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WRITTEN BY:
ELISA BALDI



U.S. CHALLENGES GOOGLE IN MAJOR ANTITRUST CASE

The American government has become increasingly concerned with the question of whether tech Giants achieved their enormous size by breaking laws that were designed to reign in corporations more than a century ago.

The Internet created these immense companies that built big platforms for accessing culture and communication in just a few seconds.

Among these giants, Google is probably the most emblematic, and the government accuses Google of abusing its Monopoly position to hurt various stakeholder groups.

Therefore, in mid-September 2023 the government initiated the first-ever Monopoly trial against Google.

The first group to be negatively affected by Google's actions consists of its rivals, such as startups or companies, like Microsoft. These companies may nurture unique ideas but often find themselves unsuccessful due to Google's overwhelming market dominance.

Consumer damage is measured in ways that can't necessarily be quantified by price. It can be measured in the quality of search results and in the policies that Google can impose, like its aggressive collection of users' personal data to target advertisements.

The final group harmed are the advertisers who pay unfair prices for Google's advertisement services: Google takes advantage of the absence of competition by making advertisers pay exorbitant prices.

In other words, Google is accused of using its weight to suppress its competitors that could be providing the marketplace with products that would ultimately be better for consumers, taking away choices essentially.

It gets at the core of these antitrust laws: the government believes that if there's fair competition, consumers end up with more options that differ from each other in price and quality.

The U.S. Justice Department has accused Google of illegally maintaining a monopoly by making exclusive agreements with companies like Apple, Samsung, and Mozilla to be the default search engine on their devices and browsers.



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During the trial, it was revealed that Google paid \$26.3 billion in 2021 alone for these partnerships, with Apple receiving approximately \$18 billion of that amount. The government argues that these practices have allowed Google to dominate the U.S. search engine market, where it controls about 90% of the market share. In response, Google argues that its search engine is popular because people prefer it and notes that changing the default search engine on devices is a simple process. The company has also assembled a large legal team, including external firms, to defend its position. The trial against Google is a bench trial, meaning that the judge alone will decide the outcome, with his ruling expected in the upcoming months. Depending on his decision, Google's operations might either remain unchanged if he rules in their favor or undergo significant changes, potentially including fines or restructuring if he sides with the Justice Department.

In their closing statements, Google claimed to be the top search engine due to its quality, while the Justice Department and several states argued that Google has misused its dominant position to stifle industry competition. Additionally, Cardozo Law Professor Weinstein pointed out the importance of this case for determining if antitrust laws from the late 1800s are still effective in the digital age, suggesting they still be applicable. This case is the perfect example to highlight two contemporary social issues.

Firstly, it suggests reflection on the extent to which people have normalized the use of search engines like Google as an obvious choice. It has become so habitual that people do not think that perhaps it is not the only available and most convenient tool we have.

Everybody uses Google daily creating a self-perpetuating cycle where its widespread use reinforces its continued popularity. Secondly, it emphasizes the state regulatory action in the economy.

Although the state is not always capable of preventing phenomena such as the Google monopoly from occurring, it can monitor its actions and intervene to protect its citizens.

History serves as a stark reminder of how unchecked industrial activity has often resulted in situations where individual citizens become victims. In my view, the government must step in and establish regulations. However, the intervention of public power should strike a balance that doesn't stifle a company's innovative ideas with excessive bureaucracy, or regulations rooted in outdated perspectives.

There should be a place for entrepreneurial creativity and politics should support it, at the same time companies should create added value in society by creating employment, satisfaction, and wealth. The final goal should be discovering ways to align private interests with public interests to create a healthy relationship between the private and the public, ultimately benefiting the community.





GEORGIAN CRISIS IN A NUTSHELL

THE “FOREIGN AGENT” LAW

Since March this year, the Republic of Georgia has been the theatre of violent protests, which saw tens of thousands of demonstrators flooding the streets, trying to break into the Parliament in Tbilisi, in an attempt to pressure parliamentarians into suppressing a proposed piece of legislation, the so-called “Foreign agent” law. Footage broadcasted on national television even showed lawmakers from the governing and opposition parties brawling in parliament.

What is the law about?

According to this piece of legislation, NGOs and independent media that receive more than 20% of their funding from foreign donors would have to register as organisations "bearing the interests of a foreign power". They would also be monitored by the Justice Ministry and could be forced to share sensitive information. Were they to refuse, they would be met with a forced payment of 25,000 lari (\$9,360), followed by additional fines of 20,000 lari (\$7,490) for each month of non-compliance thereafter.

The government justifies the implementation of the bill, describing it as an attempt to promote transparency and ensure the protection of Georgia’s sovereignty, against the “pseudo-liberal values” spread by foreigners.

Some even went as far as comparing it to transparency legislations in Western countries – such as the Foreign Agents Registration Act in the United States.

A statement from the Prime Minister Kobakhidze, a strong proponent of the bill, has further raised suspicion as he said that if the authorities did not pass the bill, Georgia could “easily share the fate of Ukraine”.

What are the objections?

Protesters and opposition, who have renamed the law “Russia law”, argue that it could be exploited by the government to crush its opponents and compared it to a similar piece of legislation passed in Russia in 2012, which has since been used to suppress dissidents and critics of the Kremlin.

The main concern for the majority of the protesters is that the law, being perceived as a breach of the right to freedom of the media, could hinder Georgia’s prospects of a future EU membership, while strengthening Russian influence on domestic politics.

Nonetheless, on May 14th, the “Georgian Dream” party managed to pass the bill on its third and final reading with 84 votes against 30, thus reaching the approval of the controversial law.

The Georgian population's resentment towards the "Foreign agent" law was not confined to domestic borders and throughout the world, this has sparked a direct response among residents living abroad. Milan as well has hosted such protests and some of our Bocconi students have promptly attended.

As one of the members of this small but fierce group highlights once again, the law is yet another attempt by the current government to slow down the process of joining the EU, "***Which is Georgian people's ultimate will and the only escape from economic poverty***".

She also provided us with another interesting insight on some of the related issues. She explained how the opposition might be exploiting the unpopularity of the law, so to take power. The problem being that the opposition is led by the party constituting the previous government, which had been in charge from 2003 to 2012 and was characterized by bloody demonstrations against the strong regime of the ex-president, Mikheil Saakashvili, now serving a 6-year sentence for abuse of power.

This is why she believes there were "only" thousands of demonstrators in Tbilisi and not millions: everyone is afraid of a return to a status quo marked by violence and repression.

What now?

Many organizations and NGOs fear lack of funding and that their work will be forced to stop, were they not to register.

However, the law comes just 5 months before the next general elections, which many look upon as an opportunity to vote out "Georgian Dream".

"GEORGIA PROTESTS: RIOT POLICE FACE OFF AGAINST FOREIGN INFLUENCE BILL DEMONSTRATORS"



WRITTEN BY:
FRANCESCA FABBRI



US ELECTIONS 2024

CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

As the United States approaches the 2024 presidential election, the political landscape is increasingly defined by familiar faces. President Joe Biden and President Donald Trump have secured enough support to be their parties' leading candidates, setting the stage for a highly anticipated rematch.

Recent polls indicate a highly competitive race, with Trump holding narrow leads in several battleground states. Nationally, the race remains tight, reflecting a deeply polarized electorate. Despite Trump's legal issues, including multiple felony charges, his base remains steadfast.

Meanwhile, Biden faces challenges in maintaining enthusiasm among key Democratic constituencies, particularly younger voters and minority groups.

There has been considerable discussion within both parties about the desirability of alternative candidates. For the Republicans, figures such as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former Vice President Mike Pence have been mentioned as potential candidates who could offer a new direction for the party. DeSantis, in particular, has gained national attention for his policies in Florida and could appeal to both the traditional conservative base and younger voters.



On the Democratic side, some voices within the party have suggested that a younger candidate might better energize the base and appeal to a broader electorate. Names such as Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg have been floated as potential candidates who could continue the party's policies while bringing a fresh perspective to the race.

In addition to the presidential race, the 2024 elections will also determine the composition of Congress. All 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 34 Senate seats are up for grabs. Democrats face a tough battle to maintain their slim majority in the Senate, especially with vulnerable seats in traditionally Republican states like West Virginia and Montana.

The economic landscape has been notably affected by the political uncertainty surrounding the upcoming elections. Markets generally react unfavorably to uncertainty, and the 2024 election is no exception. Volatility in the stock market has increased as investors weigh the potential impacts of another Biden or Trump presidency on fiscal policy, regulatory changes, and international trade.

Businesses are also adopting a cautious stance, delaying major investments and hiring decisions until there is more clarity on the future political landscape. Consumer confidence, a key driver of economic activity, has shown signs of wavering as households brace for potential changes in economic policy that could affect taxes, healthcare costs, and job security.

Economic indicators such as the stock market indices and consumer confidence indexes are particularly sensitive to election outcomes.

Analysts suggest that the policies proposed by the candidates could have significant implications for sectors such as healthcare, energy, and technology. For instance, Biden's emphasis on clean energy and infrastructure spending contrasts sharply with Trump's focus on deregulation and tax cuts, creating divergent paths for economic growth.

The 2024 election will not only decide the presidency but also set the direction for U.S. domestic and foreign policy for years to come. Key issues at stake include the economy, healthcare, immigration, and climate change. Both Biden and Trump are expected to focus heavily on these issues to galvanize their respective bases.

In summary, as the 2024 election approaches, the political landscape remains volatile and deeply divided. The possibility of alternative candidates emerging adds another layer of complexity to an already contentious race. The outcome will be critical in shaping the next phase of American governance.



WRITTEN BY:
SARA BINELLO



INDIA: NATIONAL EMERGENCY DECLARATION FOR HEAT WAVES

Climate change is wreaking havoc on our planet, as recent events and scientific reports make tragically clear. A prime example is the unprecedented heatwave that scorched India in May 2024, with temperatures reaching 52 degrees Celsius. Declared a national emergency, this extreme heat didn't just disrupt daily life, it posed severe health risks, especially for vulnerable populations.

The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) 2023 State of the Global Climate report confirmed our worst fears: 2023 was the hottest year on record, with global average temperatures exceeding pre-industrial levels by a concerning 1.45°C.

This alarming rise translates into a devastating new reality: heatwaves, floods, droughts, and wildfires are becoming more frequent and intense, causing widespread displacement, food insecurity, and economic losses across the globe.

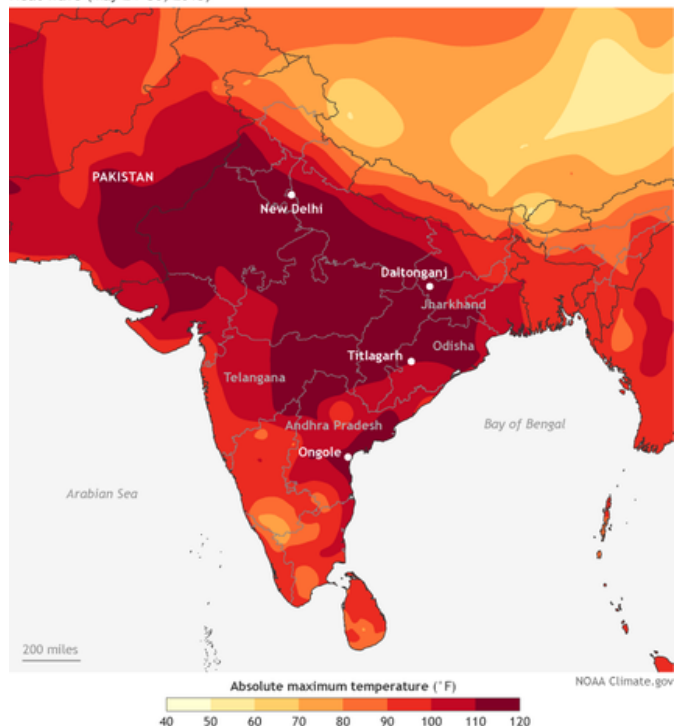
In India, the brutal combination of record-breaking heat and inadequate infrastructure has created a critical situation. The scorching temperatures not only strained the power grid, leading to widespread outages but also dealt a severe blow to agriculture, exacerbating food shortages and threatening the livelihoods of millions of farmers.

The Indian government faces mounting pressure to address these issues, as the heatwave exposed significant vulnerabilities in the country's infrastructure and disaster preparedness.

Beyond India's borders, this crisis is a stark reminder of the ripple effects of climate change. Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns are disrupting agricultural production worldwide, impacting food security in vulnerable regions. The resulting food price hikes can exacerbate social unrest and mass migrations.

Addressing climate change is not just an environmental issue: it's a global security and humanitarian imperative.

Heat wave (May 24-30, 2015)



Public health is another major concern. Hospitals are overwhelmed with heatstroke cases, and there's a growing fear of waterborne diseases as water supplies dwindle. The government has taken emergency measures like setting up cooling centers and distributing drinking water in affected areas, but the scale of the crisis is immense. The National Disaster Management Authority is urging a shift towards long-term strategies to build resilience against such extreme weather events.

The economic fallout from these climate events is significant. The rising costs associated with disaster response, healthcare, and rebuilding efforts are putting a huge strain on the country's finances. The agricultural sector, a cornerstone of India's economy, is particularly hard-hit.

Crop failures are leading to higher food prices and lower incomes for farmers. This situation underscores the urgent need to invest in sustainable agricultural practices and infrastructure improvements to mitigate future risks.

Despite the grim outlook, there are reasons for cautious optimism. The surge in renewable energy capacity, with a 50% increase in 2023 alone, demonstrates significant progress towards reducing carbon emissions. Initiatives like the "Early Warnings for All" aim to provide universal early warning systems by 2027, which could save countless lives and reduce economic losses by enhancing disaster preparedness.

The global community must come together and take decisive action to combat climate change. This necessitates not only reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also addressing the interconnected issues of food security, health, and economic stability. As the impacts of climate change intensify, the need for comprehensive, coordinated action becomes more critical than ever. The future of our planet and the well-being of future generations depend on the choices we make today.



WRITTEN BY:

ALBERTO INSARDÀ



EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

VOTING IS IMPORTANT

The 2024 European Elections will be held in the 27 member states between 6 and 9 June (in Italy between 8 and 9). They will serve to elect a total of 720 Members of the European Parliament, of which 76 are Italian.

The European Parliament will vote for the president of the European Commission. There are many candidates, in addition to the re-election of Von Der Leyen, there are those who suggest Roberta Metsola, president of the European Parliament, or Christine Lagarde, president of the ECB.

There is also the suggestion of Draghi, former president of the ECB, personality welcomed by all European authorities and not.

Who to vote for?

The European Parliament has numerous political groups: among the most famous the European People's Party (which in 2019 presented the nomination of the president of the commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen), the Democrats, Renew Europe (liberals), the Greens and the conservatives.

Why vote?

It is a popular belief to think that the European elections are of no use since apparently we are voting for something too far away from us, and which does not seem to concern us. Yet they are the most important elections, since the laws that are approved concern all citizens without distinction. Most people's problems are addressed, such as the environment, migration, social policies, and so on, which can hardly be managed at a national, or entirely regional and municipal level.

In the last elections, 50.66% of the European population took part, while in Italy 54.5%, therefore above the average, even if very far from the turnout of states such as Belgium (88.5%) and Denmark (66 %).

For these elections, we'll expect numbers likely in line with 2019.



Based on the region of residence (or domicile, if one is among the non-resident voters), there are different constituencies.

Under European electoral law, all member countries must use a proportional electoral system. This means that the allocation of seats occurs in such a way as to ensure that the various lists have several places proportional to the votes received. In Italy, the party threshold is 4%.

It is possible to vote for several different candidates, up to a maximum of three, as long as you choose candidates of different genders. Voting, of course, is not mandatory. It seems obvious, but there are some countries (Belgium, Luxembourg, and Greece) where, at least on paper, it is not so.

Be careful who you vote for!

It may seem like a statement aimed at making you vote for a certain faction, but this is not the case. Among the many candidates, there are many people, both on the left and on the right, who hold other positions, and who would hardly give them up to preside over parliament (think of our prime minister, but also of parliamentarians, majors,...).



They are incompatible roles, which however does not make them ineligible, but in the position to choose, should they also be elected to the European Parliament. These are the so-called "spot applications", which serve, through the presence of a known face, to attract a larger user base. Consequently, if they refused the assignment, their votes would be "transferred" to the first non-elected candidate of that party, who perhaps would never have received that number of votes. It is a legitimate mechanism, but ethically very questionable, debasing the European Parliament's importance.

Off-site students voting system

In addition to the traditional voting system, going to a polling station in the municipality of residence, this year Italy has implemented out-of-office voting. Until May 5th students could request to vote in the municipality of domicile. Although it has been widely invoked in recent years, requests have been decidedly low. In fact, out of a total of over 600.000 off-site students, only 23.000 (around 4%) have applied.

Many attribute this anomaly to the difficulty of some municipalities, especially the smaller ones, in being clear about the documentation necessary to start the request, or more simply to general misinformation, considering that this provision has been ignored by the traditional media, and by the politicians themselves, even those who approved it.

It will be interesting to understand whether this provision, which has been present for some time in all states of the European Union except Cyprus and Malta, will be reconfirmed in the future.

CONTACTS

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: *FRANCESCA FABBRI*

SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR: *ARIANNA ALFONSO*

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