relations. However, Murillo – an experienced pragmatist – is due to leave his post anyway this week and will be replaced by the inexperienced Laura Sarabia, whose ability to stand up to the impetuous Petro is questionable. In the meantime, US assistance to Colombia (worth USD 380mn in 2023) remains frozen as part of the Trump administration's foreign aid review. Petro, who cannot seek re-election but wants to ensure the Left retains power in 2026, is unlikely to renounce nationalism or his leftist posturing.

### WHAT TO WATCH

#### ASIA-PACIFIC

## US/China

**The White House is reportedly working on a deal for a group of US investors to purchase a majority [stake in TikTok](#).** ByteDance would retain a minority share while software company Oracle would safeguard the app's algorithm and data collection. US President Donald Trump confirmed on Saturday that he was talking with multiple potential buyers and said he would probably decide within 30 days.

## South Korea

**President Yoon Suk-yeol will face a criminal trial for insurrection in parallel to his ongoing impeachment case at the Constitutional Court, after becoming the first sitting president to be criminally indicted.** Prosecutors seem to have opted for an earlier-than-planned indictment on 26 January after another court twice refused the Corruption Investigation Office's application to extend Yoon's existing arrest warrant beyond 27 January. Yoon could receive a lifetime prison sentence if found guilty of the criminal charges, with the death penalty no longer used in practice in South Korea.

## **EUROPE**

### Belarus

**President Alexander Lukashenko secured a seventh term in a highly managed presidential vote on 26 January.** The official numbers claim that Lukashenko was supported by an unprecedented 87% of voters in an election that saw a turnout of 86%. With Lukashenko's presidency already in its 31<sup>st</sup> year, Belarus is set to continue its integration with Russia and pose various security threats to Ukraine and neighboring Western countries.

### EU/Russia

**On 27 January, the EU unanimously extended its economic sanctions on Russia until 31 July.** Hungary, which had threatened to block the sanctions' rollover unless gas transits via Ukraine were renewed, dropped its veto just days ahead of sanctions' expiration on 31 January. At this point it is unclear whether Budapest managed to negotiate anything substantial in return, but earlier in January, the European Commission agreed to set up a high-level working group on energy security in Central Europe. Also, it is noteworthy that Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky recently indicated his openness to transiting Azeri gas via Ukraine.

### Germany

**Migration and the so-called "firewall" against cooperation with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) are now firmly in the spotlight as the election campaign continues.** This is despite Chancellor Olaf Scholz's intention to focus on public investment and Ukraine. The shift in attention follows an attack by a rejected asylum seeker, killing several people including children. Friedrich Merz's Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) will table initiatives to tighten border controls and asylum laws, which might be supported by the AfD in the Bundestag this week. Rather than foreshadowing a right-of-center coalition, this likely reflects Merz's determination to substantially change migration policy and prevent a further strengthening of the AfD.

### Greece

**Parliament will hold a second round of voting for a new president on 31 January, likely to be inconclusive again.** A recent law change by the ruling New Democracy (ND) party lowers the threshold for electing the president to 151 votes in the fourth and final round of voting. With 156 seats in the 300-seat parliament, ND is expected to ultimately secure the presidency for Konstantinos Tassoulas, a former parliament speaker and ND lawmaker. While a recent poll shows limited public enthusiasm for Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's choice, its impact on the ND's popularity remains to be seen.

## **LATIN AMERICA**

## Brazil

**In the week leading up to the election of new Congressional leaders, President Lula will address food inflation and the US deportation of Brazilian immigrants.** The food inflation debate intensified after the Presidency's Chief-of-Staff used the term "interventions" to describe the government's approach. The term has since been replaced with "measures," though the specifics remain unclear. On deportations, the Brazilian justice minister condemned the use of handcuffs on nationals aboard a US deportation flight, calling it a "flagrant disrespect for the fundamental rights of Brazilian citizens." Deportation flights, abolished during Lula's second term (2006–2010), were reinstated in 2019 under the Trump administration and accepted by then-president Jair Bolsonaro. Lula has not yet decided whether to attend an emergency meeting of the Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States (CELAC) scheduled for 30 January to deal with the deportations.

## **AFRICA**

### Africa

**Executive Orders signed by US President Donald Trump in his first week in office will have immediate and longer-term consequences for Africa, among other regions.** Although Africa remains low on Trump's foreign policy agenda, US engagement — driven by Trump's Africa-focused appointees — will center on geopolitical competition with China and Russia, commercial ties, and security/counterterrorism. Aid, health, green energy and climate change face major cuts and de-prioritization, while it is still uncertain how the US's African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), due for renewal in 2025, will fit into Trump's sweeping review of trade policies and tariff plans.

### West Africa/ECOWAS

**Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali are set to officially withdraw from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 28 January.** Ahead of their withdrawal, foreign ministers from the three nations—now collectively known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)—met on 26 January in Burkina Faso capital Ouagadougou, to address formalities related to their exit. During the meeting, the ministers agreed to adopt a "global approach" in negotiations and future relations with ECOWAS within the framework of the AES. The three countries announced their intention to leave ECOWAS a few months after establishing the AES as a grouping aimed at promoting their shared interests. Ministers emphasized that future discussions with ECOWAS must recognize the AES as a unified actor, fostering talks in the spirit of peaceful coexistence.

### South Africa

**The Democratic Alliance (DA) has declared a dispute within the government of national unity (GNU).** Tensions and posturing within the coalition are escalating, with disagreements increasingly centered on substantive issues. While the recent education act did not jeopardize the GNU alliance, the Expropriation Act and the pending implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI) present more significant challenges. Internal resolution of these disputes appears unlikely, and legal challenges may become the primary means of managing tensions. Although the coalition is not expected to collapse in the near term, the alliance is likely to become increasingly unstable and contentious as the 2026 elections approach.

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