



TIPPING POINT

TRINITY TERM 2026



MP CHARLIE MAYNARD

Interview and Q&A

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FROM THE EDITOR

FREDDIE C

From the impact of social media on political campaigns, to Trump's climate policy and its affect on global affairs, Tipping Point seeks to tackle some of the most important questions shaping our world today. After reading this journal, I hope you feel more informed and better equipped to draw your own conclusions on the issues that matter most. In a period of rapid change, it has never been more important to question the narratives presented to us. I hope to inspire everyone reading this to think critically about the world around them, something Tipping Point exists to encourage.

Interview with Charlie Maynard, MP for Witney

Freddie, and Charlie Maynard



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What drew you to politics and why the Lib Dems specifically?

I wanted to be useful to society. I think we all want to try and make our locality, our country, or the world a better place, and I thought politics was the best way of trying to achieve that. My trigger for getting into this was Brexit and the refugee crisis back in 2016. I thought the only economically sane approach was something centrist - and instinctively I am a centrist, but a very dynamic, progressive centrist - very focused on trying to get things done as opposed to just talking about it. The Lib Dems' approach to fairness, internationalism, climate, and Proportional Representation, made it a fairly easy conversation.

You and your wife personally opened your home to Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. Could you tell me what vision you have for Britain's relationship with immigration

It all happened by accident - it was very incremental, not a big master plan. You don't know where you're going to be born in this world, we happen to be born here, but we could just as easily have been born somewhere much more difficult with far fewer opportunities. That's a good starting point, because fundamentally I don't think people are different in terms of their value, whatever their country or colour. What troubled me the most was Theresa May's hostile environment, just making things as unpleasant as possible for people. Compare that to Canada, where the model is roughly one incoming family supported by five volunteer families, with the state being relatively light touch and individuals and communities making it happen. With a one-to-five ratio, people get to see their own prejudices played out and realise, for instance, that their daughter loves playing with the other family's daughter. The UK story is one of immigration, and we ought to be clearer about that.

What kind of MP model do you see yourself: trustee, delegate or something in between, and why?

People vote for me to represent them, and I always need to remember that. But they also vote for me to get on top of issues, because they don't have the time or inclination to do so themselves. My interpretation is: you voted for me, I'm going to make decisions to the best of my ability, and by voting for me you've entrusted me with that for the next x years. I'll use my judgement having listened to everybody on the intake side. I am my own man, but the obligation that comes with that is I need to justify my thinking, ideally before I make a decision, but also after, to whoever wants to ask me.

You've said there's far too much reliance on house building to grow our economy. Does that put you in the NIMBY camp?

I'll be specific to West Oxfordshire. The national government has said we're going to take 18,000 houses over the next 18 years. That's 37% on top of all the houses we have now, in just under 20 years, which is gigantic. And we have an A40 that doesn't work. So how on earth do you add another 45,000 people when the road doesn't work already? My position is: if we don't have a proper transport network, we should fight like hell not to have those houses. If we do have a really good transport network, then we should be at the table willing to do our bit, fairly distributed around the region and country.

You voted to remove hereditary peers. Would you also support a fully elected Lords?

My preference practically would be to turn to each group - each party plus the crossbenchers - and say: divide by two, just shrink it. We're the second biggest legislative body in the world after the Chinese Communist Party, and with fewer than 70

million people, that's absurd. Beyond that, my party officially supports an elected second chamber, and I follow my party unless there are good reasons not to. I don't have a perfect solution, but I'm interested in all sorts of options.

Taking note of recent council elections and opinion polls, where would you see the Lib Dems in the coming years?

I want us winning a lot more seats than we already have, and that is not written in stone. We need to be doing a better job differentiating ourselves from Labour and setting a really strong economic policy. I'm an ex-entrepreneur, I'm on the Business and Trade Select Committee, and I'm number two in the Lib Dem's economic team. What I want at the centre of that is a focus on trade, making it easy for businesses to grow domestically and internationally, repairing EU relations, and getting serious about tax and spend. We need to demonstrate to the country that their taxes are safe with us, that we'll be careful with spending, and that we'll have a tax system which enables the country to grow rather than holds it back.

What does that tax system look like?

My recess reading is something called the Mirrlees Review - essentially tax policy design, and a lot of it starts with incentives: giving people the incentive to get out of bed and go to work. There's a vast amount of incentives currently working in the opposite direction, and fixing those would be a starting point. The Mirrlees Review was written in 2010-11 and it's now 2026, and none of it has been done. So the challenge is: how do you explain it clearly and simply, and then actually sell it to the country? An awful lot of people are very frustrated with the state of things and looking for answers, some of which come from charlatans. The job is to offer a genuine alternative.

You voted against your party on the tobacco and vapes bill — although that was a free vote. Are there any consequences even on a free vote?

On a free vote, no - a free vote is a free vote. More broadly, when people do vote against the party, the first thing to think about is whether there was proper discussion beforehand: were people given the chance to talk it through with the spokesperson, explain their views, and have that input genuinely included in the decision? And then, if somebody does lose the whip, you have to

make sure the punishment matches the transgression; proportionality and transparency matter. There's a balance between firmness and decency. You need to recognise you're a team, and teams get things done by hanging together... but you also need to be decent to people.

What does a typical week look like for you as an MP?

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday in Westminster, sometimes Thursday in Westminster, Friday and Saturday out in the constituency, Sunday quite often working at home. Six to seven days a week is standard.

Reform is on the rise, alongside a rise in antisemitism and racism on the streets. What can constituents do to help win that battle?

I've got an invitation to Eid this Sunday - Eid al-Adha - and I'm going, and I'm going to put it straight up on Facebook. But that doesn't mean that everything driving people towards Reform is wrong, because it isn't. There's an awful lot of pain, frustration, and anger, and if you just dismiss it, that makes it worse. The best approach is going there, being reasonable, and genuinely listening, not just listening as politicians always claim to, but really trying to understand their point of view, walking in their shoes. That, I think, is the best way to win. It's not just fighting.

What do you think you could do to better yourself as an MP and reach your constituents more?

Organising. It sounds silly, but an awful lot of practical politics is just organising. Getting better at social media, because that's how so many people receive the world now and you have to be there. And delivering. Having a voice matters, but if someone brings you a problem and you don't get it fixed, that's pretty useless. Working with people rather than against them, often the person on the other side of the table isn't looking for a fight, they're explaining why there are obstacles. If you understand their problems, you can usually find a solution together. That's exciting. And you can't do it as a single person, you do it as a team. This is traditionally not a Lib Dem seat; it hasn't been for 102 years. I need a lot of help now and down the track. Whether you're 16 or 60, if anyone reading this wants to help, just drop me an email.

THE POPULIST TIDE

Ceci



PHOTO BY OLI SCARFF/APP - THE NEW STATESMAN

The pathway for populism in the UK, particularly for right-wing parties such as Reform, has been increasingly cleared due to the absence of satisfaction among voters. In 2024, the turnout for the general election was just 59.4%, the lowest since 2001, illustrating a lack of motivation among voters who feel unrepresented by the two main parties in the UK. Lower participation - and more polarisation - is what populism

thrives on, weaponising the “us vs them” narrative and concentrating power away from moderates. By convincing people that they are the only ones who can represent ‘ordinary people’ against a threatening or corrupt group of elites, populists simplify politics into a rigid reliance on them and opposition to almost everyone else. As an example, Reform UK pushes a narrative against immigration encouraging fragmentation and

anger in society to therefore encourage people to resort to extreme views. More generally, populists often use immigration to stir up anxiety and divisions, arguing that it undermines national identity and places pressure on areas such as healthcare and schools. Specifically, many Reform voters consider the places they live to be in decline, highlighting the correlation between their problems and the way Reform constantly puts the

on immigration for issues such as a lack of attention from the government on housing. Furthermore, people are increasingly turning to extreme parties, with 80% of Reform UK’s voters admitting that they feel as though the ‘traditional parties do not represent people like them’. Professor Green, director of the British Election Study, supports this statistic, stating that “Reform voters are overwhelmingly disillusioned Tories”. In addition to this, the effect of social media has strongly exacerbated populism, as it consistently favours extremism. For example, in 2015, the average UKIP post on Facebook received twice as many likes as a post from the Conservative Party, and the influence of social media is only rising. As a result, the spread of populism and its influence over young people is spinning out of control in a manner that cannot be matched by the more moderate parties; social media is fuelled by outrage and isolation, and this is exactly what populist parties strive to encourage.

The spread of populism is also a global struggle. In Europe, it isn’t just confined to the UK, with countries such as France and Germany suffering from the expansion of populist ideas. Euroscepticism and ideas built on the protection of ‘French identity’ are surging in France, with the ‘National Rally’ populist movement - led by Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella - being the largest parliamentary opposition. Similarly, in Germany, the ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD) - which focuses heavily on anti-immigration policies - secured roughly 20% of the vote in 2025. These examples

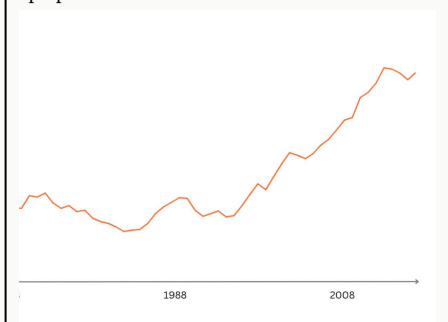


CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

emphasise a deep disillusionment with the political establishment across Europe, amplifying the necessity of the restoration of political trust in the moderate parties.

Despite this evidence for the growth of populism, it is crucial to note that it can still be combatted. Firstly, as populism is rooted in rebellions in a democracy, it is important to understand that its popularity comes from severe dissatisfaction. As a result, rather than attacking its symptoms, beating populism requires an address of the primary social and economic grievances that fuel it, such as societal partisanship; building a reunited view of national identity is crucial in combatting the detrimental “us vs them”

rhetoric. Ultimately, the rise of populism is catalysed by the failures of moderate politics, and therefore the most effective way to counter it is by reviving the reputation of mainstream politics. The acknowledgment of societal problems and the delivery of viable solutions from leaders is essential: simply moralising against populist voters is not enough. Below: Average support for Authoritarian populism 1946-2023



THE HOLLOW STATE DILEMMA

How the Assisted Dying Bill has exposed a profound democratic failure and the limits of Parliament

Jess

In 1936 the first attempt to pass legislation to legalise euthanasia in the UK parliament occurred. The Bill, titled the Voluntary Euthanasia (Legislation) Bill, was introduced by Lord Arthur Ponsonby. Since that time, numerous bills and motions have been introduced and debated in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, none of which have successfully become law to date. However, this is a contemporary, constant debate which occurs in legal bodies across the world. The UK, which can be considered a constantly developing, liberal country by many, seems cautious in this area of the law when compared to countries such as Canada and the Netherlands. The apprehension shown by the UK parliament on the topic of euthanasia and assisted dying may reflect the complexity of this area of the law and why it should be dealt with using extreme caution.

The case of Adam Maier-Clayton and his tragic journey battling the MAID (Medical Aid in Dying) law in Canada was indisputably unjust. Adam suffered from Somatic Symptom Disorder, a psychiatric condition characterised by physical complaints that always be traced to a known medical illness. The pain felt by the

patients can be exactly equal, yet under legislation one is given a possibility of escape and relief whilst the other is not regarded by the one thing that is supposed to protect and maintain an 'ordered society,' the law. Adam's case highlights a wider structural problem, the persistent tendency within legal systems to treat psychiatric suffering as less real, less measurable, and therefore less worthy of consideration. When a legal framework accepts physical pain as a valid basis for assisted dying but dismisses psychiatric pain, it continues what many scholars describe as sanism, the systematic devaluation of people with mental illness. In this way, the Canadian law unintentionally reinforced the stigma that psychiatric suffering is less believable and less worthy of legislative compassion.

The inequality reflected in Adam's experience is not unique to Canada; it represents a wider global pattern in which assisted dying laws are built upon assumptions about which forms of suffering deserve the attention of the law. For instance, the Netherlands and Belgium both allow assisted dying for psychiatric disorders under strict conditions, recognising that mental illnesses can be irremediable and cause unbearable suffering comparable

to physical disease. However, other countries, such as the United Kingdom, continue to prohibit assisted dying entirely, maintaining a system in which no form of suffering, physical or psychiatric, qualifies. These contrasting approaches highlight a lack of international coherence. Rather than basing laws on a shared understanding of suffering, jurisdictions have produced frameworks that reflect local political histories, religious influences, and levels of social stigma and attitudes surrounding mental health. If the purpose of these laws is to relieve unbearable suffering, then the basis for eligibility should logically be the nature and severity of the suffering itself, not whether it originates from physical or psychiatric causes.

The United Kingdom has moved the 'right to die bill' through the House of Commons, however is struggling immensely to pass through the House of Lords, who fear greatly that the legalisation of assisted dying could endanger vulnerable groups. Many are arguing that even if a law is designed for exceptional cases, it may expand in practice (the 'slippery slope concern'), therefore the delay the House of Lords is causing can be framed as ethical caution, not obstruction of justice. Although the House of Lords is not officially religious, it still contains Bishops and peers influenced by Christian ethics. The sanctity of life principle is explicitly defended by the Lords Spiritual, who believe all human life is sacred because it is inherently valuable; not because of its quality, suffering does not negate the moral worth of life. The difficulty being faced in the UK parliament to pass the 'right to die bill,' even in a

multicultural and diverse religious country, reflects how there is a strong case for the opposition to euthanasia and assisted dying becoming legalised, and the extreme lack of consideration for psychiatric disorders further emphasises how dangerous the inclusion of it within the law could be.

The exclusion of psychiatric illness from assisted dying legislation reflects the complexity of the area of law. This is evident in the extensive scrutiny faced by the assisted dying bill in the House of Lords, despite the proposal being limited strictly to adults with terminal illness. Peers have raised persistent concerns about safeguarding, prognosis, and the irreversible nature of assisted dying, even where death is imminent and medically predictable. The prolonged, complex debate demonstrates

how difficult it is for the law to balance compassion with protection, even in the clearest cases. If parliament struggles to regulate assisted dying 'safely' within the narrow category of adult terminal physical illness, this raises serious doubts about whether the legal system is equipped to assess claims of irremediable psychiatric suffering, where prognosis is uncertain.

The question of whether the exclusion of psychiatric illness from assisted dying laws is ethically justifiable is too complex for a straightforward answer, and that difficulty is itself revealing. Legal frameworks that treat psychiatric suffering as less legitimate than physical suffering do not reflect current medical understanding, and risk reinforcing the very stigma they should seek to overcome. The difficulty the UK parliament is facing in regulating assisted dying even for terminal physical illness

demonstrates how poorly equipped legal systems may be to navigate psychiatric complexity, which we are learning more medically about every day. Ultimately, the continued blanket exclusion of psychiatric illness from assisted dying legislation is difficult to defend as ethically justifiable in principle, but may remain necessary given the current limitations of the relationship between legal and medical systems. The underlying question may be not whether psychiatric illness should ever be included, but whether all legal institutions are yet equipped to do so safely. Until they are, the exclusion represents not a resolution of the ethical debate, but rather a deferral of it, and those deferred are real cases of severe psychiatric suffering, suffering in ways the law has yet to find the capacity to acknowledge for most worldwide.



CARL COURT - GETTY IMAGES

Alex

Should voting be mandatory?



The principle of democracy is simple: the government derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed, yet in most democracies, huge portions of the governed simply just don't vote. In the 2024 UK general election turnout was just 60%, and a similar trend is evident across the pond, as in the 2024 US presidential election, one of the most energised in history, 36% of eligible voters didn't cast a ballot. Sadly, these figures aren't outliers—they're the norm, and if democracy depends on participation, can it truly function when so many choose not to take part?

Australia has required its citizens to vote in federal elections since 1924, and the results are striking. Turnout consistently sits above 90%, this of course being considerably higher than countries that don't have mandatory voting. Crucially, those who don't comply are issued with a small fine of around AUD \$20, this creating a system that is un-intimidating, with the point being not to punish but to nudge. The effects of mandatory voting in Australia go beyond just raw participation though, as in voluntary systems the electorate is systematically

unrepresentative: lower income citizens, younger voters and ethnic minorities all turn out at consistently lower rates than their wealthier and older counterparts, and politicians are not naïve about this— they analyse turnout data and design their platforms accordingly

Compulsory voting therefore doesn't just increase turnout, it fundamentally changes who politicians are accountable to. For example, 'Compulsory voting and political knowledge: Testing a 'compelled engagement' hypothesis' (Jack Sheppard) published in Electoral Studies (2016 issue) shows how compulsory voting directly reduces inequalities in political participation and knowledge across socioeconomic groups.

The most principled objection to mandatory voting is the argument around freedom: in a truly free society the right not to vote should be protected, just as the right to vote is. Some people may choose to abstain not out of laziness, but for example because they believe that no candidate genuinely represents them, or that the system is corrupt. However, this objection fails to recognise the fact that mandatory voting, as seen in

countries like Australia, isn't really mandatory voting but rather mandatory attendance— citizens are required to turn up (or cast a postal vote) but once there they are entirely free to spoil their ballot, leave it blank, or select 'none of the above' if such an option exists. Citizens are obligated to engage with the democratic process, not to endorse any particular candidate or party. This distinction matters enormously as this objection loses a lot of its force once it is clear that no one is being forced to support a candidate.

However, some critics may worry that introducing mandatory voting and compelling reluctant voters to attend will simply flood elections with blank ballots, rendering the exercise meaningless. Although, the Australian data ultimately disproves this concern, as the vast majority of people who show up because they must do vote with genuine intent (usually only around 3-5% of ballots are blank)— mandatory voting just gets them through the door.

Moreover, we already accept, in virtually every functioning democracy, that citizenship comes bundled with compulsory obligations e.g. paying taxes, serving on juries, obeying laws one may personally disagree with etc. From this perspective, voting is simply another one of these obligations, and is the minimum ask of society.

Nobody is being forced to endorse a politician they despise— what they are asked to do is show up, and acknowledge that they are part of a shared community with a collective stake in how it is governed, and for democracy to truly reflect that shared stake, voting should be mandatory.

WHO'S AFRAID OF PLUTOCRACY?

Zack



GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK/BCI

On January 21, 2010, the US Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in Citizens United v Federal Electoral Commission that forever changed the course of campaign finance. The Supreme Court held that limiting political expenditure violated the First Amendment. In essence, the case legalised infinite political donations through Super PACs. It led to an extreme increase in spending in US elections and served as a major threat to democracy.

The voter who casts the ballot, rather than expressing true support for a candidate, represents a pre-structured choice of private wealth. Voters are not presented with a full list of choices but a synthetic, manufactured menu of pre-approved candidates. This means that policy choices do not represent the preferences of average citizens but of economic elites and organised interest groups. A 2014 Princeton study analysed 1,779 policy outcomes and their findings were that they

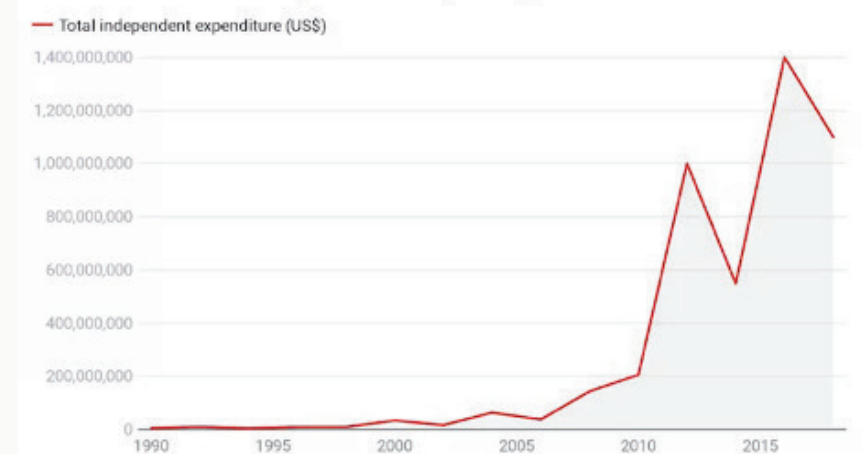
strongly correlated with elite preferences and had almost no correlation with median voter preferences. Therefore, in a sense, as economic inequality widens, fewer people are able to get involved with politics and political voice is concentrated increasingly.

In his book Plutocrats United, Hasen claimed exactly that. Further, he stressed that the significance of the ruling was that it created a more accessible way for the wealthy elite to exert political influence. Loopholes

existed prior to the case, but it was not until 2010 that multi-millionaires and billionaires could so easily use their wealth to influence political decisions. This is why many political scientists (including Hasen) make the argument that America is or has many characteristics of a plutocracy (rule by the wealthy).

This means that wealthy donors can run campaigns parallel to the ones they are funding independently from party infrastructure. In 2016, for

Total US election expenditure by independent sources



THE CONVERSATION

instance, hedge fund manager Robert Mercer poured almost \$23 million into the election cycle, initially supporting candidate Ted Cruz but later pivoting to Donald Trump. Mercer was able to place Steve Bannon and Kellyanne Conway, who were both indebted to him as their careers were funded by him. This exorbitant electoral spending was made possible by Citizens United and the creation of Super PACs.

Mercer lobbied heavily for Trump's hiring of Bannon as the GOP's campaign chief executive. Under this role, Bannon has often been considered the mastermind behind Trump's sweeping campaign. Conway became Trump's campaign manager and the public face of the victory. In August 2026, Conway and Bannon (and hence, the Mercer) took complete control of the Trump campaign. Mercer had direct, unprecedented influence over a major-party nominee. Conway pushed to stabilise Trump's negative public image and to shift focus of the campaign on nationalist ideology, which laid remarkably close to Mercer.

Mercer had previously invested \$10 million in Steve Bannon's news channel Breitbart News. The investment was used by Bannon to transform it into a populist media machine, weaponising anti-establishment narratives and specifically attacking Mercer's political enemies. Further, Bannon integrated Mercer's data firm Cambridge Analytica into political operations, using Mercer's money to test psychological profiling on voters, executing the vision of Mercer – a tech-driven populist revolt.



THE TELEGRAPH

In parallel to the liberalisation of the US, Nigel Farage's Reform UK is reaching a similar outcome through a different legal mechanism. Citizens United did not directly affect campaign finance in Europe. If anything, it served as evidence for tightening it. The propulsion of a similar system in the UK can be attributed to a global air of libertarianism and the development of crypto.

Though its effect on the UK was not direct, the Citizens United ruling reinforced the idea that money can equate to political power. It instilled this idea into many billionaires (such as Elon Musk, now trillionaire) who believe they can exert their influence abroad. Musk, for instance, was previously considering donating millions to Reform UK. Further, Farage is being investigated for failing to declare a '£5 million unconditional, non-political personal gift' from Thailand-based cryptocurrency billionaire Christopher Harborne.

Reform UK has been of great interest to many wealthy elites such as Musk and Harborne as Farage and his party gain traction. Many think this is a unique opportunity – a new party seemingly rising to power in the

UK is a new phenomenon. Donations flood in as billionaires want to be at the forefront of British politics. With caps on foreign donations and cryptocurrency donations already being imposed in Britain, can Farage come up with a way to avoid regulation and claim funding? If he does, what would this mean for Reform UK and Farage, sustainability or hollowness? On the one hand, it may allow Farage to dominate UK politics and impose his agenda. On the other, it may lead to Farage losing control to his wealthy donors.

Though there are many similarities between the US and UK, they must not be overstated. After all, the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 maintains tight spending caps of £54,000 per constituency per party. The Electoral Commission holds parties accountable for misdemeanours as it did when the Conservatives overspent on their Leave campaign. The true danger of the UK system is the uncodified nature of the constitution – it takes one Prime Minister (possible Farage) not in favour of the PPERA 2010 to rip it up, so will there be sufficient checks and balances to prevent a plutocracy in the UK and makes sure it does not follow in America's footsteps?

THE HEAT IS ON MR TRUMP



SAUL LOEB / AFP / GETTY

Ferdi

"It's the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world," insisted Donald Trump last autumn, describing climate change (or its inability to change), at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly. Whether he personally denies the presence of global warming or not, his policy is catastrophic. In his first term, Trump kickstarted the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement but curiously held up spending on carbon capture and storage (CCS). Since the start of his second his stance has hardened, dismantling virtually all climate scaffolding built under Obama and Biden. Luckily, his presidency is becoming increasingly insecure, not least with midterms on the horizon. One must note, though, that the cause of Trump's declining support is both multifaceted and not necessarily to do with his green policy. The question is whether Trump will lose Congress. If so, Trump wouldn't be able to

continue deregulating and, simultaneously, Democrats could rekindle the US' dying climate members via targets, commitments and spending projects. If not, the US will continue to aimlessly drift into dangerous waters.

Trump has systematically driven the US not only off course but off any course whatsoever towards a climate-resilient economy. Unlike George Bush, who went from disdain to acceptance for the existence of human-induced climate change, Trump's stance has only intensified. In his first tenure, he pursued an 'energy dominance' policy focused on bolstering fossil fuel production. Interestingly, renewables weren't disincentivised. Additionally, he began defunding the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - a vital federal agency that had enforced climate parameters for the US. Through his second term, Trump is ripping out all

green frameworks root and branch. Therefore, beneath present front-page coverage surrounding Iran lies a Trumpian policy perhaps as consequential. That is, withdrawing the US from the Paris Agreement (again), discontinuing all international funding for climate action and federal expenditure on renewables, and disendowing scientific climate research. In context, these 'strategies' are plainly ridiculous. The notion that the citizens of the largest global economic superpower would be reminded of 'fake news,' the falsity of global warming, or the imminent threat of Iranian nukes (and thus the necessity of war) more often than the scientific consensus on environmental degradation should be the stuff of fiction. But it isn't. Absurd would be too generous a word to describe it; ludicrous could work.

The purpose for all this makes sense. As a weaponisation

of Biden's political approach, it may have contributed to securing his presidency. As a standalone policy, voters disapprove. According to a 2025 poll by Data for Progress, 86% of voters 'strongly' or 'somewhat' believe greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions should be mitigated. Further, 79% of Republicans believe so. This clear mismatch between public opinion and the president's policy probes at something deeper. Indeed, Trump is fiercely riding (if not swelling) the wave of polarisation hitting global politics. But as the commander-in-chief and in the eye of a confident populace, why shrug off global warming? The answer is twofold. Firstly, the fossil fuel industry itself practically bankrolled Trump's administration. In aggregate, it contributed \$96 million in direct donations to Trump's latter campaign and spent \$250 million on lobbying in the 2024 cycle - 88% of which went to the Republican Party. And as we know, Trump responds keenly to financial leverage. Ideologically, though, Trump seems to have had an epiphany since his first term's uneven stance. The revolutionary Trumpist view is that renewables and environmental regulation are elitist weaknesses that threaten the US' interests, whilst fossil fuels are symbols of strength (and are thus necessities for prosperity). Although misleading, when Trump uses metaphorical or cultural reasoning, poorly educated voters are absorbed by the MAGA sinkhole. Among others, Trump's evidence-denying climate narrative resonates smoothly with the electorate. But Trump's entire campaign rests on populism, denial and egocentrism. So Trump's narrative is both politically and financially motivated - wired for his success.

But crucially, Trump isn't the author of the climate myth, despite brilliantly perpetuating it. US oil giant Exxon's (now ExxonMobil) own scientists confirmed the ecological consequences of fossil fuels internally by 1982. They then buried those findings. When scientific consensus strengthened in 1988, the industry's response was to found the Global Climate Coalition, a lobbying vehicle designed to mask the facts and instead manufacture public doubt. It worked. By 2001, Bush withdrew from Kyoto citing economic harm. Trump's justification two and a half decades later is embarrassingly similar. A declassified State Department briefing confirmed the decision was made, in the administration's own words, "in part, based on input" from the fossil fuel lobby. In Congress, Senator Inhofe spent over a decade as chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee calling warming "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people" and, in February 2015, throwing a snowball on the Senate floor to prove it (four months before Trump even announced his candidacy). Thus, Trump inherited a lucrative industrial furnace that had been smouldering in the basement of US politics for almost

forty years. But against this backdrop, he has become the single loudest spokesman for climate denial on the world stage.

The consequences are uncomfortable. Rhodium Group calculates that Trump's rollbacks will pump an additional 1.8 gigatons of CO₂ into the atmosphere by 2035 alone, exceeding Russia's entire annual output and equivalent to a third of all US emissions in 2019. His second term compounds this. Princeton modelling finds the gap between Biden-era policy and Trump's current trajectory amounts to 575 million extra metric tons in 2035, the equivalent of putting 134 million additional petrol cars on the road for a year. The Climate Action Tracker, an independent body, has downgraded the US to 'Critically Insufficient' in the most significant single-country reversal it has ever analysed, concluding that a world following America's lead would exceed 4°C of warming. The problem is not just that America is retreating. It is that retreat by the world's second-largest emitter makes worldwide climate backtracking easier. More insidiously, while Trump is repealing policy, he is also taking apart the



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY NEWSWEEK/GETTY IMAGES

infrastructure of scientific understanding. His proposed budget cuts global change research funding by 97%, eliminates NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, and halves NASA's earth science budget. The administration dismissed the team compiling the next National Climate Assessment and scrubbed the previous edition from its federal website. In February 2026, it formally repealed the EPA's 2009 endangerment finding, the legal bedrock of virtually all federal GHG regulation, stripping the agency of its statutory authority to act. The administration chose not to dispute the underlying science in doing so, rendering the decision political. The National Academies of Sciences responded that the evidence remains 'beyond scientific dispute.' Washington simply no longer cares.

'Of all the president's remarkable policy initiatives - [Trump's climate policy] is surely the most perverse and potentially catastrophic,' wrote Robert Carnworth (former Supreme Court justice) in light of Trump's second withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in December 2025. Journalists, voters, scientists and politicians alike condemn or disapprove of the Trumpian stance on global warming. Who doesn't? Trump's actions are, at best, overshooting the US beyond the planetary boundaries on which economies fundamentally depend. At worst, global ecological policy will follow suit (either becoming too flimsy or simply non-existent) and the world may become uninhabitable in the long term. Trump's electoral strength may be thwarted by his green policy, though; recent polls suggest 70%

of voters support climate action and his most unpopular rollbacks are backed by only 38%. Trump's party losing control of Congress in the upcoming midterms would allow for some hope. But that is contingent on Democrats instantaneously turning the tide. Wouldn't it be ironic if, after all that, Trump's attack on Iran and the subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz ended up accelerating the global case for renewables and electric vehicles?

"It's the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world,"

- Donald Trump



REUTERS/JENNIFER GAUTHIER

THE MATHS OF THE SENATE

Henry

With the midterms round the corner - what will the political makeup of the senate look like in 5 months time?

MAINE

On 3rd November, Americans will elect 35 senators. These Senators will have a wide range of powers to wrench back or cede more power towards Trump through legislation, appointments to the executive and even impeachment. To do that, however, the parties will need to win. And the primaries and general elections which are unfolding and will conclude in the next six months will reveal much about the direction of the parties and American politics more generally. Republicans currently hold the Senate 53-45-2 (though the independents are effectively Democrats). They have a buffer zone of three seats before losing their majority (JD Vance breaks any ties); however, this is the only structural advantage they have. They are defending 22 seats, have an incumbent President, and 7 retirements. The Democrats are in the opposite position: defending 13 seats, the ability to blame things on Republicans, and only four incumbents stepping down. But while broadly one would expect Democrats to pick up seats given the structural factors at play, their voter base lives in urban areas which means the rural-state-favoring Senate leaves them in a weaker position. Thus, control of the upper chamber will be determined by a few key races.

This is widely viewed as the Democrats' most likely flip. Susan Collins is the only Senator up for election in a state Trump has never won and backed Harris by 7 points. She will almost certainly be facing fisherman-turned-politician Graham Platner, who has forced out of the primary establishment-backed incumbent Governor Janet Mills due to her dreadful polling. Platner is campaigning on Medicare for all, affordable housing, and ending US foreign interventions. He has been critical of Democrats generally and has a controversial past, with reddit posts calling for political violence and a tattoo resembling a Nazi symbol on his chest (he says that he was suffering from PTSD after military service and unaware of the symbol's connotations). Despite these potential issues with his campaign, all major polling aggregates have him beating Collins by 6 points. If he wins it would signal to Democrats that moving in a populist anti-establishment direction is a way to win back voters who backed Biden in 2020 but Trump in 2024. Collins has a history of overperforming, so there is still a chance she can hold on. The race is currently marked as a tossup.

NORTH CAROLINA

Thom Tillis is retiring from this seat which he has held for over a decade amid criticism from Trump due to his insufficient support for the 'Big Beautiful Bill' and opposition from the state party. The Republican nominee is the former RNC Chair Michael Whatley. His role within the Republican bureaucracy lends itself to support from the establishment, and he has been able to supplement this base with the endorsement of Trump, which gives him a secure position within a large chunk of his potential voters. However, Democrats view this seat as a possible flip because their own candidate is in such a strong position. Former Governor (2017-2025) Roy Cooper is the nominee, who, because of his eight years leading the state, has high name recognition and fundraising infrastructure. He also overperformed Biden in 2020 with key voter blocks that swung to Trump in 2024 - black men, Latinos, and High-School-or-less educated. The exit poll demographics will provide an insight into whether the non-white swing to Trump last cycle was a one off, or a longer term trend with which Democrats will have to contend. Cooper will win if he can keep a hold on the urbanised Raleigh-Durham triangle and Charlotte area while keeping enough support in the east and centre of the state to counteract the red stronghold in the west of the state (in 2024 Trump carried that region by 26 points). Republicans will hold the seat if they can keep less educated, male, and suburban voters in their column. The race is currently marked as a tossup/lean D.

OHIO

The Buckeye State has not voted for a Democratic senator since 2018 and a Presidential candidate since 2012. They backed Trump by 8 points in 2020 and then 12 in 2024. It looks to be an incredibly long shot, but Democrats see an opening because of their individual candidate - which once again speaks to

the fact that in the US elections are more candidate focused than in the UK - and the political circumstances. The Republican nominee, John Husted, is fairly typical - his policy record as Ohio Secretary of State include reducing regulation and cutting the size of the bureaucracy. His almost certain opponent, Sherrod Brown, is not. He held the other Ohio Senate seat from 2007 until he lost reelection in 2024 by 3.5, a massive overperformance in a Republican-leaning cycle nationally and a 12 point Trump victory. Brown overperformed with suburban voters (2 points), independents (4 points), and, most significantly, voters with no college degree (12 points). This shows that Brown can attract support from demographics that last cycle swung heavily Republican, potentially because of his protectionist and populist policy positions, which in a midterm election would indicate a possible pickup. Polling aggregates have Brown and Husted at a dead heat. The race is marked as a tossup.

ALASKA

This is another challenging race for Democrats, but nevertheless one in which they see an opportunity. Chuck Schumer has convinced Mary

Peltola, the last Democrat to win a statewide election in Alaska (which has voted Republican for President every year since 1964), to challenge incumbent Republican Dan Sullivan. The race is unique to the other states where Democrats see an opening because of its primary system. They use a blanket primary and then ranked choice voting in the general, which weakens the Democrats' chances of victory. Peltola is the only Democrat likely to place in the top four who progress to the general, with polling data suggesting that the other three will be further to the right than her. This means that the non-Sullivan Republican's second or third choice preferences will likely go to him, which means that Peltola will have to win either an absolute majority, or very close to it, in the first round of voting. She is currently polling at 48.1%. This may well not be enough. The race is currently considered lean R.

TEXAS

If Democratic nominee James Talarico can win in Texas, he would take the crown of the most impressive victory. Texas is the largest 'red state', having last voted blue in a federal election in 1988. Trump doubled his margin in 2024

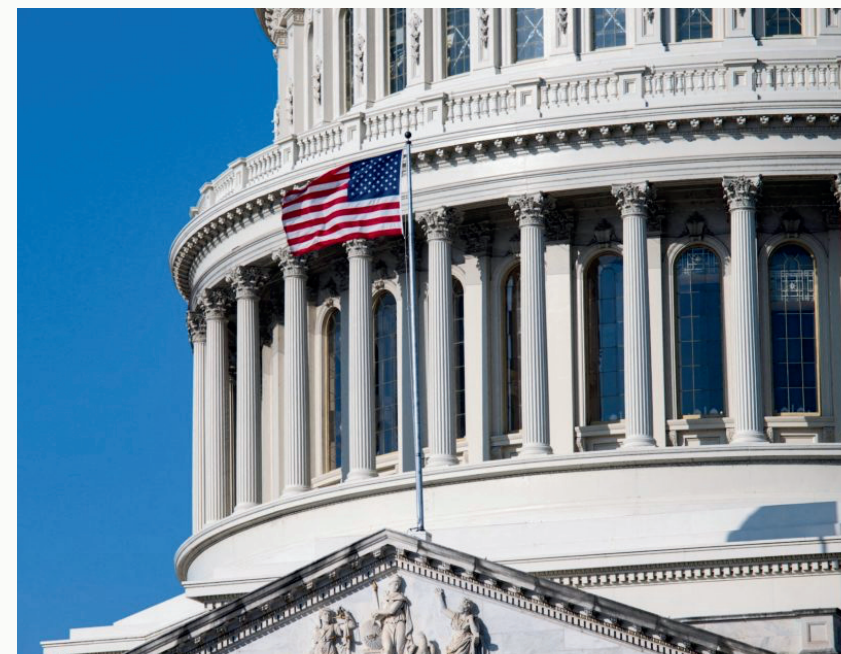


PHOTO BY PBS NEWS

and wiped out all of Biden's 2020 gains, winning the state by 14 points. But Democrats see an opening. The Republican primary was a bitter contest which pitted incumbent Senator John Cornyn, widely viewed as a key link between wealthy donors and the Texas GOP, against hard-right State Attorney General Ken Paxton. Cornyn was comprehensively defeated in the runoff despite a huge fundraising advantage, in part due to Trump's last-minute endorsement of Paxton, showing his iron grip over the Republican party. The primary was costly, which could give Democrats a spending advantage in the general. Talarico won his primary against Jamine Crockett by picking up independents and Latino voters in the center and west of the state, whereas Crockett won by large margins black voters in the east of the state. Talarico's strong showing among white voters and his prominent Christian faith also suggest that he could carry Texas with the voters that Democrats need to win back if they are to wrest control from Republicans in DC. While it may be a long shot, Democrats believe that this may be their chance to finally flip Texas. The race is currently marked as a tossup.

ACTUAL PATHWAYS

Democrats will have a hard time winning back the Senate. They would need to win 4/5 of the above races and hold onto their own marginal seats in Michigan and Georgia (both of which voted for Trump last cycle). This increases to all 5 if one of those are flipped by Republicans, and Democrats lose all realistic hope if both Georgia and Michigan go in the Republican column. But they do have a chance. The rising prices due to the Iran war, strong candidates, and an approval rating of just 40% for Trump means that there is an opening in the right states. Now all they have to do is take it.

RISE OF THE RIGHT

Philip

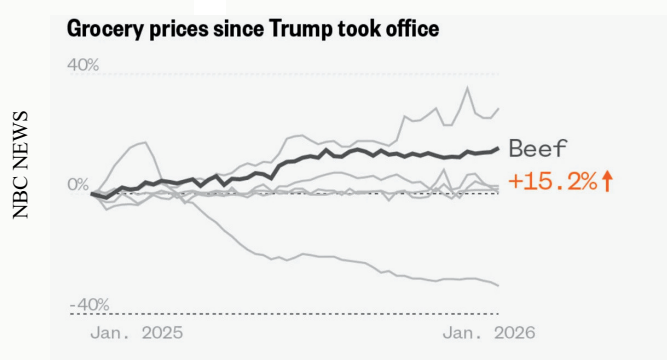
A TURNING TIDE

In recent times, the extreme right has seen increasing political popularity. Usually, this is caused by instability and a loss of trust in the more moderate parties, hastily looking for solutions. Many centrists, left-leaning politicians and activists are comparing this to Orwell's two dystopian novels and that seems ever more apparent. Reform UK, Alternative fuer Deutschland (AFD) and the Republican party have all won, or are likely to win, their next respective elections.

These parties thrive on disillusionment. Where institutions have failed and living standards have stagnated, voters become susceptible to simple answers. The consequences of this are already on display in America. Voters of the Republican Party in late 2024 were promised lower prices at the grocery store by ending inflation, bringing manufacturing to the United States and most importantly – the end of illegal migration. We're now one and a half years into the presidency and Trump has failed on all of these promises.

Voters of the Republican Party in late 2024 were promised lower prices at the grocery store by ending inflation, making the US a dominant force in energy production, stopping outsourcing and bringing manufacturing to the United States and most importantly – the end of illegal migration. We're now one and a half years into the presidency and Trump has failed on all of these promises.

BROKEN PROMISES: THE ECONOMIC RECORD



HAIYUN JIANG / THE NEW YORK TIMES



Prices at the grocery stores in America have risen, orange juice is up 22% and beef is up 15% according to NBC - the only thing that has gone down significantly is the price of eggs, dropping from \$8 a dozen (~£6) in March 2025 to \$2.50 (~£1.80) now in April 2026 (compare this to the UK's £1.40/dozen).

Trump's implementation of record high tariffs, for example, the tariff with China reaching 245%, have only contributed to increased financial debts, rising from \$37 Trillion in 2025 to \$39 Trillion in March 2026. Extreme tariffs and attempts at moving manufacturing to the US have failed at court too. For example, the Supreme Court ruled tariffs on Nintendo as unlawful, forcing the administration to back down. Alongside this, Trump's 'Liberation Day' tariffs were also ruled as illegal, but Trump is yet to fully follow court orders.

A PATTERN OF LAWLESSNESS

Trump's pattern for lawlessness has become somewhat of a theme in his presidency. The Supreme Court struck down his illegal stationing of the National Guard in states such as Illinois, California and Oregon.

Donald Trump's scandalous ties with convicted paedophile Jeffery Epstein have come to light this past year or so. The United States Justice Department's failure to follow court rulings to release the files immediately in November 2025, missing the congressionally mandated deadline and leaving a significant volume of documents either withheld or subject to ongoing redaction review, have faced immense public backlash.

Perhaps Trump's most significant crime so far is the current ongoing war with Iran, threatening the use of war crimes, putting the lives of innocent Americans and Iranians at risk. So far, 15 are confirmed to have died in the war and many more are inevitably to come.

THE ROLE OF ICE

Under Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill, signed in July 2025, 10,000 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were deployed across cities throughout the United States. The expansion has since drawn significant public backlash, particularly following a series of fatal shootings in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The first killing occurred on January 7, 2026, when Renée Good, a 37-year-old American mother of three, was fatally shot by ICE agent Jonathan Ross. Federal officials and President Trump defended the shooting, claiming the agent acted in self-defence after Good ran him over. In reality, video footage showed Ross standing at the front-left of her vehicle as it turned away from him, moving into the direction of traffic, when he fired three shots, killing her.

Seventeen days later, on January 24, Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old ICU nurse at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs hospital, was shot multiple times and killed by two Customs and Border Protection officers. Pretti had been filming agents with his phone and intervening when a woman was pushed to the ground; he was then pepper-sprayed, wrestled down by around six federal agents, and shot. Bystander video reviewed by Reuters, the BBC, the New York Times, CNN, and the Guardian all concluded he was holding a phone, not a gun, in the moments before being tackled. Pretti was legally licensed to carry a firearm, yet video appears to show an agent removing the gun from his holster and stepping away roughly one second before another agent opened fire.

In the aftermath, witnesses reported that no agents attempted to help Pretti, and a physician at the scene was initially blocked from approaching the body to check for a pulse. Despite the video evidence, federal authorities posthumously labelled Pretti a domestic terrorist, claiming officers fired in fear for their lives. Minnesota officials have since sued the Trump administration for access to evidence, accusing the federal government of renegeing on its promise to cooperate with state investigations into both killings. To date, no agents have been charged.

Serious concerns have been raised after the Trump Administration's deportation of Kilmar Abrego Garcia's, a father, beloved husband with protected status, to the only country it was unlawful for him to be sent to, due to alleged ties with MS-13.



CARLIN STIEHL / LOS ANGELES TIMES

THE COUNTER MOVEMENT

So, what can we do about it? Well, it's easier said than done but the best way is to educate people. Street interviewers in places such as Clacton help show the world how obliviousness can cause major repercussions, and efforts from the left — especially young people such as Dean Withers and Parker Sedgwick on social media — help educate people by putting on display the incapability of the right by debating voters and also bringing to light administrative faults.

Major campaigning such as Mamdani's New York City mayoral campaign also helps this, and winning these types of elections and keeping promises puts trust within the general public. Mamdani's first 100 days as Mayor of New York City has seen record lows of crime. Alongside this, many other red states such as Florida and Texas have now also turned blue, and the 'No Kings Protests' help show that people are fed up — all of these major wins show that the rise of the right is stoppable. Mid-term elections, if Democrats are to win both the House and the Senate this year, could put a stop to the ever-rising radical right.

Trump is a major representation of what the right could look like here on this side of the pond and it's about time people start waking up to the danger that Reform UK or the AFD can cause. Surprisingly, things have slowly shifted. The Green Party and the Liberal Democrats have been slowly rising in polls, and it seems that Reform will have a larger battle to fight for the top job than it seemed last year. Whilst the youth are swaying to the left — if this trend does carry on, the world may look very different than we would have otherwise thought.

'Forever Barred': How Trump Used the Courts – and Then Bypassed Them – to Shield His Family From Tax Scrutiny

Alex



A years-long legal battle over presidential financial records has culminated in an extraordinary act of executive self-protection, raising fundamental questions about equality before the law. For more than seven years, Donald Trump waged a relentless legal campaign to keep his tax records out of the hands of Congress, prosecutors, and the American public. He lost, repeatedly and decisively, in courts across the land including, on three separate occasions, at the Supreme Court of the United States. It was, legal scholars noted at the time, among the most comprehensive judicial repudiations of a president's claim to financial privacy in modern American history.

Yet just three weeks ago, the outcome of all those courtroom defeats was effectively reversed by a one-page addendum quietly posted to the Department of Justice website. The document, signed by acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, declared that the Internal Revenue Service is "forever barred and precluded" from

examining or prosecuting Donald Trump, his sons Donald Jr. and Eric, and the Trump Organization for any tax issues arising from returns filed before May 19, 2026. In the space of a single page, the executive branch had achieved what seven years of courtroom manoeuvring could not: a sweeping, apparently permanent exemption from federal tax scrutiny for a sitting president and his family.

To understand the magnitude of what has just occurred, it is necessary to trace the legal history that preceded it. Trump was, as his admirers often noted, a fighter. But in the courts, on the question of his finances, he fought and lost with remarkable consistency. The first major clash came in 2020, in the case of 'Trump v. Vance', in which the Manhattan District Attorney's office sought eight years of the president's financial records, including his tax returns, through a grand jury subpoena. Trump's legal team argued that a sitting president could not be subject to any form of criminal investigation during his time in office, a claim of sweeping

and unprecedented breadth. The Supreme Court rejected it unanimously, ruling 8-1 that no citizen, including the president, is above the reach of a state grand jury subpoena. Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, reached back to Chief Justice John Marshall and the trial of Aaron Burr in 1807 to underline the point: the president is not exempt from judicial process. The records eventually reached the Manhattan DA's office and played a central role in building the financial fraud cases that would follow.

The battle over congressional access proved equally bruising. In 2019, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Representative Richard Neal of Massachusetts, formally requested six years of Trump's tax returns under a federal statute that requires the IRS to furnish any taxpayer's records to a small number of senior congressional officials upon request. The Trump Treasury Department, under Secretary Steven Mnuchin, refused, arguing the request lacked a legitimate legislative purpose. The legal fight

dragged on for more than three years. District courts ruled against Trump. The DC Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Trump. And in November 2022, the Supreme Court declined (without a single noted dissent) to intervene, clearing the way for the records to be handed over to the committee. It was, as one legal commentator observed, the third Supreme Court loss for Trump on tax-related matters in a single year. The House Ways and Means Committee duly received the returns and published a report in December 2022. What it found was damaging: years in which the IRS's mandatory presidential audit programme appeared to have been all but dormant, and returns that raised serious questions about the valuation of Trump's assets and the legitimacy of certain deductions.

THE FRAUD TRIAL AND ITS REVERSAL

While the congressional battle played out in Washington, a parallel (and in some ways more dramatic) legal confrontation was unfolding in New York. In September 2022, New York Attorney General Letitia James filed a sweeping civil fraud lawsuit against Trump, his three eldest children, and the Trump Organization, alleging years of deliberate manipulation of asset valuations to obtain favourable loan terms and insurance rates. The suit named Donald Trump Jr., Ivanka Trump, and Eric Trump as co-defendants, accusing them of signing off on documents they knew to contain fraudulent valuations. After a trial that ran from October 2023 into January 2024, Judge Arthur Engoron found Trump and his companies liable and ordered the disgorgement of \$364 million in ill-gotten gains, a figure that, with interest, approached half a billion dollars.

Trump called himself "an innocent man" and branded the case "a fraud on me," repeatedly and publicly asserting that it was a politically motivated attack by Democratic officials.

He was not entirely without sympathy from the bench. In August 2025, a New York appeals court voided the penalty, though it narrowly upheld the finding that Trump had engaged in fraud by exaggerating his wealth for decades. Trump declared "total victory." The ruling spared him from the financial penalty but imposed a ban on him and his two eldest sons serving in corporate leadership roles for several years. The civil case never involved the IRS directly. But it underscored a pattern: that the financial affairs of the Trump family had generated sustained legal scrutiny across multiple jurisdictions, and that the question of whether those affairs constituted fraud, civil or criminal, was very much alive.

THE LAWSUIT AGAINST THE IRS

The pretext for what came next was a genuine grievance, though critics would argue it was weaponised beyond all proportion to its legitimate scope. Between 2019 and 2020, an IRS contractor named Charles Littlejohn had accessed the confidential tax records of Donald Trump and thousands of other wealthy Americans and leaked them to journalists at The New York Times and ProPublica. The resulting reporting, which showed Trump had paid just \$750 in federal income tax in the year he won the presidency, caused a political sensation. Littlejohn was subsequently identified, prosecuted, and sentenced to five years in prison. On January 29, 2026, Trump, his sons Donald Jr. and Eric, and the Trump

Organization filed a \$10 billion lawsuit against the IRS and the Department of the Treasury in a Florida federal court, alleging that the agencies had wilfully failed to safeguard their tax information. The complaint argued, with some arithmetical creativity, that each view of a news article containing the leaked data constituted a separate \$1,000 statutory violation, hence the ten-figure demand.

The suit was almost immediately controversial. Critics, including senior members of Congress, pointed out the structural absurdity: the president was simultaneously the plaintiff in a lawsuit against a federal agency he controlled. Representative Jamie Raskin, the senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, urged the court to dismiss the case for lack of jurisdiction, arguing that no genuine adversarial case or controversy existed when a president could effectively direct the defendant (his own government) to settle on whatever terms he chose. On April 17, 2026, the parties filed a joint motion requesting a 90-day pause in proceedings, citing ongoing settlement discussions. The presiding judge, Kathleen Williams of the Southern District of Florida, declined to grant it, and instead signaled she would examine whether the court had jurisdiction to hear the case at all, a question that, if answered in the negative, would have invalidated any settlement reached. On May 18, 93 members of Congress filed a brief calling the suit an unconstitutional "collusive" action. That same day, Trump filed a notice of voluntary dismissal.

THE SETTLEMENT AND ITS EXTRAORDINARY ADDENDUM

The following day, the Justice Department announced the terms of a settlement. In lieu of any

direct payment, the government agreed to establish a \$1.776 billion fund, a figure chosen, apparently, to echo the year of American independence, for individuals who claimed they had been the victims of political "weaponisation" by previous administrations. The fund would be administered by the DOJ. The settlement itself attracted immediate and fierce criticism from Democrats and some Republicans who regarded it as an unconstitutional self-dealing arrangement, a president extracting nearly two billion dollars from a government he controlled by suing it, dropping the suit, and pocketing the proceeds in the form of a slush fund for political allies. But it was the addendum, posted quietly to the DOJ website the day after the settlement was announced, that provoked the deepest alarm among legal scholars. Signed by acting Attorney General Blanche, the one-page document declared that as part of the settlement, the United States government was "forever barred and precluded" from examining or prosecuting Trump, his sons, the Trump Organization, and affiliated individuals and entities for any tax issues arising from returns filed before May 19, 2026. This was not a pardon, which requires a formal presidential act and applies only to federal criminal liability. This was, in effect, a permanent administrative waiver of the government's right to pursue civil or criminal tax claims against an entire family and its associated businesses, signed not by a court, but by a Justice Department official who served at the president's pleasure.

LEGAL CHALLENGES AND CONGRESSIONAL FURY

The backlash was swift and, by Washington standards, unusually bipartisan. Representative Neal,

whose committee had fought a three-year legal battle to obtain Trump's tax returns from the IRS, was categorical. "Trump has turned the federal government into his personal protection racket by making sure his, his family, and his companies' taxes are permanently off limits," he said in a statement. "The same people struggling with grocery prices are now on the hook to protect the wealthiest family in America from tax scrutiny." Legal experts pointed out the extraordinary implications of the waiver. Analysts at the Centre for American Progress noted that, if the settlement were permitted to stand, it could bar not just the IRS but potentially the Securities and Exchange Commission, the DOJ itself, the FBI, and other federal agencies from investigating the more than 500 Trump-related business entities for anything that occurred before the settlement date. Ongoing IRS audits that could have resulted in the Trump Organization paying a penalty of \$100 million would, under the terms of the addendum, simply vanish. A federal judge has since temporarily enjoined the settlement fund pending a hearing scheduled for later this month. Thirty-five former federal judges filed a separate motion in the underlying case, calling for judicial scrutiny of the arrangement's constitutional foundations.

The Centre for American Progress noted a further dimension: the Trump family had reportedly accumulated over \$2.6 billion in cash and gifts since the November 2024 election, with significant portions tied to financial vehicles (including a cryptocurrency venture called World Liberty Financial) that were themselves subjects of ongoing federal inquiry. Under the terms of the addendum, those inquiries, too, would appear to be foreclosed.

WHAT COURTS CAN DO

The fundamental legal question: whether a president can use the executive power of his own Justice Department to grant himself and his family permanent immunity from federal financial investigation, has never been squarely answered by the courts. The Supreme Court's 2024 ruling in 'Trump v. United States', which established broad presidential immunity for official acts, has been cited by some Trump allies as providing a legal foundation for the settlement. In that 6-3 decision, the conservative majority held that presidents enjoy absolute immunity for acts within their core constitutional responsibilities, and at least presumptive immunity for official acts within the outer perimeter of their responsibilities. But legal scholars are divided on whether directing the attorney general to issue a blanket tax waiver for the president's family constitutes an "official act" within the meaning of that ruling, or whether it amounts to a private benefit, which the majority in 'Trump v. United States' explicitly excluded from immunity protection.

What is clear is that the tools previously used to pursue Trump's tax records, congressional subpoenas, grand jury process, state-level litigation, were all tools that operated through the courts. A DOJ administrative settlement, by contrast, is an executive act. It bypasses the judiciary entirely. And that, critics argue, is precisely the point. Seven years of litigation. Three Supreme Court defeats. A civil fraud finding upheld on appeal. And yet, in the end, none of it mattered. The answer to seven years of judicial process was a single page from the Justice Department. The courts are still deciding what to do about it.

A retrospective of of three turning points in judicial independence

Lawrence

From the 18th to the early 20th centuries, the US Supreme Court was seen as a body not merely burdened with the duty of impartiality but as an institution standing above partisanship, a vital check on the worldly realpolitik of the other branches. John Adams, writing in 1780, believed that the nascent constitution should be 'a government of laws and not of men,' and the creation of the Supreme Court in 1789 was intended to embody this principle. Alexander Hamilton, a firm believer like so many of the founding fathers in the importance of the separation of powers, wrote in the Federalist Papers no. 81 that 'there is no liberty, if the power of judging be not separated from the legislative and executive powers.' On the nature of judicial detachment from political currents, Hamilton opined in Federalist no. 78: 'The judiciary ... may truly be said to have neither force nor will, but merely judgement.' A more recent soundbite, however, indicates a very different view of the Supreme Court's position: Associate Justice Elena Kagan, a 2010 Obama appointee, remarked that 'Judges create legitimacy problems for themselves ... when they stray into places where it looks like they're an extension of the political process.' This indicates an entirely different kind of Supreme Court from the superpolitical entity anticipated by the founding fathers, to whom the

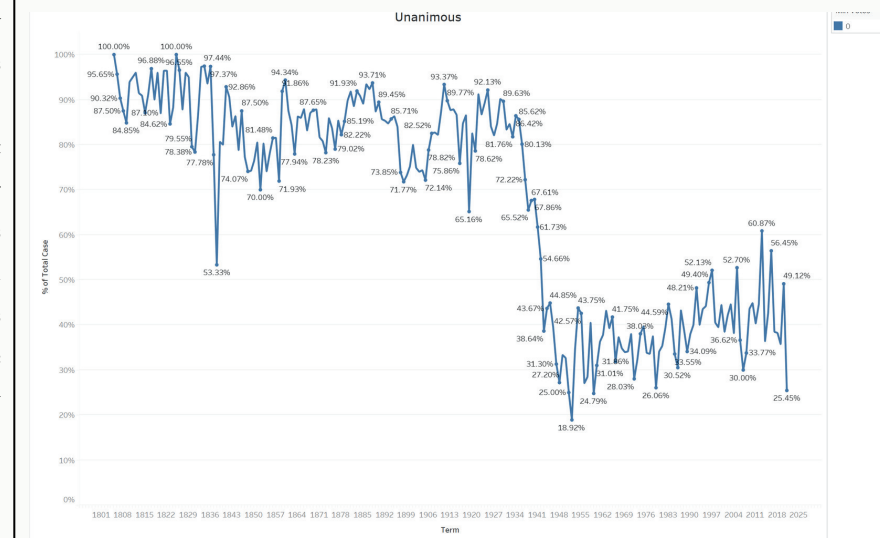


PHOTO: JOE RAVI/C-C-BY-SA 3.0/WIKIMEDIA

very idea that a Supreme Court Justice could be influenced by the political sphere would have been foreign. This begs the question: when and how did this image of the justice as a semi-mythologised elder statesman change in the 250 years since Hamilton and Adams?

The event most often associated with the beginning of the Supreme Court's transition towards a more overtly politicised body was the 1937 Judicial Procedures Reform Bill, colloquially known as the 'court-packing plan.' This bill was introduced by President Roosevelt during the apex of his clash with the more conservative Supreme Court, who threatened to repeal much of his landmark post-depression New Deal reforms. It would allow him to appoint 1 extra associate justice for each current one over the age of 70, effectively allowing him to strengthen his reforms by 'packing' the court

with his supporters. Although it was defeated thanks to the famous 'switch in time that saved nine' where Associate Justice Owen Roberts switched his vote to allow some of Roosevelt's reforms to pass, this marked a vital step in the long road to today's relatively open judicial partisanship, as it was the first attempt to manipulate the Court's structure for partisan ends, and marked a shift in the court's attitude, which had previously viewed unanimity as a desirable outward indicator of judicial stability and impartiality. Post-New Deal, however, the individual justices' ideologies increasingly overrode this desire for unity, as can be seen in the sharp plunge visible in figure 1 in the percentage of unanimous decisions from 85% to 40% of cases, which never returned to historic levels, a sign of the enduring legacy this period left on judicial partisanship.



THE US SUPREME COURT DATABASE

In terms of its enduring legacy on the functioning of the contemporary Supreme Court, the ‘court-packing’ incident is superseded only by a select few periods in American history. One such period was the civil rights movement, perhaps unsurprising given the sheer extent of the sweeping changes to American society as a whole during this period, an onrushing tide of reform from which the Supreme Court was not spared. And at the centre of this movement was the Court itself. Few moments better represent this decade of upheaval better than the event which opened the floodgates of civil rights: The 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. The justices unanimously found the practice of racial segregation in the school system unconstitutional, striking a fatal blow to the principle of ‘separate but equal’ characteristic of Jim Crow-era America. No other Supreme Court case at the time had ever had such a sizeable influence on American politics, and at the same time few had ever been so controversial, ending in standoffs between federal and state troops in a number of southern states who refused to acknowledge the ruling, and is seen by many as the most important Supreme Court decision of all time.

As the gravity of the Supreme Court’s rulings grew, so too did their value as a tool for pushing a political agenda. The controversial tendencies of their verdicts in this decade shattered conservative perceptions of the Court’s lofty and apolitical nature, as to their eyes, the Republican political programme was rapidly being undermined by a partisan, and unelected institution. The combination of the increasing appreciation of the Court’s value as a policy tool, and the progressive slant of their rulings led the right

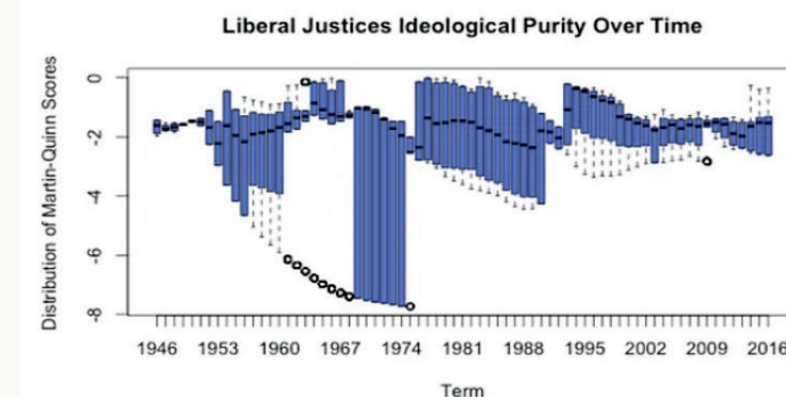
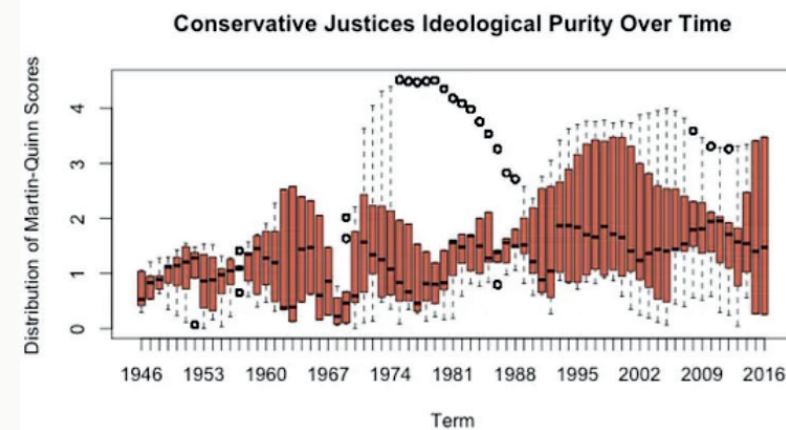
wing to stage a ‘counterrevolution’ against an institution they increasingly saw as a mere tool of the civil rights movement, and the Supreme Court’s latest rulings had given them a perfect target with which to focus their ire. But these decisions, now embedded in the principle of *stare decisis*, could only be overridden from the inside – so the Republican presidents of the 1980s and ‘90s set about trying to dismantle the civil rights movement’s hard-won reforms of the last two decades.

As a result of the broadly Republican elections between 1969 and 1994, 10 justices were appointed under Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush sr. and Bush jr., ensuring Republican dominance of the Supreme Court for those three decades. But packing the court with Republican appointees did not necessarily equate to Republican judicial dominance, as the Bush family found to their frustration.

By 1992, the main conservative target was another landmark Supreme Court ruling: *Roe v. Wade*, a ruling decided in 1973 which guaranteed abortion as a right reserved to all women. With 8 out of the 9 current justices in the Rehnquist Court having been Republican-nominated, and the sole Democratic appointee Byron White ideologically opposed to abortion, they should have faced little resistance in their desire to overrule this ruling. However, in the 1992 case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, effectively a referendum on *Roe v. Wade*, 5 justices: Blackmun, Kennedy, O’Connor, Souter and Stevens formed a 5-4 plurality opinion in favour of *Roe*. The scale of Republican fury at what they saw as a betrayal by their own justices cannot be understated, as this directly resulted in the next evolution of

the Supreme Court: a desire for ideological purity among nominees to the Court. O’Connor, Souter and Stevens were particular figures of hate for conservatives, as they joined new Democratic appointees Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer in defeating a number of right-wing assaults on civil liberties, notably in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down laws criminalising homosexual relationships, and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which upheld affirmative action policies in university application. The ‘betrayal’ of these justices transformed what should have been a period of conservative dominance on the Court into an era of judicial moderation.

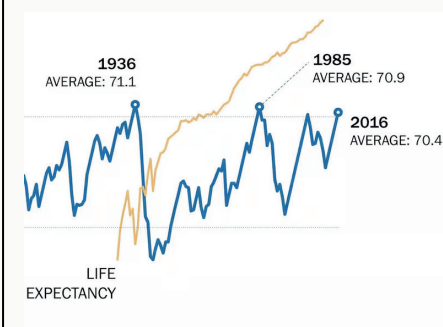
By the early 2000s, the ire of right-wing commentators had crystallised into the No More Souters movement, a rallying cry against the ideological moderation of the Rehnquist Court. But Republican President George H. W. Bush had learnt his lesson; from then onwards, any Republican nominee to the Supreme Court had to prove themselves a committed conservative, and all future considerations for the nomination underwent a vetting process from conservative groups like the Federalist Society to demonstrate their ideological purity. This openly and purely political approach to nomination had a profound effect on future Court decisions, as can be seen in figure 2 (top of page on the right), as the distribution of Martin-Quinn scores of ideological purity narrowed substantially for conservative justices from this point onwards.



The Democratic party, however, had long since known the value of nominating candidates who would do what they wanted; having far fewer Supreme Court nominees in this period, they knew each one had to count, resulting in the nominations of committed liberals like Breyer and Ginsburg (figure 3) (see directly above).

The moderate Court of the 1990s changed not just the ideological profile of future Supreme Court nominees, but the physical profile as well. Age in particular became regarded as a valuable yardstick second only to ideological purity in determining the next nominees, as a young candidate could exert their influence on the Supreme Court for longer. The model of a young, committed conservative justice was in many ways pioneered by Clarence Thomas’

confirmation in 1991, who at 43 has been a reliable vote for right-wing policies for the last 35 years. Gone were the days of wizened elder statesmen who made up a majority of the Court in the 18th and 19th centuries, as the average age of the Court has fallen substantially compared to the average life expectancy, as can be seen in figure 4.



MEDIUM

The new generation of justices were younger than ever and more ideologically partisan than ever, and this shift is a direct result of the increased appreciation of the power that the President’s ability to nominate justices to the Supreme Court carries, a legacy of the rebellious Rehnquist Court of the 1990s and early 2000s.

Each of the three events explored in this article has had its own unique influence on the nature of the contemporary Supreme Court and taken together explain a large part of the difference between the Court of the founding fathers and that of today. The New Deal and Roosevelt’s ‘court-packing plan’ was responsible for the discovery of the Supreme Court’s ability to exert itself on the landscape of politics, and the demythologising of the justices’ impartiality. This began a trend of partisanship which the next period exacerbated, as the civil rights movement put to the Court an unprecedented degree of power over American society as a whole. If 1937 gave political actors the ability to influence the court for the first time, then 1954 gave them a reason to do so. And the final period, beginning in 1992 with an unprecedented degree of nonpartisanship, resulted in a fundamental shift in the profile of the future Supreme Court justices, in an attempt to ensure final control of the Court went to the politicians, and paving the way for the modern era of historically toxic fighting between conservative and progressive forces inside the courtroom just as is happening outside. In many ways, the evolution of the Supreme Court mirrors the evolution of the other branches of government, and indeed American society as a whole into one so different as to be unrecognisable to the America of the founding fathers.



MALA HITTI/GETTY IMAGES

THE AfD AND GERMANY IN CRISIS

Lev

The 20th Bundestag is in session. 83 members of the 20th Bundestag were from the far-right nationalist party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland – Alternative for Germany). The 21st Bundestag is in session; 151 are from the AfD, and they are the second largest party after the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Social Union, CSU is essentially the CDU but in Bavaria), who dominated the elections after crushing the left SPD party. The fact is, people were tired of Scholz and the SPD, they wanted a change, and they voted far right, creating a strong partnership with their fellow far right friends, the AfD. The AfD has 20% of the Bundestag, over twice as much as last time. But many people are concerned, and very worried that the AfD has such a large majority.

The AfD is one of the most, if not the most, far-right, ultra-nationalist, ethno-nationalist and Eurosceptic party in Europe, to the extent that multiple members of the party have been accused of antisemitism and Holocaust denial, as well as confirmed and verbal protest against refugees and migrants/immigrants coming into Germany. Furthermore, it has been confirmed by multiple sources that German intelligence has classified it as an extreme-right party, and the mere fact that German intelligence is actively monitoring that party is also worrying. It has also created worry

in the context of Germany's incredibly strong ties to Europe and Germany's strong integration into Europe, as it provides stability, peace, and democracy.

This worries many people, as Germany has built a reputation for being kind, developed and above all reasonable. Yet this quick and rapid rise of ultra-far-right and ethnic nationalism worries people and certainly reminds them of the Nazi party, and so they are apprehensive of the very similar rise to power of a far-right party, perhaps even a repeat of history. Furthermore, Max Krahn in 2024 spoke out and disregarded the crimes of the SS, leading to the removal of the AfD from the European Parliament, as well as the Central Council of Jews in Germany and multiple individuals voicing their worry. We have an ultra-far-right, ethno-nationalist, conservative, Eurosceptic party which has gained traction very quickly within the past year, and it is worrying people as it looks a lot like the rise of the Nazi party. But first, let us break this situation down so we can understand it better.

One of the main reasons why the rise of the far-right is indeed a shock to people is because of how much Germany tried to prevent the rise of the far right, as they already have suffered from the consequences of having an extremely

far-right, ultra-ethno-nationalist, conservative party. The very fact that the German people are rejecting such a taught and valued doctrine is simply a manifestation of how tired the Germans were of the SPD, and perhaps is also a testament to the people's patience. The Nazi party's rise to power was horrific and it led to horrible events, yet the German people still made that decision. Germany had lost World War I and had been put under justifiably brutal conditions. Whilst I and many others believe this was a necessary punishment for their atrocities, the German people were definitely not satisfied, nor in agreement with me. When the Nazi party came into power it was 1933, and so it had been 15 years of brutal conditions for the German people and they were understandably tired, exhausted and angry. There was no faith in the German people, no encouragement or justification for their rise back to glory, and that is why a party which so enthusiastically promoted the German race and people grew in traction. The German people once again had faith in themselves, a belief that they could do it and, most importantly, the idea that they were superior. The last point resonated very well with Germans, as the German people had been treated like they were inferior and like essentially scum for the past 15 years, and so suddenly when people have faith in themselves and are promoting themselves and saying that they are confident in themselves, it works perfectly. The Nazis took advantage of Germany's weak spirit.

One of the key reasons for Hitler's campaign's success was their horrific treatment of Jews and ethnic minorities. They had a scapegoat, upon whom they could dump all of their felonies. The Germans, nor the Nazis, couldn't admit that they did wrong in WW1, so they had to blame it on someone: the Jews and ethnic minorities. Earlier I mentioned that the element of encouraging the fact that they were superior was a very important factor in their rise, yet here they had somebody who they could be superior to: the Jews and ethnic minorities. The Nazis also promoted the idea of the Jews and ethnic minorities as being a pollutant to the German race, which boosted and gave traction to the Holocaust, as well as helping the idea of superiority. They inferiorised the Jews and ethnic minorities and placed all their crimes on them, and so successfully had people to be superior to (N.B. they couldn't say they were superior if there was no one to be superior to; saying they were superior to other European races wouldn't work as well, as people relate better to something within their country rather than something foreign), which boosted but most importantly provided "evidence" for their claims of superiority and their campaigns, as well as "evidence" for the fact that they did nothing wrong. It was apparently all the Jews' and ethnic minorities' fault.



JAVIER PALMA - THE ECONOMIST

That was a quick overview of the past, so how does it relate to the present? Well, one could argue that a similar situation has arisen today. Before I get into the details of how this relates to the rise of the AfD, I would like to outline the points that give me the view that today's situation is similar to 1933's. Germany has seen some rather turbulent political times, and has had quite a difficult time. I would like to establish that when I say difficult times, I relate this to the premises of the Treaty of Versailles, which put Germany under economic hardship, and various other difficulties and restrictions. Now, this helped the Nazis' popularity grow not because of the specifics of the oppression, but simply because of the difficulties and strain, which then made the solidarity stronger. Germany, over the past few years, has been put under so many responsibilities and is now the country upon which many nations are dependent. This has put strain and difficulty onto Germany, and so when I say difficult times, I don't mean necessarily economic and post-war complications, but general strain, regardless of its manifestation. Furthermore, like I have mentioned earlier, one of the key reasons for the rapid rise and success of the Nazi Party is a scapegoat and someone who the Nazis could oppress to prove that they bore the dominant race and

people. In this context, very recently (by this I mean the past two decades) there has been a very large influx of immigrants from around the world into Germany, who most commonly are from the Middle East and/or Africa, and are most commonly unskilled, bearing no significant education, and perhaps crucially being poorer than average Germans. This is the component which I am not suggesting are being treated as inferior, but are vulnerable to inferiorisation.

According to multiple pollsters in all of Germany in the past two months, the AfD has had the most favour among the public, especially in East Germany, where all districts voted for the AfD. I have quickly outlined in the last ten lines of the previous paragraph as to why the AfD has gained so much popularity, but let us explore it further, so as to obtain some further clarity upon this subject. It is evident that Germany in 2025 is (in my opinion) surprisingly similar to Germany in 1933. One of the ways in which it is similar, which I specifically left for this section of my article, is the buildup. 1933 and 2025 both fit eerily well the criteria of a good year for the expansion of a UFRN/ENES (Ultra-Far-Right-Nationalist/Ethno-Nationalist-Euro-Sceptic) party. But part of the reason for this is the buildup of events before this year. The buildup for both years included political "turbulence", loss of faith in the country, loss of faith in the country's leader and dissatisfaction with past leadership and past years. The past decade of politics in Germany has included lots of political instability, from Angela Merkel's highly controversial selfie with an immigrant, to the Euro crisis. Germany has experienced a lot of strains and that strain has significantly corroded it. Let me

The AfD's rise echoes a history Germany swore never to repeat.

expand more upon my idea of this strain. America internationally has both voluntarily and involuntarily taken on the title of world police, i.e. they have to get involved in every conflict, structure peace for every war, be actively involved in diplomacy (the world police is currently in action; Donald Trump is attempting to solve the Russia-Ukraine conflict), as well as various other roles to resolve economic crises and humanitarian crises. However, Europe, due to it being developed, doesn't straight away need America's help; it resolves everything within itself, and so Europe has developed its own "European police." However, I would like to point out that the European police are mostly diplomatic. In my opinion, the only country that has been the fulcrum for economics, diplomacy, aid and generally everything in Europe has been Germany.

It is also the only country capable of doing so; the UK has had a fun yet unproductive ride with the Tories, and France is still being complacent with Macron. Germany has, partly voluntarily and partly (mostly) involuntarily, gained this title, as well as the burdens that come with it. So not only has Germany been working

like clockwork to serve the whole of Europe whilst still meeting the European police expectations, it has maintained this for a very long time. So what is wrong with all this? Germany is making us happy and safe, life is great! Well, the problem is that due to this, Germany hasn't been able to focus on its own national needs, and so the people are struggling and tired. Germany has ignored and isolated its people due to its very active international life, so it is very easy for a party that promotes Germans in such a strong and powerful way to win in a country where the German population has been neglected; in fact, these are perfect conditions. Furthermore, one of the reasons which I believe to be important to the rise of the AfD is the large influx of immigrants that has been coming into Germany. Now, this point is rather interesting, as this, unlike some of my previous points, does not bear any resemblance to 1933. Yet the overarching effect it produces very much does. Immigrants are vital to any country or sovereign state, mostly because they are willing to do any and all work as long as it gives them a living wage and a life in itself. Immigrants, however, are very often discriminated against due to the fact that most of them occupy low-skilled jobs and many of the immigrants being unskilled. This is in fact the reason why they are vital; they do the jobs that we lazy occidentals can't be bothered to complete. More to the point, they are commonly discriminated against and, most crucially to my point, treated as inferior to us. People consider immigrants inferior due to their lower income, worse or nonexistent education, as well as .

potential discrimination against their race and skin colour, points which sadly still exist in our society. So when I said earlier that the overarching point will be the same, this is what I meant: whilst the mechanism for them to become inferior is different, the result and my point is the same. Inferiorising someone is key, as you can further assert your dominance and supremacy. The difference here is that in 1933 they were largely inferiorised based on their ethnicity, race and religion, characteristics that are now protected very well, meaning the AfD can't exploit them, but in 2025 they are inferiorised based on their financial and economic situation. Like I said earlier, inferiorisation is key; you can prove your point of supremacy by having someone to be supreme to. However, this cruel tactic works especially well with immigrants, as they don't have the luxury to leave Germany for another place; they are bound to Germany for work as it is their only source of money and help.

Should we stop the AfD? This is a question plaguing everyone's mind, and I will place my opinion on it. On one hand, in this day and age, we have achieved something that would seem very interesting to our feudal ancestors: democracy. But let us quickly explore and through that define this humble yet powerful word. Democracy: it is the ability to freely choose whatever leader you as an individual would like to represent you and govern your state or country. Democracy was created in Greece and Athens, and whilst yes it existed for that period,

for much of history after the ancient Greeks, democracy was not very widespread, in fact close to nonexistent. People simply had to deal with another monarch who inherited the throne after their predecessor became deceased. Citizens didn't really have a say in who could be their ruler; it was already decided for them.

Choice was absent, and it was difficult for you if the current leader did not satisfy you, or wasn't competent enough. We are a democratic world (mostly) and in most countries people have a choice as to which party they would like to vote for, and they will not face any persecution if they choose a specific option. In my opinion, this is the pinnacle of electoral freedom, and it took hundreds of years of human rationale and thought to come to the conclusion that having people pick what they want is the best idea. Perhaps in retrospect it may seem quite vulgar or even stupid of us to take hundreds of years to come to that conclusion, as why not let people do what they want? I think that rather it simply backs the fact that democracy is also precious and valuable, that we should almost preserve our democratic structure, as when the Greek democratic structure disappeared, it took us another 1,000 years to come up with it again, so we should value it. So ultimately, eliminating a party which, yes, is extremely and overly far-right, would still be taking away people's freedom and rights, and would deconstruct our society and weaken our democracy rather than strengthen it. On the other hand, we should make the sacrifice and put our freedoms on the line, as other people's

freedom is potentially in danger; long term, the AfD will corrode our democracy and society. Or am I just overthinking it? Or maybe I can't talk at all, after all I'm not German! Should we even bother about what's happening in Germany? There is no clear answer as to whether we should stop the AfD, but right now I would like to point out that the German population is tired, has been exploited and so is in a bit of a frenzy, and excited to finally have faith in themselves again, and they can't make rational decisions and the AfD is exploiting that, so maybe they just need some guidance. That's my take on the issue. I hope you enjoyed reading this article and I hope it provided some information on this mini crisis. This is a testament to young people to get involved in politics, fix what's out there and make a statement; the world of politics is open for ideas and opinions. I would like to end this article on a curious saying which my mother told me, who grew up in the Soviet Union. It's up to you to think whether that influences the following:

"Enhancing one's freedom limits everyone else's."

The Algorithmic Republic: How TikTok Split France's Gen Z

Tom



There is an old rule in politics: young people always vote for the left, hence the saying "if you are not a liberal when you are young, you have no heart". For decades, young French voters followed this path. They favoured progressive, anti-racist, and green politics, seen with the presidential rules of François Mitterrand - a beloved figure for many French people - and the more recent François Hollande, a socialist member serving from 2012-2017.

But today, that old rule is dead. France's Generation Z (people under 25) is deeply split. In fact, France's fastest-growing political group is now on the hard right. This change is being driven by the rise of social media. In France, two radical leaders dominate social media: 30-year-old Jordan Bardella on the far right, and 74-year-old Jean-Luc Mélenchon on the hard left. Together, they have captured the youth vote and destroyed the political centre. These examples have shown how the political culture in France is heavily shaped by the algorithm of social media platforms. The 'algorithm' is the one most dangerous threat to politics right now. Apps such as TikTok, Instagram, and arguably the most prominent, X, give voices to any person, creating a system where extremity and radicalism is fully embraced and encouraged to go

more viral. This feeds perfectly into the algorithm; figures such as Melonchon attract young people through radical messages, creating an almost friendly, warm relationship as unlike our dads, these old politicians are seen as 'cool' for being the talisman.

Bardella is the president of the far-right National Rally party. He is a social media star with over 2.1 million followers on TikTok, making him France's most active political figure on the app. His videos do not look like boring political ads. Instead, they look like a friend's lifestyle vlog. Viewers see him in sharp suits, drinking wine, filming behind-the-scenes travel clips, and taking selfies with fans. He uses this friendly image to hide his harsh anti-immigration message. He packages radical nationalism as a normal defence of French culture. To millions of young viewers, Bardella stands as an example of a successful, wealthy and idealistic man, something increasingly dangerous for a generation which lives off short-term attention and shallow attractiveness.

On the other side is Mélenchon, the leader of the hard-left France Unbowed party. Through social media, he speaks directly to young voters about contentious issues such as poverty, high rent, and climate change. Many of the videos he posts are incredibly charged, and have often fostered a sense of anger and rebellion against a corrupt system. For young people

struggling to pay for groceries, Mélenchon gives them a way to voice their anger. The data shows exactly how well these two strategies work. In recent elections, 32% of voters under the age of 34 voted for the far right. Meanwhile, President Emmanuel Macron's moderate, centrist

The Renaissance party won just 5% of that same youth vote. The centre has been completely wiped out. Young people who actually show up to vote are splitting their ballots almost equally between the two political extremes.

This internet-driven divide has exacerbated this problem. TikTok videos are very short, often lasting less than a minute. You cannot explain complex laws about national debt or secularism in a 15-second clip. Because of this, important details are ignored. Politics becomes less about smart policies and more about strong emotions like anger, fear, or pride. France is a warning sign for the rest of the world. People once hoped that social media would help voters learn more. Instead, it has divided them into hostile groups. The algorithm favours echo chamber views, increasing a sense of polarization as youth voters are forced to choose between far left or far right. Undoubtedly, social media has been a major cause of hostility within the French political scene, the worst of which is yet to come. What is certain, however, is that when Gen Z votes in the 2027 presidential election, they will not just be picking a leader. They will be choosing which algorithm won the battle for their minds.

DOES THE EMERGENCE OF AI REPRESENT A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY?

MR ROHAN EDWARDS



HOOVER INSTITUTION

The question of how emergent technologies might threaten democracy is not new. In the 1920s, it was radio on trial; in the 1970s critical theorists such as Jurgen Habermas grappled with the inherent contradictions in mass media, with its potential both to create opportunities for an active and involved public, and to fragment and control that same public. The advent of the internet in the 1990s saw similar worries, amplified perhaps by the scale and reach that could be achieved through this new medium; by the mid-2010s, companies like Cambridge Analytica leveraged commercial marketing techniques to turn mass communications into targeted and individualised communications, further fragmenting the public space. The fundamental question is similar in each case, and reflects a concern that historians share about the printing press: how best to weigh a technology's

capacity to enhance individual knowledge and understanding against the capacity of elites to use that same technology for the exercise of power. In the case of AI, the quantitative and qualitative differences to previous changes in communication technology – the greater scale, and the lack of accountable authorship of ideas – present greater challenges to democracy than potential to enhance it.

Democracy – or rule by the people – is itself not easy to define. Like some other concepts found within political philosophy, it tends towards a paradox: 'too much' of it in its simplest form can undermine the very 'people-rule' we want to bring about. As Attlee noted, and many others have parroted, such a phenomenon is why the 'purest' tool of direct democracy – the referendum – is favoured by demagogues and dictators. Such a paradox can be illustrated by

considering the idea of freedom: as the British socialist thinker wrote (and all A Level Politics students will be aware), 'freedom for the pike is death for the minnow'. Not a reference to our Master, but an acknowledgement that freedom can be described on both an individual level and on a social one, and that an increase in one's individual liberty, or scope of possible actions, might adversely affect the freedom of others. The path to creating a free society, therefore, is not exactly the same as the past that might maximise any individual person's freedom. The most famous expression of this is probably J S Mill's 'harm principle', but similar acknowledgements of freedom's complexity are found in the work of many other political thinkers

Democracy contains a similar, if somewhat harder to grasp, tension: if giving power 'to the people' permits one group within that 'people' to exert their

will against another group, has democracy been enhanced, or its opposite? Perhaps the most famous example of this tension appears in the work of de Tocqueville, warning against the danger of a 'tyranny of a majority' (although, it should be noted, motivated minorities can be equally problematic in democratic systems). When we speak of democracy, then, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that the more a system resembles a 'classical' democratic system of direct majority rule, the more democratic it is. Such a polity might allow unfiltered decisions by a majority of those participating, but by prioritising one version of 'the people' – the majority – above others it can create relations of domination, and undermine the central principle that people might retain control over the institutions under which they live. Theorists have tended to include at least two very distinct elements to a democracy – one which I will call a responsive element, and another which I will call a protective one. The responsive element is a measure of how far government reacts to changes in expressed political opinion: how far preferences are translated into policy, and how easy it is to remove and replace unpopular rulers. The equally important protective element considers how far one's rights are entrenched against the whims of others. Various theorists describe other elements, or dimensions, of a democracy; there are too many permeations to consider here. However, two related dimensions would be useful to consider as we turn to the question of whether AI is a threat to democracy: one is a pluralist dimension, by which we mean the ability within a polity for new ideas and

groupings to coalesce and compete with existing ones on a level playing field. Another is a deliberative dimension – the extent to which the institutions in a polity create the space and means for individuals and groups within a community to discuss and scrutinise the political problems faced by that community. An effective democracy contains responsive, protective, pluralist and deliberative elements; the rise of generative AI creates more threat than opportunity in most if not all those elements.

It's when we take a simpler model of what we might understand by democracy that the arguments in favour of AI are most persuasive. If democracy is only, or mainly, a form of government formed of preferences (a purely responsive model) then tools which potentially give individuals information should be a good thing. More information, properly utilised, can mean more awareness of what policies might best map to one's preferences, and which political parties or candidates best reflect those; it might provide greater information on the performance of politicians, their promises kept and unkept, or even on how to translate preferences tactically given the constraints of electoral systems like FPTP in the UK. Previous technological shifts have always had the potential, at least, to empower individuals, and AI does too.

This rests on some key assumptions, though: that AI will not either deliberately or inadvertently result in false information; that individuals will retain the critical faculty and alternative sources of truth to evaluate new information; and that elites do not use AI

technology to control who, when and how individuals receive new information. This is partly why I am watching the stand-off between Anthropic and Trump with such interest; will states be able to regulate AI technology, and if they do will they do so in the public interest (which may give rise to challenges to their power?) or in the particular, immediate interests, to entrench their power. The answers to these are far from clear. One fundamental difficulty in answering them is the lack of accountability – of clear authorship – in AI content and actions. Combined with the small number of LLM-powered engines powering the AI economy, and the fact that content is individualised to users (itself a very unpleasant word – a far cry from citizens!), there are many hurdles to overcome if the hope is that AI will produce a generation of better-informed, critical and engaged humans operating in the type of public space required for democracy to flourish.

At the heart of the problem posed by AI is the challenge to the pluralist dimension of democracy. Although all mass forms of communication have risked domination by the few, no technology seems to suffer from the effects of a first mover advantage in the way that generative AI does, and will continue to. From the domination of British newspapers by a small number of firms since the 1980s, through the state control of the airwaves in much of Europe, to the dominance of a small number of privately owned companies with strong and clear partisan alignments in American cable news, mass communications have not always

been pluralist. Nevertheless, alongside the main players, niche interests have almost always found their audiences, and their mediums, from pirate radio to pulp journalism. It's not clear what can happen with the large language models behind current AI applications: the fixed capital costs are immense, and the concentration of market share in just a few firms has consolidated at an early stage. If (as seems increasingly the case) AI becomes a major source of news consumption, as well as production, then information will be more and more in the hands of a smaller group of companies. This is perhaps not a problem if the AI models are simply a neutral platform, but they are not; they are controlled by extraordinarily wealthy entities with deep and delicate interests.

So, like previous technologies, AI provides opportunities for empowering individuals alongside opportunities for domination. Compared to previous technological shifts,

though, the latter have the upper hand: fewer groups control more powerful and less accountable tools; the technology is more fragmentary, with its personalised and impossible to replicate output; it creates a dangerous sense of impartiality where the great theorists of politics recognise there is no such thing: politics is not the art of removing conflicts of interest but the process of reconciling and compromising on them, and democracy is a system that does so in a way that gives all citizens opportunities to identify, articulate and protect their interests in a public arena. This last point is interesting with regards AI, and raises a final question: as AI capabilities grow, will we see the rise of a 'new technocracy', where the processing power of AI is itself used to find 'correct' solutions to the inherently conflictual demands of human beings for recognition and resources within a world where both can be scarce? And if so, what does that mean – not only for democracy, but for politics itself?



MR ROHAN EDWARDS

DEPUTY HEAD OF
MAGDALEN
COLLEGE SCHOOL



IS THE UN STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

Freddie



GETTY IMAGES

"Do you want a rules-based international order that upholds multilateralism and the UN charter, or a chaotic world based on violence and disruption?" António Costa, representing the EU, asked members of the 80th anniversary UN Conference Meeting in September 2025. Members left the meeting with a false sense of hope that the consensus would improve, and the world watched in anticipation to see whether the question would finally be answered. Half way through 2026, the question of whether the UN is still relevant today is once again at the forefront of global politics.

The UN was founded in 1945 following World War Two, in which fifty-one countries swore to uphold global peace and security. Whilst the UN was originally founded primarily to prevent another world war, today its mandate has extended to include two more core pillars: protecting fundamental human rights, (involving health and legal protection), and promoting sustainable

development, (focusing on reversing climate change and eradicating poverty). The modern UN consists of 193 member states, with a fifteen-nation Security Council consisting of five permanent members - UK, USA, France, Russia and China - who are granted a legislative veto.

Look at the front page of any newspaper - or, for that matter, this journal - and the UN's failure on its founding purpose of maintaining world peace is hard to miss. This is due to a multitude of factors, not least the actions of the US president. Trump has consistently positioned himself as anti-establishment; indeed, it is this trait that facilitated his rise to power in the first place. His provocative and disruptive stance towards politics in general, and more specifically his foreign policy, has nowhere more clearly been seen than through his disregard of the UN. Trump has made a public display of violating key clauses of the UN, including his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate

Change and the World Health Organisation (WHO), a UN specialised agency and the centrepiece of world health coordination. These acts have disrupted progress on two of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, and have shown that a leader cannot be curtailed by the non-enforceable international law of the UN. Trump is not the only major-power leader who has shown a severe lack of respect for the laws and conventions of the UN. Russia blatantly violated the sovereignty of Ukraine in its invasion in 2022, and China's refusal to condemn this violation, instead making a display of support for Russia, has shown stark disrespect for international law. Great-power hypocrisy undermines the values of the UN, and has set a dangerous precedent whilst simultaneously eroding the legitimacy of the UN as a global peacekeeping body.

FINANCIAL UNDERFUNDING

The US' underfunding of the UN in recent years has significantly inhibited

he UN's ability to perform its humanitarian role. Trump's caps on America's contributions to UN peacekeeping and the US's decision to delay critical budgetary support has had a spiral effect, granting permission for China and other major countries to delay their own financial support. The effects of such drastic underfunding have become evident in the UN's humanitarian aid response to crises across the globe. According to Mr Galtieri, the Representative for Yemen, 40% of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA's) humanitarian funding was cut last year, forcing the agency to suspend or halt support for roughly a third of its services. This has meant that women experiencing pregnancy complications in Yemen have been unable to access lifesaving care, and malnutrition is rife amongst the most impoverished communities. Similarly, one of the UN's greatest achievements, playing a leading role in reversing the AIDS and HIV epidemic, now faces reversal. By the end of 2024, new HIV infections and AIDS related deaths had fallen by 40% and 56% respectively since 2010. The funding crisis threatens to undo that progress: UNAIDS warns that cuts already in place could produce more than 4 million additional deaths.

and 6 million new infections by 2030, figures that would return the epidemic to levels not seen since the early 2000s

THE VETO

One of the UN's greatest threats to "relevancy" is the permanent members' right to veto decisions made by the General Assembly. Members who hold the power of the veto, included in the UN Charter following WW2 in order to promote great-power unanimity, include the UK, Russia, USA, China and France. The veto power is a constant source of rigidity and paralysis that plagues the institution, and is the driving factor behind its own irrelevance. The Permanent Five, (P5) - in particular Russia, China and the USA - have extensively used, or abused this power, in order to ensure their individual interests are protected. For example, in June 2025, the Security Council voted on a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and unrestricted humanitarian access. Fourteen members of the Security Council voted in favour, but the US used its veto. Since then, every resolution has collapsed, and the area remains a hotspot of violence and terrorist activity. Russia, meanwhile,

has blocked every resolution on Ukraine since the invasion began in 2022. These examples have shown how the veto power drags the UN into irrelevancy, as unanimous decisions made by the Security Council can be easily overridden by five members who hold the greatest power.

Enforcement is just as weak. The UN can blacklist states from peacekeeping missions, but beyond that, it has little leverage unless the state being investigated chooses to cooperate. Members of both the IDF and Hamas have been accused to have committed rape as a war crime. Nothing has followed from those accusations. When atrocities occur, the global response is too often delayed, or never arrives at all.

The veto power of the permanent five members has also inhibited reform to the UN's Charter, or its "constitution". Any propositions to reduce the permanent members' elevated power would simply be blocked by the same members' veto, as was done in 2005 by the US to block the expansion of the security council from 15 to 25. Once again, the veto power of the Permanent Five shows how the UN remains a largely irrelevant body - as the UN structurally favours the interests of its most powerful members over the remaining 188 nations.

Those more sympathetic to the UN have highlighted the rise of non-amendment reforms, which work through evolving interpretations of the Charter's existing text, allowing the General Assembly to gradually expand its own authority without requiring the consent of the permanent members. Non-amendment reforms are

triggered by a catalyst: usually a geopolitical crisis, after which legal experts identify a vague clause in the Charter and suggest a reinterpretation, which is then voted on by the General Assembly, requiring only a majority or supermajority to pass. The Veto Initiative of 2022, which mandates that any exercise of the veto automatically triggers a General Assembly debate within ten working days, exemplifies this approach - as it was passed by consensus, imposing a measure of accountability on P5 without touching the Charter itself. Following Russia's vetoes over Ukraine, General Assembly debates stemming from the Veto Initiative have contributed to the broader diplomatic isolation of Moscow, providing a forum in which condemnation could be formalised. Thus, some political scholars have argued that non-amendment reforms provide an opportunity for the UN to transform into a more relevant body, as they can be used incrementally to allow the General Assembly to place a better check on the P5, and increasingly hold its most powerful members to account - perhaps serving as a deterrent for future aggression.

However, such hopes are difficult to sustain given that ultimately the P5 hold the power of the veto, a fact which is highly unlikely to change. Whilst non-amendment reforms on the surface may look like a promising way to make the UN more relevant, ultimately what they lack is the ability to compel. The Veto Initiative has made vetoes more visible and marginally more costly reputationally, but it has not stopped a single one being cast, altered the outcome of any Security Council vote, or changed Russian behaviour in Ukraine or American policy on Gaza. The UN's



SWISS INFO - KEYSTONE

power problem ultimately has rendered it irrelevant in maintaining global peace and deterring conflict, and no reinterpretation of the Charter's existing text can substitute for the enforcement authority that the veto permanently withholds.

WHAT WORKS?

This does not mean that the UN has nothing to offer, because it does. The UN has continued to provide humanitarian aid across the world, and dismissing the UN as "irrelevant" risks undermining the thousands of workers and volunteers who put their lives on the line daily to make the world a better place. In 2024, the World Food Programme delivered food to 124 million people in 87 countries, and the UN Development Programme continues to operate in fragile states where few other organisations are present. For issues not relating to war and conflict, rules set by the UN are often respected, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, which sets global air safety standards, and the International Maritime Organization, which regulates shipping rules that carry almost 90% of world trade across oceans.

There is also a tendency, particularly in Britain, of treating the UN as if it exists only in relation to the five major powers. But the organisation's global image remains broadly favourable, and

countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Germany have actually seen rising approval of the UN over the past year. China has stepped into the vacuum left by declining US engagement, taking a more prominent role across UN agencies from the Food and Agriculture Organization to Interpol, albeit the western view is to increase China's global power. Within China itself, two-thirds of citizens say the country's UN participation matters for shaping global policy, and three-quarters think China should take a more active role in UN decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the UN is publicly failing at the thing it was most famous for, peacekeeping, and its ability to sustain humanitarian work is increasingly threatened by financial cuts from major donors. Nevertheless, dismissing the UN as entirely irrelevant risks undermining the aid it does manage to provide, much of which is down to the consistent bravery and dedication of thousands of workers and volunteers across the globe. The UN is not yet entirely irrelevant, but it is increasingly unable to fulfill its purposes at a time when global security is under consistent strain, and an international body is never more needed than today.



GOV.UK

She's Everything, You're Just the Market: The "Plastic Feminism" of Barbie

Penny



THE PICTURE HOUSE

Walk into any toy shop today and the message is inescapable. Barbie, the world's most famous doll, is no longer just a fashion model in a Dream House—she is a doctor, an astronaut, a president, a scientist. "Girls can do anything," the branding insists. Mattel's website proudly notes that Barbie went to the moon in 1965, four years before "real-world men" did. There are Barbies of Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, Helen Keller, Frida Kahlo. The message is clear: Barbie doesn't just reflect women - Barbie empowers women.

Then came the 2023 film. Directed by Greta Gerwig and starring Margot Robbie, it arrived like a cultural detonation, grossing over \$1.4 billion at the global box office and setting off a summer of think-pieces, sold out pink outfits, and tearful screenings. Gerwig herself declared it "most certainly a feminist film." For many, it felt like a genuine cultural reckoning—a big budget Hollywood blockbuster that dared to say the word "patriarchy" out loud. Women dressed in pink and went

in groups. Some cried. Some called it a masterpiece. But behind the pink curtain, a more uncomfortable question emerges. Is Barbie's feminism real—or is it, like the doll herself, made entirely of plastic?

Before Barbie arrived in 1959, girls played almost exclusively with baby dolls—toys that trained them, from the earliest age, for their role as mothers and caregivers. Barbie was genuinely different. She was a young woman with a job, an independent life, and a wardrobe. She felt modern.

But what actually made Barbie the "modern woman" wasn't some noble feminist vision. It was her relationship to consumption. Her job as a fashion model was ingeniously designed so that the play itself required you to keep buying: new outfits, new accessories, new sets. Shopping wasn't a side effect of owning a Barbie, but rather it was tactfully built into the toy.

Barbie was, at her core, a teenage consumer—a reflection of the emerging youth spending culture of 1950s America. She was

nineteen years old, and she shopped. The liberation she offered girls wasn't freedom from society's expectations. Barbie offered freedom to buy.

Today whilst the product has evolved, the logic hasn't. Barbie is now a YouTuber, an influencer, and an Instagram presence. As video essayist Verity Ritchie puts it, she is "basically the 2023 equivalent of the 1959 fashion model".

Nowhere is the gap between Barbie's feminist image and its reality starker than in the case of the Frida Kahlo Barbie—perhaps the most telling case study in what critics have called Mattel's "commodification of feminism".

In 2018, as part of its "Inspiring Women" doll series, Mattel released a Frida Kahlo Barbie. The backlash was swift. Kahlo's family members protested against the doll, with her great-niece stating: "It should have been a much more Mexican doll, with darker skin, a unibrow, not so thin—because Frida was not that thin—dressed in more Mexican clothing, with Mexican

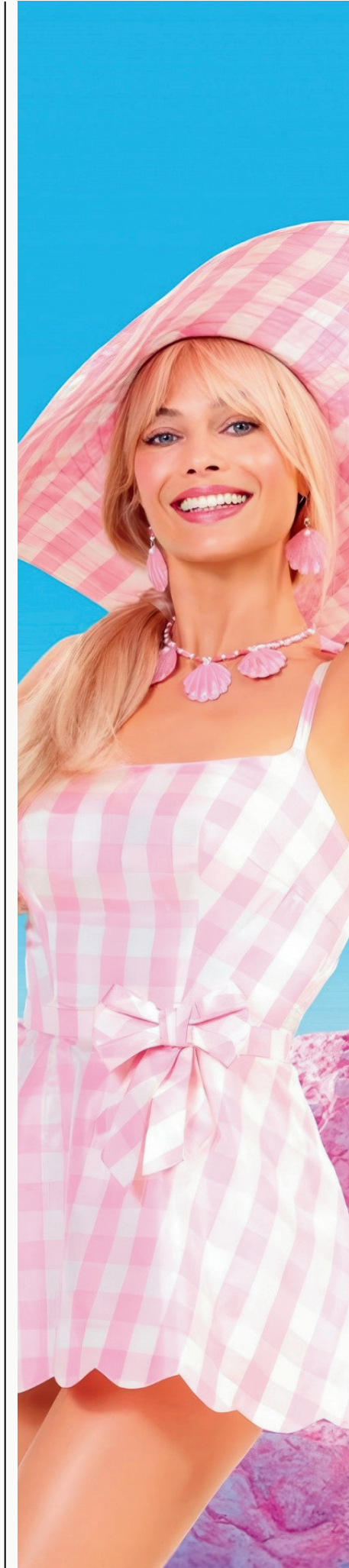
jewellery." The doll was far more Barbie than Frida. In Mexico, courts ultimately banned it from shelves, ruling that Mattel did not hold the rights to Kahlo's image.

But the deeper problem was ideological. Frida Kahlo was a lifelong communist and anti-capitalist who deliberately defied classical beauty ideals and the objectification of women: both in her life and her art. She painted women's bodies as blemished, imperfect, real, and de-eroticised. In other words, she would have absolutely hated her Barbie doll. A radical whose entire life was a rebuke to everything Barbie represents was absorbed wholesale into the Mattel product line, her politics erased, her image sanitised, her unibrow removed. What remained was not Frida Kahlo. It was the idea of Frida Kahlo. An idea which had just enough feminist association to sell a doll, with none of the inconvenient ideology attached.

This is the mechanism at the heart of Barbie's brand feminism. A political movement with a radical message and one that demands systemic change gets flattened into an aesthetic—a product. Feminism was utilised by Mattel to be a brand identity rather than a call to action—hence "plastic feminism". The movement goes mainstream, but in a neutered, powerless form.

While Mattel's marketing insists it cares deeply about empowering women, investigative reporting has revealed a rather different reality behind the factory doors.

China Labor Watch, which sent undercover investigators into Mattel's Chinese manufacturing facilities, found conditions that read as a direct and damning inversion of everything the Barbie brand claims to stand for. Most workers were women. Most managers were men. Female



workers reported regular verbal abuse and humiliation from line supervisors. Dormitories housed up to ten people per room, infested with fleas, mosquitoes and bugs. There was no hot water; the cold water was dirty; the toilets had no doors. Food in factory cafeterias was served on dirty dishes with workers frequently finding hair and cockroaches in their meals. Pay was so low that workers were forced to work illegal amounts of overtime simply to earn a living wage. There was no safety equipment, even when workers were handling dangerous materials. And female workers described a climate of frequent, trivialised sexual harassment.

When Mattel was informed of the harassment and discrimination in its factories, it announced no measures to address it.

China Labor Watch's conclusion was unsparring: "At the very least, women who produce Barbie dolls should be able to work without fear of humiliation or harassment. Barbie makes a mockery of women's rights."

There is a particular irony here. In the Barbie film, America Ferrera's character Gloria delivers a celebrated feminist speech about the exhausting, impossible demands placed on women—about having to endure men's bad behaviour, stay in line, smile through it. The speech moved audiences and crew to tears. Yet according to investigators, it describes almost precisely the conditions Mattel imposes on the women who manufacture the doll at the centre of that speech. The film casts the Mattel bosses as bumbling, harmless, likeable even. In real life, when those bosses were told women in their factories were being harassed and humiliated, they did nothing.

None of this is to say the Barbie film isn't enjoyable, because it is. And that, critics argue, is exactly the problem.

As writer Chavisa Woods put it: "The Barbie movie is so insidious because much of it was incredibly enjoyable. It is a true masterpiece of capitalism." The production design is extraordinary, the performances are brilliant, the music is sharp, the jokes land. The pleasure is real. And this is what makes the film's muddled and often contradictory ideas harder to notice, and therefore harder to challenge.

Because what it's actually saying, on examination, is often deeply confused. When Barbie sits at a bus stop and tells an elderly woman "You are beautiful!", the film presents this as a feminist revelation. However, it is almost a reaffirmation of exactly what feminism should be dismantling: the idea that women's value is tied to their appearance. Barbie hasn't learned that beauty is irrelevant to a woman's worth but rather just simply expanded the definition of who counts as beautiful. Imagine the scene reversed. Imagine Ken sitting next to a man in his eighties and telling him, "Don't worry, you're still handsome." It would be a patronising statement, because it doesn't really matter if older men are seen as handsome, since being attractive does not define men's worth.

Then there is the Ken problem. Ken is written to be a figure of ridicule, a walking embodiment of toxic masculinity brought low. But Ryan Gosling's sheer charisma, according to *The Guardian*, "countermands his brief". A supposed parody of male iniquity comes across instead as a display of irresistible charm. And because the film needs men to appear foolish in order to make its point, it portrays patriarchy as bumbling and self-defeating,

which inadvertently drains it of any real threat. A harmless, incompetent patriarchy is not the feminist argument Gerwig intended to make. It's almost the opposite.

The film's contradictions compound. Mattel's executive producer on the film, Robbie Brenner, stated in an interview that Barbie is "not a feminist movie." Not only does this contradict Gerwig's assertion that it is, but the film's marketing also sold it as exactly that. Gerwig, working within the constraints of a studio system ultimately controlled by the corporation her film nominally satirises, could only go so far. As the film itself almost acknowledges, Gerwig hasn't taken advantage of the Hollywood system to create feminist cinema but rather she's been absorbed into it.

This pattern is also consistent with Mattel's broader approach where feminism is embraced enthusiastically when it sells and disowned when it doesn't. The brand is perfectly comfortable putting 'GRL PWR' on a t-shirt, but the moment the word 'feminist' risks alienating a portion of the market, it disappears. And the merchandise kept coming. Alongside the film came official Barbie anti-wrinkle cream, Barbie bikini serum,



THE BBC

and NYX Barbie makeup. Women were sold a film about body acceptance, and simultaneously sold products premised on the idea that their bodies needed fixing. Beauty critic Jessica Defino identified the contradiction: "You cannot subvert the politics of Barbie while preserving the beauty standards of Barbie. The beauty standards ARE the politics."

In the end, as Cox concludes in *The Guardian*, "if Barbie constitutes a triumph, it's a triumph not of feminism but of the patriarchy's so far most unassailable scion—capitalism. Women have been spending millions to watch a giant advertisement more likely to bewilder than inspire them. And now they're spending millions more on the merch. The Barbie brand surged; the merchandise sold out. And the conversation, the one Margot Robbie said it was "better to be involved in", was a conversation that Mattel controlled on Mattel's terms for Mattel's profit. Ritchie's verdict is blunt: "I'm afraid the feminism of Barbie is an artificial and appropriated one designed specifically to sell you products—many, many products, and nothing more." She's right. Barbie has always been a product. Feminism, it turns out, is no different.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Laksh

Social media has significantly transformed political campaigns and public opinion over the past two decades. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok have evolved from simple networking tools into powerful spaces for political communication, activism, and debate. As a result, they have reshaped how political information is created, shared, and consumed by the public.

One major impact of social media is the increase in civic engagement. Individuals can now interact directly with political content and messaging. Political campaigns also benefit from direct communication with voters, reducing reliance on traditional media outlets such as television and newspapers. A notable example is the 2017 UK general election, where Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party used social media effectively to reach younger audiences. Compared to Theresa May and the Conservative Party, Corbyn's campaign generated significantly higher online engagement, which contributed to Labour gaining seats and exceeding expectations.

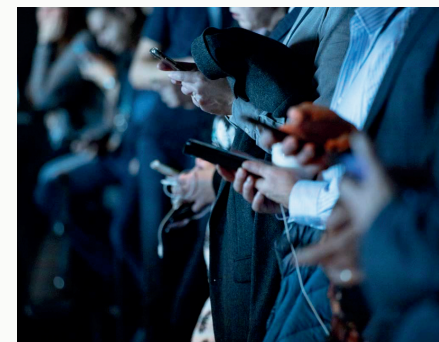
However, social media also enables the rapid spread of misinformation. False or misleading content can circulate widely, often faster than accurate information. This can distort public understanding of political issues and weaken trust in

democratic institutions. Furthermore, social media platforms rely on algorithms that prioritise engaging content, meaning users are more likely to see posts that align with their existing beliefs. This creates "filter bubbles," where individuals are exposed to limited perspectives, increasing political division and reducing balanced debate. TikTok is particularly influential among younger users. It can play a positive role by raising political awareness and encouraging participation through short, engaging videos. Many young people use the platform to learn about political issues, campaigns, and current events. However, political content on TikTok can sometimes be plausible, biased, or lacking context, which may influence opinions without encouraging critical thinking or deeper understanding of complex topics.

Despite these concerns, social media can also strengthen democracy. It allows a wider range of voices to be heard, including those who are often underrepresented in traditional media. New movements can gain visibility quickly, and individuals can organise campaigns or protests more easily. In addition, social media can increase voter turnout, particularly among younger generations who are more active online and more

likely to engage with digital content. Another important issue is the role of data collection and targeted advertising in political campaigns. Social media platforms gather large amounts of personal data, allowing political organisations to deliver highly personalised messages to specific groups. While this can make campaigns more effective, it also raises ethical concerns about privacy, manipulation, and transparency in democratic processes, particularly when users are unaware of how their data is being used.

In conclusion, social media has a powerful impact on political campaigns and public opinion. While it promotes engagement, accessibility, and participation, it also presents challenges such as misinformation, bias, and dichotomy. Its overall influence depends on how effectively it is regulated, how responsibly it is used by political actors, and how critically individuals evaluate the information they encounter online.



SHUTTERSTOCK - CREATED BY ROMAN SAMBORSKIY



Can Mexico be deemed a Narco-state in 2026?

Josue

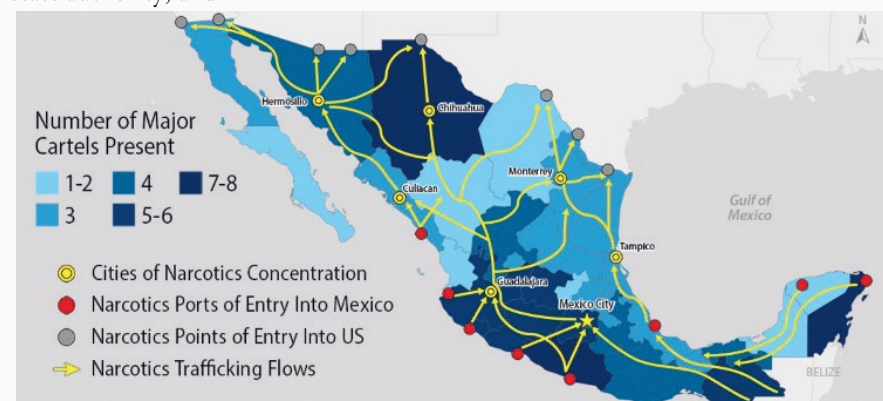
The label “narco-state” is a term that has often been related to Mexico in order to describe the country’s ongoing struggle with organised crime and drug trafficking. By definition, a narco-state is one where illegal drug trade so thoroughly corrupts a government’s core institutions that the state’s legitimate authority is subordinated to criminal power. Widespread violence in Mexico led by the CJNG (Jalisco New Generation Cartel) following the death of El Mencho (Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes) once again raises a significant question over cartel power in Mexico. This article examines the extent of cartel influence in Mexico and thus gives insight into whether the country should justifiably be considered a narco-state in 2026.

February 26th, 2026, marked the death of Mexican drug lord “El Mencho”. In hours, the CJNG responded to the death

of their leader with violence and a show of force against the Mexican state. Over 20 states reported cartel activity and outbursts of violence coordinated by the CJNG including more than 250 ‘narco blockades’ along roads and important routes of transport. The scale of the CJNG’s reprisals was a stark demonstration of cartel power in Mexico – a force capable of inflicting destruction and chaos across an entire nation. The influence the cartel holds on the state of the nation significantly undermines state authority, and

suggests a significant power rests in the hands of the cartel, thus supporting the claim that Mexico is a narco-state in 2026. The influence of the cartel is further supported by Figure 1 (below) which depicts the magnitude and depth of narcotic operations in Mexico.

This perspective finds further support in a statement made by Mexican Senator Lilly Téllez, who accused Mexico’s President Claudia Sheinbaum of protecting what she referred to as “narco-politicians” and described the government as responding,

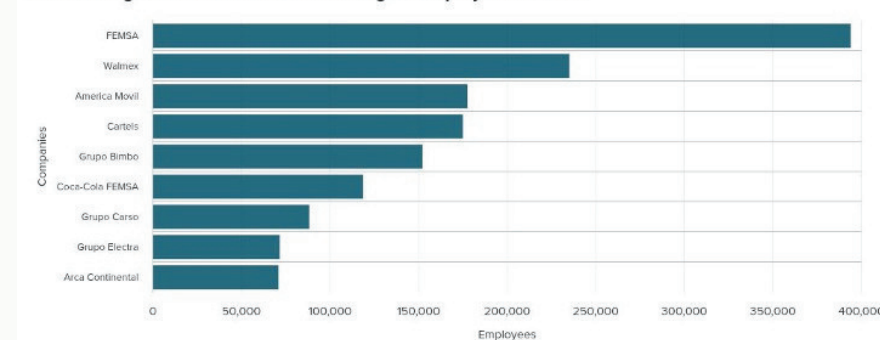


“not to the rule of law, but to the rule of the mafia”. Téllez went further and characterised Mexico as a “mafocracy” – a political system subordinated to organised crime. The senator’s argument carries considerable analytical weight when examined alongside Mexico’s labour market. As figure 2 illustrates (right), cartels are a significant source of employment, and their deep penetration of the workforce translates directly into economic leverage and social control clearly demonstrating narco control and political influence.

While cartel violence and narco influence represent a serious and demonstrable threat to Mexican governance, the state retains fundamental institutional features that distinguish it from a true narco-state. The neutralisation of El Mencho, who had evaded capture for more than a decade represents an institutional achievement for the Mexican state and suggests an improvement in operational discipline. The operation also reflects continuity with the security approach being pursued by Claudia Sheinbaum and her security team. A true narco-state could not permit such an operation to take place, and whilst the cartel-inflicted chaos that followed was real, its rapid dissipation suggests a demonstration of reach rather than a sustainable deterrence strategy.

A true narco-state implies a unified criminal power directing state affairs. Mexico’s situation demonstrates a contrasting problem. FIU’s Gordon Institute documented 442 distinct criminal groups operating in Mexico as further shown by figure 1. Without a common narco ruling power the

Criminal organizations are the fourth-largest employer in Mexico



cartels are as much a threat to each other as they are to the state, thus cartel fragmentation undermines a narco-state thesis. This view is supported by political scientist Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera who argues that the narco-state label is analytically imprecise. She argues that it flattens the distinction between states captured by criminal interests and states where corruption is endemic but contested. Mexico, she argues, is the latter.

Mexico has seen a fall of 22.7% in homicide rates by the start of 2026, representing 7000 fewer deaths compared to the previous year. Furthermore, Mexico’s prison population rose by 21,000 to reach 260,000 by February 2026. These statistics point to a strengthening of state authority over organised crime groups, suggesting that the government has become increasingly capable of disrupting cartel operations and enforcing the rule of law. Such developments weaken the argument that Mexico can unequivocally be classified as a narco-state.

While Mexico certainly faces a profound and destabilising influence of organised narco crime, the narco-state label remains an analytically insufficient characterisation of the country in 2026. The CJNG’s

coordinated nationwide response to El Mencho’s death demonstrated the cartel as a force capable of projecting serious force across an entire nation, yet the temporary nature of the disruption revealed the limits of cartel power. A true narco-state could not have permitted El Mencho’s neutralisation, and the increase in incarcerations demonstrates the control of the government over cartel groups. With 442 distinct criminal groups, Mexico lacks a unified narco authority that a genuine narco-state requires. As Correa-Cabrera argues, endemic corruption and criminal capture are meaningfully different conditions, and conflating them distorts rather than clarifies an accurate picture of Mexican governance. Mexico is not a narco-state - it is in a state of war, and it is not yet losing.



AFP/GETTY IMAGES

THE SAHEL CRISIS

Tonia



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

The Sahel Region is a large belt of land in Africa, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, encompassing multiple countries. However, the three in focus in this article will be Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. It is a focal point of geopolitical interest due to issues regarding political instability, conflict and migration.

To further understand the scale of the crisis, it is notable that this region forms a transitional ecological zone between the Sahara Desert to the south, making it highly vulnerable to climate change pressures, population growth and resource scarcity, all of which intensify the already-present political tensions.

The crisis became particularly evident during 2012, originating in Mali, before

spreading and encompassing Burkina Faso and Niger. This initial outbreak was triggered by a combination of separatist rebellions; the return of heavily armed fighters from Libya after Gaddafi's fall, the country's leader for over 40 years; and the rapid expansion of extremist groups exploiting the weak state structures. Before 2011, Gaddafi had recruited and used many fighters across the Sahel region as soldiers in his army. This meant that when his regime collapsed, thousands of unemployed soldiers after having lost their job brought back a large quantity of weapons, heavily contributing to the rise of extremist armed groups. Some of these men joined rebellions in northern Mali, including Tuareg separatists. Once instability took root, it spread across the central Sahel, creating a wider regional

conflict. The crisis has been exacerbated by a worsening of living conditions due to flooding, desert locust infestations and rising grain prices. This meant that an estimated 18.7 million people faced food insecurity and more than a million children under 5 were at risk of severe acute malnutrition, even after humanitarian assistance. At the same time, armed groups engaged in direct violence and looting, preventing humanitarian aid workers from operating efficiently in the region. One key group was the Tuareg separatist group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, which called for an independent Saharan state in Northern Mali.

The central Sahel region has attracted media attention after several non-state armed groups, including terrorists, took over a dozen years ago. Backed up

by the 2024 Global Terrorism Index, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are among the top 10 countries most affected by terrorism worldwide. This evidence is closely interlinked with the recent military coups experienced by these three countries, such as in 2020 and 2023. In several cases, Jihadist groups have carried out mass attacks on rural villages, killing civilians and burning homes in order to intimidate populations and assert control over territory. These armed groups, including Jihadist factions linked to Al-Qaeda and ISIS (both responsible for severe harm and human rights violations), have exploited the unstable conditions and embedded themselves deeply into rural communities. Their presence directly undermined state authority and significantly jeopardises the lives of local people.

Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have experienced repeated coups, due to rising dissatisfaction with governance, competition for power among military factions, and weak government structures. The widespread popular frustration with the collapsing security situation, parallel to lack of socio-economic progress under the country's democratically elected executive, created the perfect conditions for the military and these groups to seize power. These coups are often justified by military leaders as necessary interventions to restore order, and yet they worsen instability by disrupting institutions, alienating international partners and weakening the already fragile democratic conditions. The Malian coups, such that of 2012, which plunged the country

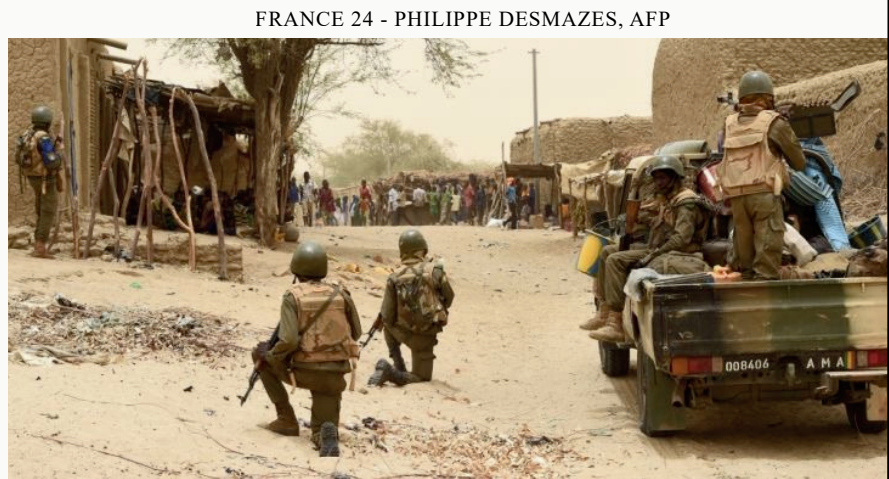
further into a period of political instability amidst the rebellion in the north, and the later 2020 coup, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, continues to erode central authority and allows non-state armed groups to gain greater territorial control.

This instability becomes increasingly concerning when it diffuses from just political problems into social deprivation, as school closures (over 14,800 have closed in the region by mid-2025), internal displacements, and increasing likelihood that the younger population becomes involved in crime and terrorism. The worsening living conditions only exacerbate the region's vulnerability, decreasing the likelihood of a democratic solution from being reached. The collapse of the education system, healthcare access and local economies create a generation growing up without opportunity or stability. This has deepened the humanitarian crisis and made long-term recovery much more difficult. Not only that, but the central Sahel Region has now become home to nearly 3 million internally displaced individuals. These people live in overcrowded camps of informal settlements, dependent on humanitarian aid, that is increasingly difficult to deliver due to terrorist control, creating a cycle of deprivation.

Especially now that these vast territories are lawless zones, where trafficking flourishes, particularly the importation of cocaine from Latin America towards Europe, the three countries collapse further into despair. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has denounced serious abuses against the Fulani People in Burkina Faso, due to the community's alleged association with terrorist groups.

The breakdown of state control has turned parts of the Sahel into major corridors for organised crime networks, linking West Africa to global trafficking routes. What's more, Niger is one of the countries where a hunger alert has been issued for 2026. This alert reflects the combined impacts of climate shocks, conflict and economic collapse, placing millions at risk of food insecurity.

Despite multiple humanitarian efforts, including involvement by the Red Cross in the region, attempts at solving the issue have been prevented by the growing accessibility difficulties, worsening political conditions, and climate difficulties. This has made it all the more harder to accommodate all those in need. In recent times, the Sahel Crisis has become more a question of who should be prioritised in receiving help, while others wait, raising ethical and moral concerns of who are included in care and who are not. Lastly, I would like to stress the importance of raising awareness for the Sahel Crisis: with only 8% of required funding met by 2025, the world has turned a blind eye on a humanitarian crisis which has, and will continue to, destroy thousands of innocent lives.



UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND



THE GUARDIAN



WFP/CHEICK OMAR BANDAOGO

FRANCE 24 - PHILIPPE DESMAZES, AFP

The South China Sea Dispute

Nilay



The South China Sea Dispute started in 2013 and is ongoing to this day. This article centres around China's nine-dash line, which violated certain rules made by the UNCLOS and how these rule violations caused conflict between neighbouring countries.

The South China Sea is located south of Hong Kong. One of the many reasons countries in this region want ownership of this water body is because a large number of oil tankers and cargo vessels pass through this region, making the taxation of such ships a lucrative business yielding large profits. Furthermore, 80% of China's sea exports travel through the strait between the south border of Vietnam and Brunei, making this a large factor behind China's desire for total dominance over the South China Sea as they would be able to guarantee the maintenance of trade links and foreign relations.

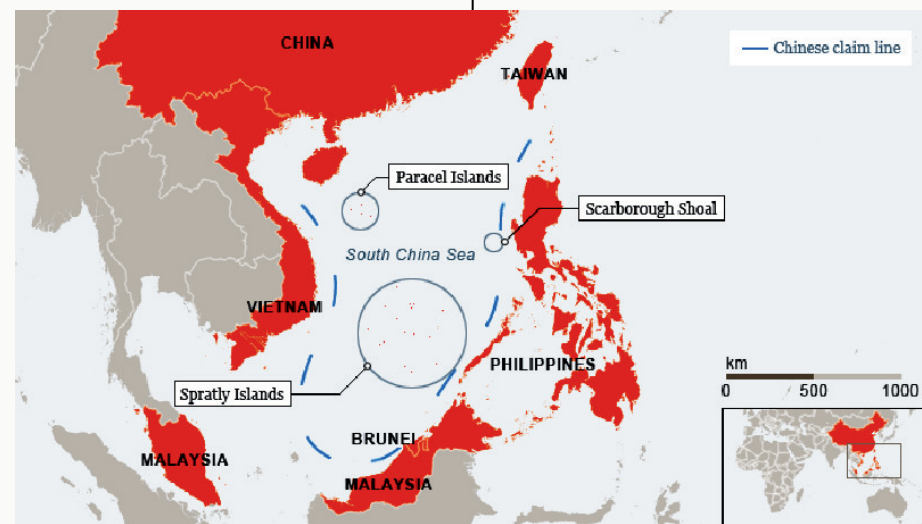
At the South China Sea 2016 Arbitration, in which the Philippines sought to hold China to account for their expansion of the seas, UNCLOS said that China's 9-dash line had extended into other countries' EEZs. An EEZ is a 200 nautical mile from a country's coastline, within which perimeter countries are allowed to make profits such as building wind farms, fishing and oil extraction. China rejected the

2016 arbitration ruling issued by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, claiming to have ancient writings that quote that they have fishermen who used to fish in the region and that the Chinese made regular visits to the Paracel Islands, helping to make a case for their rightful control.

The Spratly and Paracel Islands are specific areas of desired control for many countries bordering the South China Sea for a variety of reasons. These Islands provide a strong location for military and naval outposts. Furthermore, many countries claim that these islands have vast amounts of useful resources such as oil and gas and abundance of fish. Countries like Vietnam and Brunei want control over the Spratly Islands in particular, as it is within their EEZ. The issue over who should control the

Spratly Island is unique, as multiple countries have the island within their EEZ boundary, meaning that no one country has obvious rightful legal ownership of the land.

After having avoided the 2016 Arbitration, China continues to regularly undergo naval drills outside of their EEZ. Despite winning the case, the Philippines, under President Rodrigo Duterte initially chose not to strongly enforce the ruling. Instead, he sought closer economic ties with China, and was wary to avoid confrontational action at sea. Since the 2016 ruling, the U.S. Freedom Of Navigation Operations has challenged China's claims, however no significant Chinese concessions have been made. Certainly, however, China's control of the seas is not set in stone, and will meet future diplomatic or military opposition. Without the ability to legally enforce their territorial control, the question over whether China will face opposition over the seas is not a question of if; it is a question of when, and what the consequences will be. The answer remains increasingly uncertain in our rapidly changing political climate.



OFFICIAL BLUEBIRD ENERGY SYSTEMS

WHEN IS THE GOVERNMENT JUSTIFIED IN RESTRICTING WHAT WE CAN SAY?



Moses

The tension between free speech and incitement sits on the forefront of contemporary politics. The topic of free speech opens up a broad discussion about the history of clerical authority, misinformation or online harms. These areas are well researched and widely covered in academia. Instead, this article will examine when, if ever, the state is justified in restricting speech that targets ethnic and religious minorities.

John Stuart Mill's Harm Principle is the traditional liberal baseline for free speech, but it is not enough on its own. The state is justified in restricting categories of speech such as incitement and libel; all other attempts to extend restriction beyond the limit either collapse under their own logic, or hand a veto to whoever is prepared to cause the most disruption.

Mill's Harm Principle is the classic liberal view that the state should only restrict individual liberty to prevent harm to others. As shown in the analogy 'your right to swing your arms ends at the tip of someone else's nose'; this boundary is objective, and leaves no room for state discretion. Here, the expression of opinion falls squarely on the protected side of the line.

Despite this, T.M. Scanlon points to a structural gap. Mill mainly focuses on the speaker's right to speak, but a full account has to also consider the audience's interest in obtaining information to form their own views. Once the audience is taken seriously, the question is not just whether the speaker is harmed by being silenced, but whether listeners are harmed by being denied access to certain speech, or whether certain speech limits their ability to reason freely.

Mill also wrote for a world of print publication, where the limits of amplification meant dangerous ideas had an inherent limit on their reach. That condition no longer holds. Even so, two categories of restriction are nearly universally accepted: direct incitement, where the causal chain between speech and violence is short and specific, and libel, where false statements damage an individual's reputation without physical violence. Even Ronald Dworkin, one of the most prominent rights-based defenders of free speech, accepts this limit. It is precisely this concession that Jeremy Waldron uses to build a far more ambitious argument.

Waldron's argument is philosophically elegant as it

begins on grounds his opponents already hold. If individual libel is restricted because false statements damage a person's dignity and standing, why should the same logic not apply to groups? If someone circulates the claim that gay people are carriers of AIDS, or spray paints black people as monkeys on a wall, they are doing something structurally similar to individual libel: corroding the basic assurance that minorities are recognised as full members of society. Waldron argues that a multicultural democracy can only function if its citizens are able to move through public life without encountering systematic messages that they do not belong. This is no longer about offence but about something more fundamental: the social standing that makes participation in civic life possible. This is where Waldron's argument begins to strain. The analogy only works if the statement in question is evidently false. What about data used in bad faith, weaponised facts intended to destroy dignity: statistically contested data on crime rates across different demographic groups, or historical practices of minorities cited in bad faith? All of these are technically beyond Waldron's reach. To suppress true speech on

the grounds of dignity alone is to move towards a state that bans science that makes others uncomfortable, a destination with a deeply worrying history.

Scanlon acknowledges that minorities suffer real status harm from speech that portrays them as inferior, and this is the true question of why the state should not intervene. Nonetheless he ultimately refuses to endorse restrictions. Once offence becomes a legitimate reason for restriction, constraints on political opinion become alarmingly tight. This uncertainty about whether restriction works in practice is more defensible than Waldron's definitive position, and it points towards a deeper structural problem revealed by the Heckler's Veto.

The natural fallback if Waldron's dignity framework fails is security, only restricting speech when it poses a threat to public order. This seems like common sense, but in reality it is the most manipulable principle available.

The Heckler's Veto originates from American jurisprudence. If the state restricts speech whenever it poses a threat to public order, any group that credibly promises disorder can silence opinions it dislikes, all without winning the argument. Take the Satanic Verses controversy of 1989 for example. Salman Rushdie's novel contained what many Muslims considered blasphemous depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, enough to prompt a fatwa, public burnings, and bomb threats against bookstores. The British police, knowing that disorder would follow if the book was freely distributed, quietly discouraged its sale. This restriction was achieved through

the credible threat of violence, not through law nor argument, with the state becoming a tool for suppression. Rushdie himself noted that the Satanic Verses would not be published today, because a climate of fear has settled over the editorial world, not because the law has changed. The state now no longer needs to act because the threat of disruption has already done the work.

Both Waldron's dignity based restrictions and security based restrictions on free speech meet on the same structural problem: restrictions reward escalation. The more aggressive a group indicates that certain speech offends or threatens them the more protection they receive, only because their threat is louder. Scanlon's framework captures why this matters: whether a right to free expression exists turns on whether giving the government power to restrict it constitutes a dangerous power, one that leaves speaker and audience interest dangerously at risk. On this point, security based restrictions fail this test for the same reason Waldron's dignity framework does. In the end, both philosophies hand the most disruptive actors a veto over public discourse.



The narrowest defensible position, restricting direct incitement and individual libel, survives scrutiny precisely because it avoids both failures identified above. It does not require the state to decide which true opinions are too dangerous to circulate. It does not reward those willing to make the loudest scene. Even Scanlon, who takes the harm from hate speech seriously and acknowledges its real impact on vulnerable minorities, ultimately declines to endorse restriction, not because the harm is not real but because the regulatory power needed to address it is too dangerous to give.

What this conclusion leaves unresolved is whether Mill's framework is suitable for the modern age of algorithmic amplification, where the conditions his liberalism needs to work no longer exist. When a single post on social media can reach millions in hours, the constraints of amplification that restricted harmful opinion in 1859 has disappeared completely. The question of whether a coherent free expression framework suited to our reality is even possible remains the deeper question that free speech debates are only starting to tackle.

THE CENTRE OF POPULIST ECONOMICS CANNOT HOLD

Arthur

Populism has re-emerged in global politics in recent years and is rooted in very real concerns of countries which govern without regard for the interests of the population. Populist political parties, therefore, representing the 'true' people of a nation, formulate economic policy which provides short-term benefits to this section of society. Populism is framed as a challenge to the elites of society and a method of "the people" recapturing power; the needs of the seemingly marginalised are prioritised.

Populist economics however, in doing so, creates contradictions which cannot run indefinitely without the collapse of the economy. Often these contradictions present as a reduction in tax in conjunction with a disproportional change in government spending, forcing an increase in the fiscal deficit (how much more the government spends than it earns). Cutting taxes, such as income tax, provides visible benefits to workers and increases how much money they keep in their pockets for their labour. The worker feels satisfied that less of their hard-earned cash is being siphoned off because the party in government no longer represents the elites. However, the gap between how much the government spends and earns grows if the tax cuts are not met with a fall in government spending. This gap must be addressed by the government through borrowing, printing money or running down national reserves and all these have drastic consequences for the economy.

Increased borrowing raises the

national debt; this pushes away the problem to be handled later, reduces investment in the economy via the crowding out effect and raises the interest rates at which future government bonds are set. Printing money comes with inflation that means prices rise faster than wages, slashing living standards for the economically insecure who generally vote for populist parties. Once national reserves have been run down, it leaves the currency of a country at heavy risk of collapse as the government can no longer defend it on international markets. All these are consequences of an increasing fiscal deficit, which is natural for current day populist economics.

Undoubtedly the most prevalent example of a populist government currently is Donald J. Trump's, in the wealthiest country on the globe that need not be named. The 'One Big Beautiful Bill', signed into law on the patriotic 4th of July 2025, is a prime example of how populist economics increases the instability of an economy by raising the national debt. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the bill will increase the deficits by \$2.8 trillion between 2025 and 2034 as a result of sweeping tax cuts including a reduction in tax on tips and overtime. While these tax cuts will certainly benefit workers as a whole, they are met with alarming cuts to Medicaid and SNAP which will actually cause lower-income families to end up worse off even with the reduction in taxation. An estimated 12 million families rely on both Medicaid and

SNAP, so Trump's 'One Big Beautiful Bill' ends up disproportionately benefiting middle to higher-income households -- especially billionaires (who are the face of the 'establishment' which Trump has promised to fight.) Not only will the 'One Big Beautiful Bill' contribute to rising national debt in the long run for the USA which cannot be properly sustained, but the provisions harm the poorer groups of society who flocked to Trump during the 2024 presidential election. Historically, rising national debts are a central consequence of populist economics and have led to the collapse of the voter base in these parties. In 2015, Kirchnerism, a strain of left-wing populism in Argentine politics that stemmed from Peronism, saw its first defeat in a presidential election after their policies of substantial government subsidies caused national debt to climb dramatically. Between 2014 and 2015 national debt as a share of GDP had increased by 7.8 percentage points in Argentina, breaking several of their core economic tenets. When compared to Trump's right-wing populist economics, Kirchnerism differs through the way in which it raises fiscal deficits. Instead of sizeably reducing government revenues, it increases government spending considerably through financing government subsidies. However in both cases, the national debt balloons and in Argentina this heavily contributed to their first loss in a presidential election. Populist economics is still relatively young and increasingly hard to define as political scientists agonise over an uncontested definition for populism itself. However, the rising national debt that is inevitable and central in contemporary populist economics is totally unsustainable for both the country and party: as Yeats wrote, "when the centre cannot hold, things fall apart".

The old adage "Generals are always fighting the last war", attributed to French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau is currently being challenged. Both the Ukraine conflict and the Iran war have completely changed the dynamic of war, and they are continuing to do so.

The Ukraine conflict has created an environment in which military weaponry and technology has been forced to develop at an extraordinary rate, one of those being military drones. This new weaponry has transformed the Ukrainian front line and many more around the world. These drones can be used in a wide range of different ways, however a typical pattern of attack can be followed: long-range drones are used to locate the target, followed by one or multiple of "kamikaze" drones flown directly into the target to blow them up. This method is highly effective for two reasons, as it minimises the risk to soldiers as they can conduct military operations from afar and their low manufacture cost means that they can self-destruct with minimal costs.

However, as always with new military technology there is a new countermeasure developed almost immediately, creating a continuous action-reaction cycle. This can be observed with drone manufacture too. The Ukrainians first started using low-cost "kamikaze" drones on a large scale, however, because of their metallic structure which was easily detected by sensors, they were forced to change the material. Furthermore, they were forced to change the way they communicated to the drone as radio waves were too easy to track. Currently, the majority of Ukraine drones

THE ECONOMIST



THE CHOSUN DAILY



THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF WAR

How modernisation is changing the battleground

Blaise

use fibre-optic cables to control the drones, which bypass radio trackers. One of the most striking images from the war is of cities covered in the fibre-optic cables of drones out on the frontlines. The rise of AI has dramatically changed the character of war, and is now used on an unprecedented scale on and off the battlefield in planning and executing attacks. The Iran war marked the first time AI has taken a primary role in conflict. In the past, finding missile launchers in the desert required a specialised team of analysts to look through thousands of satellite images, taking a substantial amount of time and resources. Now, however, the US military uses AI to

quickly sift through pictures and locate missile launchers, allowing them to disarm them in near real time. In the first 24 hours of the Iran conflict, the use of AI allowed the US to take out 1,000 targets with 10 per cent of the human analysts it would take to hit 1,000 targets daily. This highlights the speed and efficiency of this new tactic; which by moving quickly allowed little time for the Iranians to respond.

In conclusion, the approach taken to war is changing dramatically at a rapid pace; and highlights how unprepared Europe is to the prospect of war. There are few drone companies making drones on an industrial scale accessible to European countries, and the story is the same for AI as well. Mistral, a French AI company, is the only one in Europe that sits in the top 10 global AI companies. Furthermore, Europe is reliant on Chinese drone companies and American AI companies. Without a rapid and profound change in attitude towards the changing character of war, European countries significantly risk falling behind in the race to modernization, jeopardizing it and its citizens' national security.

Play Review: "Inter Alia" and its lessons on consent, masculinity and lost childhood innocence. **Freddie**



THE GUARDIAN

"The West End play Inter Alia" does not give an answer to the problems of today's age; instead, it tackles them head on, and leaves the viewer feeling a profound sense of self-introspection. After hearing consistently positive reviews, my mum and I recently travelled to London, to the Wyndham Theatre. Inter Alia's long show time with no interval is immediately evocative of the lead character's (played by Rosamund Pike, critically acclaimed movie actress starring in "Gone Girl") chaotic, unforgiving and demanding life - balancing her work, as a high court judge, with parenting a son. Initially, Inter Alia presents a story of the struggles of womanhood in a patriarchal society, being consistently overlooked by those in her male-dominated sector, not least by her husband, a defence lawyer. Rosamund Pike's acting is what makes this theme so powerful - personally being a mother of two and a full-time actress, she perhaps is able to draw on her own struggles in managing a work-life balance.

The play's main theme, however, was what stuck with me the most. The play's opening scene, in which Pike energetically delivers a courtroom sentencing of a young man for rape, establishes the theme of female sexual abuse which runs throughout. The turning point in the play arrives when Pike's son, Alex, returns home from a party, drunk and clearly out of his

depth, with a cut on his left eyebrow - after which the audience learns that he had received rape allegations from a girl at the party. The rest of the play deals with tackling the issue of sexual violence, pornography, and the "manosphere" - as Pike learns about her son's almost double life behind the door of his bedroom. Although we as a society have certainly become more aware of issues such as these facing young men, I still find it unbelievable how little they are talked about relative to the impact on the development of a young man's mind. It is a well-known fact that the adolescent years are those where the most brain growth occurs. Pair this fact with the boom in the number of teens who have been exposed to, or watched, pornography, and it is clear that we are laying the groundwork for a generation of young men with a fundamentally twisted understanding of sex, consent, and women. The effects of such toxic material online are already becoming evident: walk into any bar or club in Oxford, and statistically one-third of university-aged girls would have experienced sexual assault (OfS, 1 Aug 2025); walk to the bar to get a drink, and the barman will offer you a spike-proof cover. We are not doing nearly enough as a community, and more specifically as a school, to educate our young men about the dangers of pornography and the importance of consent. If we want to win the battle

against sexual assault, we need a fundamental educational inclusion of these topics, at home and at school. Reliance on government intervention to safeguard our kids against pornography is not nearly enough.

The final scene of the play left the audience, including myself, with a heavy heart. Rosamund stands in the middle of the stage. Running manically behind Rosamund, Alex as his seven-year-old self and his friends play in the garden, whilst in front of her, Alex as his 18-year-old self stands at the doorway of the house about to leave for the police station to turn himself in as guilty. The juxtaposition of the innocence of Alex as a child and his same self ten years later redraws the audience's attention to the corruptive impact of the rise of social media and pornography, essentially stealing a young man's sense of innocence and self-worth. Leaving the theatre, it was clear that the audience had felt similar power from Inter Alia as I did, as I overheard conversations that it was the "best thing they had watched". As I walked down the stairs, to my surprise I realised that I was one of the only teenagers in the crowd - and if that is not a reason for us, as a community, to do more, I do not know what is.

Politics Journal Crossword

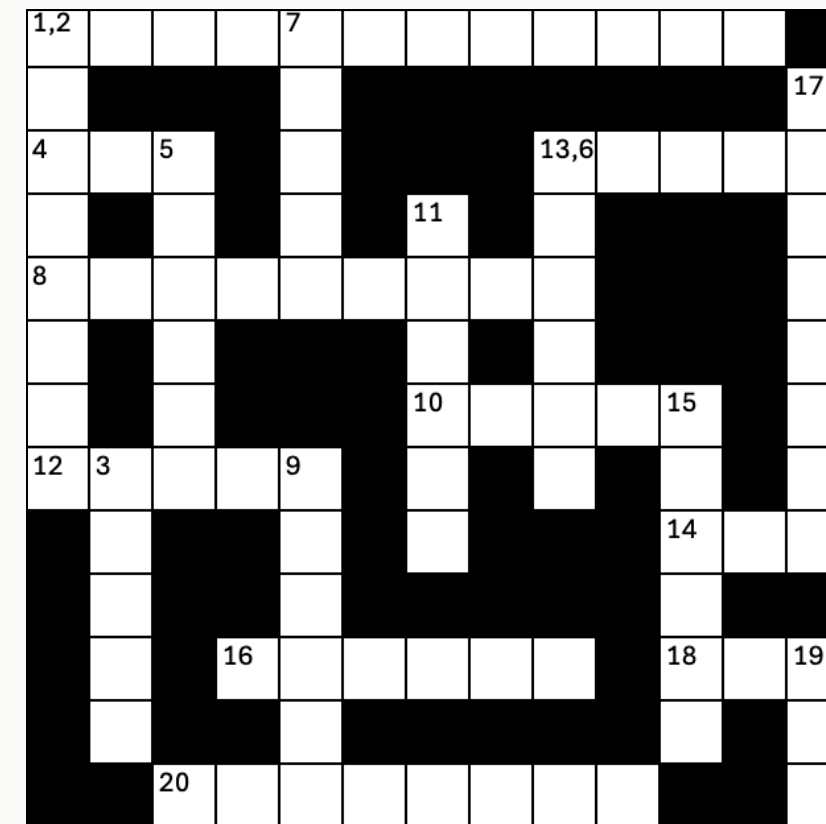
Henry

Across Questions

- Document setting out how a country should be run
- French left wing electoral alliance
- Fundamental entitlements of citizens
- German legislative building during the Weimar Republic
- Deputy Prime Minister of the UK (as of May 2026)
- A campaign to discredit a public figure with false accusations
- Delay between recognising a problem and policy implementation
- Method used by democracies to choose politicians
- Number of times the Conservatives have lost three consecutive elections since 1918
- Period of time leading up to an election in which parties make their case

Down Questions

- United States Legislative
- Most likely Senate flip for the Democrats
- Heir in a patriarchal monarchy
- Amendment granting states extensive rights
- Highest polling British party (as of July 2026)
- Soviet dictator
- A government, in particular an authoritarian one
- Colour representing the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong
- Type of order that governs procedure in the House of Commons
- Exclusive economic zone can be abbreviated to?



Across answers

Constitution
NFP
Right
Reichstag
Lamy
Smear
Lag
Voting
One
Campaign

Down answers

Congress
Maine
Prince
Tenth
Reform
Stalin
Regime
Yellow
Standing
EEZ